

# **Bivocational ministry means two places to minister, Fort Worth pastor says\_30804**

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**By George Henson**

*Staff Writer*

FORT WORTH—Bivocational minister Charles Levine believes “vocational bi-ministry” might better describe his life, because he considers both his jobs to be ministry points.

In addition to being pastor of Terrace Acres Baptist Church in Fort Worth for the last 12 years, he is a counselor at Liberty Elementary School in White Settlement.

Charles Levine
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“Working here in the school, often I feel like a chaplain to the children and their families. We want to be ready to help our families and not just academically. If a child is not well-fed and well-rested, it all makes a

difference," he said.

Levine thinks his work in the school complements his ministry at church.

"I really like bivocational ministry. It gives me contact with people outside the church," he explained. "Because of that, I think I have a better idea of what they are going through each day because I deal with the same things.

"I think it also gives me a better understanding of what can be expected of volunteer leaders in the church and the time constraints they are under."

Since he is not completely dependent on the church financially, Levine believes he has "a bit more prophetic freedom" than some preachers.

"I don't know, but that may make me a little freer to say some things than if I was more worried about being fired," he said.

Even so, he sees at least one drawback to the bivocational life.

"The drawback is the double schedule. I not only have committee meetings at church, but I have meetings and other events at school as well," he pointed out. "The only way to get a day off is to get out of town. Also, I don't carry a cell phone or a pager and don't want one."

Levine realized while he was attending East Texas Baptist University that he wanted to be involved in a ministry to Hispanics. Working for awhile with illegal aliens during his college career confirmed that sense of calling.

Levine took all the Spanish courses he could in college. Since then, he has improved his proficiency primarily through conversation with Hispanic people.

"I was going to take a Berlitz course, but they said I knew too much. So I've had to study and learn on my own," he said. "My Spanish isn't perfect, but it's good."

His Spanish has been an asset in both his jobs: He started a Spanish-language mission five years ago and serves as an interpreter for the school district.

The Hispanic congregation has now grown to have its own pastor, but Levine's dream is for the two cultures to meld into a single congregation.

"It's called Mision Hispana Terrace Acres, but I'm trying to get away from those divisions and begin thinking of ourselves as one in the Lord," he said.

"I think it would be a real neat testimony to the community if we could work and worship together."

Terrace Acres Baptist Church averages about 60 people in attendance each week, and about 40 people attend the mission's services.

The two congregations already meet together periodically, "but not as much as I would like," he said. His plan is to integrate the two congregations, first in prayer groups and then begin joint Sunday school classes.

Theology is not a sticking point for combining the congregations, but cultural factors do weigh in, he said.

One of those things is that the Hispanic church tends to need a more personal touch. "If I want to have a meeting, in the Hispanic culture I really need to make a personal invitation to each person," he noted, adding that in contacting Anglos, he could just send an e-mail or mail a card.

Scheduling in the Hispanic culture is more flexible than in Anglo culture, he added. "I'm not saying that either is better. That's just the way it is."

And, of course, language produces barriers. A bilingual youth minister is helping to bridge that gap.

“God has really blessed us in that,” he said.

Levine also has tried to enhance his ministry among Hispanics by taking guitar lessons.

“I knew the Hispanic culture liked guitar music, and I like it, too. Also, it's just such a portable instrument; you can take it anywhere. It's a lot easier to carry on your back than a piano,” he joked.

While he feels a definite call to serve as a pastor, he feels fortunate he has never been forced to choose between his job at church and his job at school.

“It would be hard—really hard. I look at it as all one thing. It's all ministry. There are a lot of good Christian people in the public schools and especially this one. I know public schools get a bad rap, but the genuine caring for the students is really great,” he said. “I'm glad to be a part of that.”

He feels he has been blessed with not just one calling, but two.

“God has been very good to me. I'm very content.”

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