
Answering the call - and working on side

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Abstract: Dan Garland, director of pastoral ministries at the Nashville, Tenn.-based organization LifeWay Christian Resources, trains pastors across the nation at state Baptist conventions or associations. Planting churches For smaller and rural churches and new church transplants, paying a pastor at a part time or reduced salary keeps the church afloat.

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Full text: Five days a week, John Effinger works from 5 to 8:15 a.m. at a Pepsi warehouse before starting his duties as a full-time worship pastor at Lincoln Hills Bible Church. He returns to Pepsi at other times, too, working a total of 22 hours a week there.

Effinger started the second job after moving to Sioux Falls in July 2007 for the worship pastor position. He needed a second source of income - his family, as with many, felt the effects of the economy and had financial constraints.

Effinger has adjusted to the early hours at Pepsi.

"It's challenging at times because having a family, a wife and two kids, trying to fit in awake hours," he says.

Effinger is a bivocational minister - those in full- or part-time ministry who have an additional job. The group includes ministers who started out in another profession before going to seminary and might have kept a job in their secular profession to bring in extra income or for other reasons.

The idea of bivocational ministry dates to the Bible. The Apostle Peter was a fisherman before becoming a preacher. The Apostle Paul, when he wasn't writing most of the New Testament or starting churches, made tents for a living.

Many of today's bivocational ministers make the decision to work two jobs based on financial concerns - both the church's and their own.

In some senses, bivocational ministry in recent years has been going back to an earlier model, says Ron Sisk, academic vice president and dean at Sioux Falls Seminary.

"There's a long tradition of bivocational pastors, in rural America especially, that goes back to farmer-preachers in the 1800s, especially on the frontier. Congregations tended to not be very large or not very wealthy. Full-time pastoral ministry has been more a function of towns and cities and of the 20th century."

Sisk couldn't speak to whether the group of bivocational ministers is growing here, but he notes that Sioux Falls Seminary students feel less compelled to follow the traditional, full-time pastoral path.

Many seminary students are on their second career, he says.

"They tend to be folks who already have a way to make a living, and they're entering ministry. Some of them will go into full-time ministry. Others may continue to work in their secular job and either become pastors of small churches or help out in larger congregations on a part-time basis. What you're really seeing, I think, is an increasing variety of ways of going about ministry."

Dan Garland, director of pastoral ministries at the Nashville, Tenn.-based organization LifeWay Christian Resources, trains pastors across the nation at state Baptist conventions or associations.

"I do think there are more bivocational pastors today as a trend than there have been in the past," he says.

Part of this has to do with more pastors serving where churches are being planted, Garland says, and more pastors bypassing traditional theological training.

Most pastors who have a secular job say they are a full-time pastor, he says. "Sometimes they're working a 40-hour job, they're working 70, 80 hours a week, because they're basically doing both."

Planting churches

For smaller and rural churches and new church transplants, paying a pastor at a part time or reduced salary keeps the church afloat.

Mark Taylor is a church plant director for the Free Methodist Church denomination. He and his wife train pastors nationwide to be church planters.

Church planting is a growing nationwide trend, he says. "The generation we live in today, they're not reached by the traditional church method."

Taylor recruited Pat McClanahan and his wife, Marge, to start Common Ground Worship Center, which launched Jan. 9. The church meets at the South Dakota School for the Deaf's gymnasium on Eighth Street.

People sit at tables and chairs during the Sunday service and can get a cup of coffee during the service.

The finances aren't available for Pat McClanahan, 55, and his wife to work in the ministry without second jobs.

He works full time at the Good Samaritan Society and is a student at Sioux Falls Seminary, and she teaches English as a second language part time at Lutheran Social Services.

"It's difficult for a new church plant financially," McClanahan says. "You don't want to put too much of a financial burden on them. It creates an interesting challenge to be pastoring a group of people and working full time at the same time. ... Over time, I think that will show up. It will take a bit of time. In the meantime, people will be understanding."

Liz Schmidt, 56, of Sioux Falls didn't find out that McClanahan had a second job until she had been attending the church for several weeks.

"He still devotes himself to the church, to Common Ground," she says.

Jean Layton pastors the United Church of Garretson, a rural church with a congregation of about 80. It is about a 45-minute commute from her home in Canton, and she also works full time in fundraising as the planned giving officer for Lutheran Social Services. She and her husband, John McWayne, have 9-year-old twins and an 11-year-old daughter.

Layton has a colorful resume and a stack of degrees - a bachelor's degree, three master's degrees and a doctorate in administration.

Layton always has felt a tug toward ministry. And she's been adept at balancing multiple jobs for the past few years. She started her pastoral work at Garretson in 2002 while she finished seminary (in 2005) and worked full time at Dakota State University.

She started at Lutheran Social Services in August 2007, and in 2002, she became the pastor for the Garretson church.

"Church for me, I am paid, but it's more like being that kind of tentmaker, or that person who's called to do whatever you can do without necessarily having to depend on that income."

Layton is paid part time at the church - she says the small congregation wouldn't be able to afford a full-time pastor - but admits that she puts in more hours during a typical week.

"As our state becomes more drawn to the jobs in larger communities, it's harder and harder, like it is with anything in rural America, for churches to sustain. It's almost impossible to grow unless something comes into the community bringing jobs, but sustaining gets hard, too."

Fewer worries

The bivocational model also allows those who feel called to ministry to pursue that path with perhaps fewer financial worries.

Neil Peterson was a financial consultant for six years before he became the part-time worship leader at Christ Community Church in Sioux Falls. Peterson, who is the associate pastor of worship, also teaches private music lessons at the church.

"It fills up my income nicely. I can afford to be a worship pastor," he says.

According to a 2008 compensation survey from LifeWay, the average pastor of a small church with 50 to 74 members makes \$39,459. For a bivocational pastor of the same-size church, the salary is \$10,181.

Some pastors might choose to stay bivocational, even if their church grows large enough to hire a full-time pastor. They think that having financial independence allows them to preach what they want in the pulpit and allows them to stay out of church conflict.

Alexander Klimchuck, 32, is pastor at New Life Church, which he started eight years ago. Klimchuck has a business background - he started his own business at 17 - and gradually became more involved in ministry. Even after starting the church, Klimchuck has stayed involved in the business sector. He is a business consultant with partnerships in several businesses.

"Church was never a job for me. It was more like my calling," he says.

He says the extra work outside of church also is "liberating" - he can buy a car if he wants without worrying what congregation members will think.

A secular job also gives pastors more perspective to relate to their congregation, Klimchuck and others say. "It does help me understand how hard it is out there, to go to a regular job and feeding your family," he says.

After all, a pastor is never off duty. The work of a pastor goes beyond typical hours and a typical career.

"I will always be a pastor, no matter what," Jean Layton says. "If I'm 90 years old and I can still speak and walk up to the pulpit, I will do whatever I can in the church because I feel so strongly about giving back and recognizing that that's what God has asked of me."

Wire services contributed to this report. Reach BryAnn Becker at 977-3908.

AT A GLANCE

Tips for bivocational pastors

1. Have a support group of other people that are in similar situations. Make time once a month and spend time with another pastor for encouragement.
2. Take time at least once a year to attend equipment training that will encourage you and help you develop pastoral skills.
3. Find time for family. Schedule time for family, to be a parent and/or a spouse, almost like you would study time.
4. Make sure that you are feeding yourself, so that you can feed the congregation. Think of ways to keep yourself refreshed with online podcasts, books and other ministry tools.

Source: Dan Garland, director of pastoral ministries at the Nashville, Tenn.-based organization LifeWay Christian Resources

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