

Bi-Vocational Pastors

According to Ed Stetzer, vice president of research and statistics at Life Way Christian Resources, there has been a trend in the past with many denominational ministers to look down on bi-vocational pastors, unpaid pastors, and on non-seminary trained pastors. But statistics reveal that more of our pastors are becoming bi-vocational for a number of different reasons. Some are due to the economy, low church attendance, or to retain another career if they are terminated, in between churches, or leave the ministry. This may be wise because 50% of the ministers leave the ministry in the first 5 years and only 1 out of 10 ministers will retire as a minister.

The Baptist organization is the leader in promoting and supporting bi-vocational pastors. They report that 75% of their churches run under 100 people, many of which are bi-vocational. The Nazarene Church reports that about 40% of their ministers are bi-vocational. The Pentecostal churches also report a number of their pastors working outside of the ministry due to declining attendance. While George Barna reports that 87% of Protestant churches have full-time ministers, there are concerns that only 7% of our pastors are between the ages of 28-45. The rest is made up of Baby-boomers or older, which may have different financial make-up.

Being a bi-vocational pastor brings challenges and opportunities for the pastor as well as the church. Paul never apologized for being bi-vocational so why should you? Both bi-vocational and full-time pastors are very important in the Kingdom of God. Each have a call, purpose, and similarity. Listed below are suggestions for pastors who are bi-vocational or are thinking about becoming a bi-vocational pastor:

1. ***Perform your work as a calling instead of income.*** Success or failure is never measured by the amount of money but whether we are performing what God has called us to do. Our esteem can never waiver when our eyes are upon our calling.
2. ***Delegate your work.*** You cannot be at every place all the time. An effective pastor will include and nurture the help of others, allowing them to “share” in the ministry. Ephesians 4 tells us to empower others to do the work. God never intended for the pastor to do everything. By providing a clear line of responsibility and duties to others, you allow them to continue the work of God in the overall outreach and care of the church.
3. ***Understand your limitations.*** Pastors, as a rule, are workaholics. You cannot give 80 hrs. a week to two different jobs, maintain your health, and build your family. God will

give grace to your calling, in your weaknesses, not in your perfections. Do the best you can while spending time in prayer, exercise, and with your family. Once the church grows, you and the church will have other decisions to make concerning compensation and the amount of time you can spend to the church.

4. **Embrace Help.** Many bi-vocational pastors feel “*less than*” other pastors. They seem afraid to ask for help from larger churches as if they are “*little preachers or part-time preachers*”. It has been our experience that most pastors, no matter the size of church, will help others when asked. Don’t be afraid to ask others for advice or suggestions but remember it is your calling, not theirs. Be sure to take those to the Lord.
5. **Put God First!** This is your calling, not others. Communicating and placing Him first in your life will enable you to persevere and maintain your calling. God will undertake in miraculous ways! It is like giving Him 10% of our income when we cannot afford to make ends meet. He is miraculously able to meet your needs, including the church’s needs.
6. **Put Family Second, Not Before The Church!** Take a day off, spend time with your family, have a date night, and go to your children’s events. Your family and spouse will embrace you and are more likely to embrace your ministry.
7. **Maintain a Pastor’s Heart.** You don’t have to be there all the time but having a pastor’s heart towards them, sharing the love and compassion towards your flock will separate you from just being a hireling.
8. **Help The Church To Understand Change.** Some church members are slow to embrace change. Only a few people would ever consider a pastor doing full-time duties on a part-time salary. I know they wouldn’t. Love and encourage them to embrace the changes of duties, growth, and outreach. Remember, you are called by God, not man.

There are many challenges for our pastors today. You are very important in the Kingdom of God, whether you pastor a small or large church, whether you are a part-time or full-time pastor, or whether you are very young or very old. Each one of you has a special calling on your life that needs to continue until God calls you away from that calling. Too many times, we get tired, impatient, and move on without considering what God wants or whether we have done everything we can do to make this church or outreach the best it could be. I would like for you to “stay the course” and consider some of the suggestions we are recommending. If you need help with anything, such as prayer, a get-a-way for rest and meditation, or advice, we are here for you. Together, we can make this happen!