

## A call for bivocational or part-time pastors



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**M**ore than half of Mennonite Church USA congregations record their membership at fewer than 100. Once there are fewer than 100 contributors to church spending plans, it is difficult to support a full-time pastor.

Of the 100 pastors registered as Mennonite Church USA pastoral candidates so far this year, only 10 percent report being able or willing to work part-time. We need at least half our pastoral candidates to be open to part-time ministry in order to match all Mennonite Church USA congregations with a gifted, qualified leader ready to equip members in a missionally-driven church. Half the openings in our churches are for part-time pastors.

I face these realities daily with conferences ministers, overseers and bishops in the Mennonite Church USA calling system. That, coupled with working part-time in ministry for the first time in my life, draws me to reflect more on issues of part-time and bivocational ministry.

**There are benefits of having two vocations.** One has a foot in two worlds. There is a certain authenticity to pastoral ministry when members know the pastor also works in a world similar to theirs: owning a business, selling real estate, teaching, farming. Knowing their pastor has to be in two places helps members have realistic expectations of their pastor. For those of us who struggle to keep good boundaries around the unending possibilities of ministry, having a clock to punch or a business to maintain offers concrete help.

Feeling neither job is getting its due is one challenge of bivocational work. Getting away for theological study and continuing education is difficult

for pastors who have second jobs. Financial benefits, particularly health insurance and retirement, are a challenge for pastors who are pro-rated according to time employed by their congregations. But some congregations work out good financial packages for part-time work.


**A successful bivocational pastor** needs to be organized and pay attention to detail. Supportive family and friends (or spouse) is important. When used judiciously, technology can be essential to keep track of schedule and where to be reached. It

can also be entertaining. Once I took a binational conference call on my cell phone while standing in the pasture where my husband was trying to sort calves without me. My colleagues love to make barnyard comparisons to ministry.

For pastors who like fresh challenges, bivocational ministry is a delightful option. In one day I may counsel a pastor in transition, project trends of the future of pastoral ministry, substitute teach third grade, eat lunch with farmers at the local sale barn, operate large farm machinery or study agricultural marketing trends.

Part-time pastoral work is also attractive without the other vocation. While this is not financially possible for many pastors, some

have other sources of income or a working spouse. There is fulfillment in volunteer opportunities when we work part-time, not to mention the increased effectiveness of a pastor who cultivates leisure and good health practices. Jennifer Davis Sensenig, associate pastor at Pasadena (Calif.) Mennonite Church, suggests all pastors live “the good life” to model something attractive in the call to ministry in Mennonite Church USA. She describes the good life as a continual realignment of priorities according to the gospel, coupled with habits informed by our faith. That means pastors can and should do less.

Mennonite Church USA congregations are creating a culture of calling people to pastoral ministry. The young people being mentored reveal a bright future of pastors for our congregations. As demographic and economic pressures shift and change, we will see an increased need for pastors choosing part-time or bivocational work. 

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