

Taking the Temperature of Churches' Bivocational Interest

Consultants and commentators have been pushing churches and ministers to consider bivocational ministry in light of shrinking budgets, bulky campuses, dry baptismal pools, aging congregants and emptying pews.

Cooperative Baptists are resisting the mainstream bivocational ministry trends for good reason.

Before joining CBF Global as reference and referral manager, I was a bivocational pastor.

As much as I wanted to baptize my work from enrollment manager to "admissionary" (admissions counselor and missionary) in Christian higher education, admissions was not my calling.

The valuable skills of caring and counting necessary for deans are helpful to understand the current trends of ministerial transition and congregational change.

Based on data from churches posting open ministry positions across the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship the last two years, about two-thirds (63 percent) are full-time positions, one-third (34 percent) are part-time staff ministry positions, and a fraction (3 percent) are bivocational pastorates.

Among the part-time staff ministry positions, the most popular, in order, include:

- Youth minister/director
- Music minister/director/worship leader
- Children's minister/director
- Music accompanist
- Youth and children's ministry intern

Interestingly, director titles were commonplace among part-time ministry positions. In church lingo, “director” serves as a signal for soliciting lay and clergy applicants.

In addition to public classified sections and ministry job boards, I used private data from CBF’s LeaderConnect records to build this market report for bivocational ministry.

LeaderConnect is a proprietary virtual relationship matching database used to refer clergy candidates to churches in ministerial transitions.

Based on ministers currently using LeaderConnect, 96 percent (420) would consider full-time and part-time positions, but given family budget considerations the overwhelming majority prefers full-time employment (340).

Only 4 percent (19) are considering part-time or bivocational ministry opportunities within tight geographic constraints.

A college president jokingly said, “God hasn’t called many rich folks into church ministry. In my experience, they’ve nearly all been poor and they’ve all needed scholarships.”

While that particular anecdote represents a singular rhetorical opinion, I do know that Cooperative Baptist clergy are highly educated. Almost all our clergy have earned a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree or are working toward an advanced degree.

Ninety hours of academic coursework is typically dedicated to the rigors of theological education. With the ever-increasing cost of higher education sharply outpacing inflation, the debts incurred on clergy have also risen.

Given the economics of debt service and the intense educational focus of theological training, there is not a measurable increase in ministers looking to be bivocational, in fact, quite the opposite.

Few ministers who sense a call to ministry and spend three or more years of time and money on a master of divinity degree graduate from seminary seeking two jobs. Ministers want to make a livable wage doing what they were called and trained to do.

Similarly, the data does not support an increase in CBF churches looking for bivocational ministers either.

Faithful parishioners who have been spiritually formed under the leadership of full-time pastors are reluctant to reduce a minister's full-time classification to three-quarters or half-time.

Churches know the value that stability in personnel provides to the congregation, community and clergy.

Some congregations fear that calling a bivocational minister may expedite church decline rather than free the congregation to take creative, missional strides.

Lurking variables like geography, compensation, convenience and necessity may bias part-time congregations against mass marketing their bivocational openings.

Placing paid advertisements for a bivocational or bi-professional pastor may not occur at the state or global CBF levels because the minister would need to be living and working within a commutable distance of the church.

Churches that cannot afford to pay a full-time wage may also see mass marketing via classifieds as a disservice to the pastor search committee members who will review the cover letters and resumes.

Bivocational/professional ministry can benefit churches and ministers in unique ways.

There are budget advantages to the congregation and economic benefits to the clergy given housing allowance options.

For the price of one full-time minister, a church might be able to hire two part-time bivocational ministers without incurring the costs of medical care. Two-for-one is an appealing deal with unique challenges inherent to doing two jobs (or “serving two masters”).

However, burnout should be anticipated without clear expectations, open communication with both organizations and a commitment to discipleship and delegation.

Healthy bivocational ministers understand the role they play in the local body of Christ and embrace the embedded appeal of doing church work in tandem.

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Editor’s note: This article is part of a series focused on bivocational ministry.

Previous articles in the series are:

[Meeting the Needs of Emerging Bivocational Ministers](#)

[The Joys and Chaos of Sharing Bivocational Ministry](#)

[5 Challenges for Churches Shifting to Bivocational Ministry](#)

[Bivocational Leaders Are Vital in China’s Sichuan Province](#)

[My Journey to Answer the Call to Bivocational Ministry](#)