

# 2nd Opinion: Bivocational ministry is a thing of beauty

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You can call it bivocational ministry, two- or dual-career ministry, tentmaking, conjoint ministry, multi-focused ministry or something else. Yet when referring to the commitment of a majority of people in Christian ministry, one or more of these titles fit.

Full-time ministry—if by this you are referring to a role where a person in a congregation or some other position within the Christian world has only one employed, full-time role—is something held by a minority of people in Christian ministry.



George BullardJack was the bivocational pastor of the church I attended in Pennsylvania when that congregation licensed me to ministry as a step toward my ordination. Dale was the bivocational national leader for bivocational ministries among Baptists. Glenn was the bivocational pastor who led the search committee that nominated me to lead the statewide missions efforts for Baptists in South Carolina.

These are only three of the thousands of bivocational ministers I have encountered during my life, but they certainly are three who contributed significantly to my life and ministry. They were leaders whose bivocational

ministry was a thing of great beauty.

Pastors are not the only ministers who serve bivocationally. Music ministers, worship ministers, campus pastors, senior-adult ministers, youth ministers, children's ministers, Christian-education ministers, recreation ministers, family-life ministers, pastoral-care ministers, organists/pianists and church planters are just a few of the other congregational ministry roles served by bivocational ministers. Can you name others?

### **Full-time ministers are not the norm**

More than 80 percent of the people who serve in ministry roles do so bivocationally. When the spectrum of Christian ministry is considered, the majority of the people serving congregations in the role of minister do so bivocationally. Bivocational ministry is the norm. It is a thing of great beauty.

Some bivocational ministers would prefer to serve in their ministry role full-time; some would not. Bivocational ministers are not ministers part of the week. They always are ministers who focus a portion of their week on direct ministry engagement.

Some denominational cultures do not make intentional room for bivocational ministers. Some do. When there is less focus on a professional, degree-holding clergy or a centralized ordination process, more bivocational ministers serve in the affiliated congregations. Other denominational cultures either state or imply real clergy are full-time. But again, this is not the norm. The decentralized grassroots ordination movements are growing, and the centralized ordination systems are not.

### **The case for bivocational ministry**

A great case can be made for bivocational ministry. Here are a few observations. Perhaps you have others:

- Bivocational ministers often are as highly educated as full-time ministers. Their degrees may not always be from a seminary, school of theology or divinity school, but their education may provide them with specialized skills and great leadership knowledge.
- The vocational roles of bivocational ministers outside local congregational ministry often are of exceptional value and responsibility in the community. I recall a university president who was a bivocational minister. I often encounter exceptional leaders in the marketplace who serve in a bivocational ministry role.
- Many congregations under 135 in average weekly attendance cannot afford the full financial support of a full-time pastor. If they have a full-time pastor, they may be depending on the pastor's spouse to maintain significant employment to support the pastor's household. That is fine if the spouse desires to pursue a career. Many of these congregations might be served better by a bivocational pastor.
- Even congregations larger than 135 in attendance might be served best by a bivocational pastor. If the congregational members are generous givers, it is possible three bivocational ministers can be called and employed by the congregation for the price of a full-time pastor's salary package. They can offer multiple-staff congregations a diverse ministry leadership team with a variety of gifts, skill and preferences.
- Bivocational ministers who serve in the marketplace have regular connection with various nonchurched people and are able to help laypeople learn how to connect with nonchurched people. Congregations, and even pastors, easily become too insulated from pre-Christian, unchurched, under-churched and dechurched people. They often are looking for ways in which they can connect with people who need the benefits of connection with a Christian congregation.
- When congregations are served by bivocational pastors and other

ministers, they must create a culture where laypeople step up to serve throughout the congregation. This is a great asset for the spiritual and leadership development of laity. It also keeps the congregation from developing a pastor-dependent culture.

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