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Being RIFed

Being a part of a Reduction in Force (RIF), no matter where it happens, can be a complicated issue for all involved. The level of complexity only increases when the organization instituting a RIF is a church or school where many, if not all of the workers are called into what were, at one time, thought to be tenured positions. Certainly, the leaders, students, and members of the organization will have their own complexities and issues to work through. This article, though, is intended for the one who has been the target of a RIF.

If you are like me, when you are the target of a RIF, you will feel as though you are being torn apart. For many professional church workers, a called position is not only your job. A position in a church or school is your calling from God, your career, your church family, your spiritual filling station, a significant source of income for your family, your community, and home. It makes perfect sense that you will feel as though you are being pulled apart—a very real part of several parts of your life will have been taken away from you.

So how can you begin to find a sense of wholeness again? The [Wholeness Wheel](#), developed by the InterLutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness, can provide a powerful and useful framework for restoring wholeness and readying yourself for continued service in God's kingdom.

Baptism

First, remember that you are a baptized child of God, called and gifted for His service. There is nothing that any group of people, congregation, school, or organization can do to take that away from you. Luther teaches this in the explanations to the First and Third Articles of the Apostles' Creed. "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me...[and] the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." Understand first of all, that even though you may feel that others do not appreciate your gifts or even who you are, God does. You are a valuable part of His kingdom and His work.

Emotional Well-Being

With the multitude of issues and components of your life affected by a RIF, it is likely that you will also experience a multitude of



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Review, Reflect, Resolve

Does your congregation or school have a RIF policy? Are you familiar with it? Since RIF is becoming more prevalent, what can you do to hedge against or prepare for it?

Links & Resources

A copy of the [The Wholeness Wheel](#) and a detailed explanation of its components is available from Wheat Ridge Ministries, one of the partners in its development.



LCMS Reduction in Force [Resources](#)

emotions. Don't be afraid to feel—and to express your feelings. More than likely, there will be much sadness. Perhaps anger. As leaders in a sometimes stoic society, we forget that emotions are a part of who we are—a part of how God created us to be. Jesus himself openly expressed sadness and anger, along with other emotions. At the same time, be on the watch. Don't be afraid to seek help in sorting through your emotions and reactions. Many District offices can offer recommendations for mental health professionals who are well versed in working with church workers, and if you are a member of [Concordia Plans](#), mental health care is a part of the coverage.

Physical Well-Being

While it might seem secondary to the other things you are experiencing related to the elimination of your position, don't neglect your physical health. Whatever positive things you were doing to care for yourself physically before, continue them. If there are things you would like to do differently, use this time to do so. For me, a blessing to come out of this experience has been the additional time available to me. I have found time to exercise more than I was while serving full time. The connection between the physical and other facets of health is well documented. You may find that an emphasis on your physical health will have positive effects in other areas.

Financial Well-Being

It would not be my place to comment in depth about maintaining or improving financial health, not because of any glaring personal issues, but rather because there are so many positive, faith-based resources readily available. Two sources I have found to be very helpful in maintaining financial health—in all situations—are [Crown Financial Ministries](#) and [Dave Ramsey](#). Both have many free resources and articles available on their web sites along with paid materials and curriculum.

Vocational Well-Being

While being the target of a RIF certainly affects all facets of our being, the most notable and obvious being the vocational aspect of our lives. Remember first of all, that Scripture is very clear that ministry is not defined by a professional position. You are a minister because you are a baptized child of God, called to serve Him, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit with gifts to use in that service.

In the time from when you are told you are the target of a RIF decision and when your service actually concludes, I urge you to leave strong. Continue serving at the level you had been before the decision. As appropriate, equip and empower others to continue the ministries after you leave. This will be emotionally difficult in most situations—but remember that the teens, children, students, and others in the congregation you worked closely with may not have wanted this to happen and may also feel like victims.

When you leave, take advantage of any processes available to a leaving worker as defined by the congregation or school. Many organizations offer an exit interview. Use these tools as opportunities to assist the congregation to grow through this situation.

In taking these steps, not only will you likely feel better about your service, having ended strong, but you will have utilized an unprecedented opportunity to teach the congregation and to represent your profession well.

You may find yourself ready to change career paths, even for a short time, as a break of sorts. Perhaps God will lead you to a new position outside of professional ministry. You are still a minister and can use your gifts and talents for God's service. There is no shame in this.

At the same time, you may find yourself more committed than ever to your calling to professional ministry. In that case, I have several recommendations. First, contact your district office. They will be able to guide you through the process and protocol regarding pursuing a new call and your change of status. Second, maintain your skills. Volunteer. As finances and time allow, continue to attend workshops and conferences. Meet with any collegial groups that may exist in your area. Don't be afraid to accept work on projects even if they won't "pay the bills."

In my own experience, I have faced the elimination of my position twice, and each time, my feelings about my involvement in professional ministry were different. I believe God was leading me by His Spirit to do what He knew would be most helpful for me at those points in my life.

Intellectual Well-Being

Use your brain. This could serve as a brief summary as to how you might maintain your intellectual well-being. You may find yourself with the blessing of time you didn't have available to you before. Take advantage of this time to improve your knowledge and intellect. Read—both for your own pleasure and professionally. Keep abreast of current events and developments in your field. Consider issues and problems in your field and whether or not your experience might be able to assist others in the same field. Perhaps how you use your time can be a blessing to your colleagues.

Social and Interpersonal Well-Being

Perhaps this is one of the more complicated areas of health to address when related to the elimination of a position. First, there is the issue of your family. If you are married and, in particular, if you have children, they will be faced with the prospect of not only a new way of life with the changes in schedule and income, but also the loss of what had been their church. You, too, will face the same challenge. What had been your spiritual home and likely a place where you have formed many relationships beyond your official roles can in many situations become an extraordinarily uncomfortable place to be. You (and your family)

will need to carefully examine the benefits and potential pitfalls to the continuation of relationships after you leave employment in a congregation or school. Today's technological world offers more opportunities to continue relationships beyond physical contact than ever before. Each situation and relationship is likely to be different.

Spiritual Well-Being

The Wholeness Wheel places spiritual well-being around the outside of the edge, reflecting the reality that God created us as spiritual people. Our spiritual health affects our whole being—all other components of our health are related to this aspect of health. Given that importance, I urge you to place a great importance on it in your life as well. Recognize that your own intellect, emotions, and more may prevent you from being able to be filled spiritually at the congregation in which you were a member when part of the professional staff. Find a place where you can be nurtured spiritually. Network with other area professionals about their experiences with nearby congregations. Visit other congregations – and have fun. Seek out a place where you can be filled spiritually—through worship, Bible study, and more. Find a place where your family can connect. Find a place where your God-given gifts can be of use. Above all, find a place where you can heal.

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, remember that you have been wounded and that's perfectly acceptable. Even if you don't immediately feel as though you are hurt, you will likely feel that way. Sometimes the emotions of the situation will come in waves—that has been my experience. Remember that you are grieving. That, too, is acceptable. You are facing a very real loss. Allow God to heal you. Take care of yourself—your whole self.

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