

McCORMICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR:
TOWARD A HEALTHY PART-TIME ARRANGEMENT FOR
THE FULLY-VALUED PASTOR AND THE FULLY-ENGAGED
CONGREGATION

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Abstract

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Mennonite Church USA needs more part-time or bivocational ministers, yet most pastors need full-time salary/benefits and not many have a secondary vocation option. There is a lack of recognition and appreciation- perhaps a lack of status- of serving part-time, which can weaken pastoral identity. A further impediment may be ourselves as pastors- our lack of boundaries and time management skills. Serving bivocationally supports Mennonite theology of leadership. We believe in the priesthood of all believers, and lay members need to be equipped to fulfill their calling to ministry. Congregations with part-time pastors uniquely need all members to share leadership; it's imperative, not just nice, for members to lead. Scripture demonstrates leadership gifts are given, not for one's own career development, for the benefit of all. Ephesians 4 describes the end toward which God's leadership gifts point: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry". The promise to Abraham that he would be a great nation was given, not for his own posterity, but so that "all the nations might be blessed" (Gen 18:18). God calls us, and we go where we are sent. "Here I am, send me" (Isa 6:8). As our denomination intentionally hones our "shoulder-tapping" skills, we must also discern with candidates if part-time or bivocational settings are part of God's call on their lives. Mennonites respond to need; we must clarify what kind of pastors Mennonite Church USA really needs. Pastors called and gifted by God must consider the challenging route of bivocational ministry so that under-served congregations might benefit from pastoral leadership and lay leaders' gifts are released. At least three frames required change to make this happen: symbolic, behavioral, and structural. Rhetoric and scripture narratives motivate Mennonites, so a combination of sermons, articles and workshops with a motivational text and stories of bivocational pastors addressed the symbolic/cultural image problem. Education/ formation addresses the human behavioral impediments in three audiences: present bivocational pastors (negotiating skills and identity issues), college and seminary students (training for a 2nd vocation), and full-time pastors ready for another call (pastoral identity and authenticity). Reframing (orientation-disorientation-reorientation) the job opening scenario was shocking enough to prompt experienced and already established pastoral candidates to consider the benefits of part-time or bivocational ministry, and may open congregations to considering less-than-full-time as the best option, not just the second option. The leadership team I serve with, together with conference ministers, can continue work together on interventions. We want to address unique part-time needs in the denominational salary/benefits guidelines and the ministerial polity document. Communication avenues and public speaking now communicates the value we place on part-time ministry. An authenticating relationship was built through the survey follow-up and the forthcoming bivocational resource packet. This intervention succeeded in heading the right direction because the national statistic of those willing to consider bivocational ministry improved from 10% to 30%.

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SITUATION ANALYSIS.

Mennonite Church USA needs more part-time and bivocational pastors.

Mennonite Church USA (MCUSA) consists of nearly 1000 congregations, about 500 of which have less than 60 members. General wisdom claims it is difficult to fund a full-time pastor with less than 150 members. Pastors who can work part-time are increasingly attractive to half of MCUSA congregations. Rural and urban communities are experiencing economic decline, so the demand for these pastors will only grow. But the demand is fueled by more than finances. Some congregations are creating ministry teams which often require some part-time staff. Ministry teams, as MCUSA executive ministerial leadership defines them, can be comprised of any combination of a trained pastor (full- or part-time) and lay leaders (elders, deacons) and specialized part-time ministers (minister of worship, minister of pastoral care) that form a team to lead the congregation. As team ministry is endorsed, the demand for pastors who can work part-time will only increase.

At the same time, great caution is warranted in issuing the call for part-time pastors; only in the last few decades are Mennonite pastors are being properly compensated for the work they do, and this article is in no way intended to undermine solid pastoral compensation. Sacrifice, when forced and not chosen, is slavery and not a spiritual virtue. There are pastors who have the luxury of working part-time, they are married to spouses that provide solid income and benefits. But it's likely unwise for denominations to arrange for marriages to make this possible! As a result, we are drawn to bivocational models. Only 10% of Mennonite pastoral candidates for the 2004

national Registry were open to serving in bivocational arrangements and we need at least 50% of our pastoral candidates willing and able to work part-time or in two vocations.

A definition of terms is necessary to communicate this situation accurately and, for lack of a better method, salary can be used to define terms, recognizing there are many ministries that are not salaried, both lay and clergy. Some Mennonite pastors are paid a part-time salary—whether or not they work at the church full-time is not the issue I take up immediately. I use **part-time pastors** to refer to pastors who are paid part-time and have no other paid vocation. Some Mennonite pastors are paid full-time in secular jobs and also lead a congregation—in other denominations these are known as non-stipendiary pastors, but few exist in Mennonite Church USA. Other pastors receive part of their salary from their congregation and part of their salary from another vocation, either secular (business, trades, education) or from another part of the church (agencies, conference/denomination work). For the purposes of this thesis article, the term **bivocational pastors** is used for the both of the latter two categories, where some salary is gained from outside the congregation, whether or not the congregation offers a stipend.

The congregational need for bivocational pastors is dire, and it can be fulfilling to know one is serving where really needed. Bivocational work may not be the best first call for inexperienced seminary grads who need to develop a clear pastoral identity before balancing two vocations. Experienced Mennonite pastors need to be challenged to explore the benefits of bivocational ministry. It can provide experienced pastors the opportunity to pursue areas of interest that may have grown dormant in the pursuit of ministry; writing, teaching or creative physical labor. Bivocational and part-time ministry need to be promoted as attractive options for more of our pastors. If all vital, viable

Mennonite churches deserve adequate pastoral leadership, the reasons for the shortage of bivocational pastors must be addressed.

As a denomination, we have recently set a national goal to call more pastors. Research¹ has shown we aren't encouraging our young people to go into the ministry. The culture of call that we strive to create is indeed emerging. More young people are going into college and seminary pastoral education programs. It seems everyone knows we need more pastors. But few people recognize the need for part-time or bivocational pastors. Few voices are explicitly inviting and calling new candidates, or perhaps more appropriately, challenging present experienced pastors, to consider serving a congregation part-time.

There are at least five impediments to fulfilling the need for bivocational pastors in Mennonite Church USA. One of the impediments for pastors is clearly a financial one. It is a struggle to live on a part-time salary, particularly if benefits such as health insurance are only partly provided or pro-rated to the percentage of time employed. Considerable progress has been made in the last decades toward adequate salaries for Mennonite pastors, but pastoral salaries for full-time pastors are not excessive by American standards.² It's been posited that seminary grads carry debt that makes a part-time salary unattractive. Mennonite bivocational pastors surveyed did not carry debt and many full-time pastors did, which may testify to the fact that debt drives pastors to full-time positions. However, only about 10% of our new pastors each year come from the

¹ The Samuel Project, Mennonite Church USA, 1990s.

² Mennonite Church USA Salary/Benefits Guidelines survey. Newton, KS, 2004. A copy can be obtained at 1-866-866-2872.

two Mennonite seminaries³ and Hesston's training program.⁴ If more pastors respond to the bivocational call, debt may become more of an issue. I am convinced first call pastors cannot be the primary pool of bivocational pastors: we should be promoting bivocational work as a second call after serving full-time for a period. The congregation that can pay a full-time salary can help the beginning pastor with existing educational debt thus freeing the pastor to work part-time in a second or third calling.

The second impediment is a cultural one. I suspect the lack of recognition, affirmation and sense of accomplishment in part-time or bivocational ministry is an often unspoken detractor. From our beginnings in the Reformation, Mennonites have believed in the priesthood of all believers. But that tenet, combined with our (resulting?) suspicions of power and authority, has had a historical effect of robbing pastors of their office and the authority of the position of pastor. Mennonite pastors described ourselves as "facilitators" instead of "leaders" in the 60s and 70s. Sometimes the priesthood of all believers has been confused with the leadership of all believers.⁵ There is some recovery of pastoral authority and office in the last decades, and a new emphasis on leadership rather than management, but if all pastors still struggle to feel good about their calling and their work, how much more do bivocational pastors, with less time to devote, then struggle with a sense of success, accomplishment and fulfillment.

Additionally, there is an unspoken, nebulous "status" assigned to full-time pastorates. Many pastors think we have only truly "done well" when we land a full-time, solo or lead pastorate. Or when successive pastorates lead to bigger churches.

³ Both AMBS (Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN, and Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, VA, offer M.Div (3 year) and M.A. (2 year) degrees for pastoral ministry.

⁴ Hesston (Kansas) College Pastoral Ministry Program issues an A.A. degree in pastoral ministry in 2 years.

⁵ This helpful insight was provided by my graduate reviewer, the Rev. Cal Zehr.

Congregations, too, suffer feelings of inferiority or low self esteem when they can't fund a full-time pastor.⁶ Receiving a full-time call in a "plum" church is part of the evaluation of one's student life. "Star" students get "star" full-time positions. This is subtly communicated to seminary grads by faculty, family and peers (and even denominational staff) as seniors receive their call. I received a full-time call upon seminary graduation at the same time some of my peers received part-time calls and I could tell they felt less successful, as I would have had I received a part-time call. When I was sharing this hunch about diminished status with a recent senior seminary student who was considering an attractive part-time call, she fairly exploded, "Yes! That's it! I want to take this job but people make me feel like it's beneath me!"

Bivocational pastors are not as well known in our small denomination as full-time pastors, who can serve on boards and task forces, national committees, and as delegates to assembly. As a result, they may not receive affirmation from peer networks or growth opportunities from conference and denominational work. Not being known in a small denomination can contribute to reduced recognition for pastoral efforts, perhaps a general view that bivocational pastors are less effective, and a total deficit when we miss the edification and building up of the body that bivocational pastors can offer the leadership of the church.

There is an impediment that is really a combination of education and motivation within our culture. Mennonite seminaries and training programs are graduating pastors who don't feel called to, or perhaps cannot afford to, work part-time. There are few bivocational training opportunities at our seminaries. Happily, a few exceptions exist:

⁶ The germ of this idea was in a conversation with the Rev. Nancy Kauffmann, conference minister in Indiana/Michigan Conference.

AMBS has instituted a dual MSW/ MDIV degree for potential bivocational work. Hesston College calls second-career candidates to train for ministry and work in their previous profession and ministry bivocationally. But, in reality, most Hesston grads desire and receive calls to full-time ministry. This is puzzling as these pastors *naturally have* the training and experience in their second vocation. When recruited, these Hesston students need to be encouraged not to close businesses, sell farms, and divest of secondary vocational options. I wonder if our training schools have many positive models to inspire students to a part-time call. I sense conference and denominational staff haven't told enough inspiring stories on our campuses. And I wonder if faculty themselves are convinced of the benefits of bivocational or part-time ministry. I believe we have inadvertently created a culture that validates a full-time call to a congregation higher than a part-time call.

Mennonite pastors are not required to have seminary education, in fact, less than half do. There are educational opportunities, degree and non-degree that are created for in-service pastors. But bivocational pastors who often begin with little training are unable to access many of these because of the demands of the other vocation. The good news is, creative conferences are beginning local training programs⁷ and the seminaries and colleges are working at non-degree options⁸.

I do wonder if one of the largest impediments is our own selves and our behaviors as pastors. It's hard work to balance two vocations; one must be willing to be "in two minds" much of the time. One foot in the church and the other in the second

⁷ Proceedings, "Preparing Pastors for the Missional Church: A Consultation on Pastoral and Theological Education in Mennonite Church USA", Great Plains Office, Newton, KS, 2003.

⁸ Journey program at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, certificate program at Hesston College, Lancaster Conference leadership education plan sponsored by Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

vocation: farming, plumbing, teaching, business. We need to have clear boundaries, and be able to leave one job and pick up the other. We need to be clear with the congregation about what we will and won't do with a part-time contract. But pastoral ministry is very difficult to boundary. And few pastors have skills at negotiating pastoral contracts. Two jobs leave little time for reflection on the challenges of ministry and so our work is largely reduced to action without the reflection on the practice of ministry. Our families must be fully supportive of this kind of life. It seems to me that bivocational pastors are operating without a "handbook", and partly because the denomination has failed to focus enough on this valid model of pastoral ministry.

Personal Insights. Another angle on this situation in ministry comes from my own experience. For the first time in my life of teaching, pastoral ministry, and church administration, I currently work in two vocations. I find it both challenging and often rewarding to be "in two minds" – one in the ministry, and one in agriculture. I often work mornings, and then contemplate the issues at work while driving tractor, moving bales or other routine tasks in the afternoons. I enjoy the change from desk work- physical work is demanding but refreshing in its own way. Body movement helps me think clearly. I've always taken walks and "talked through" my sermons before preaching, or did the dishes and tried to imagine what difference this sermon will make to people doing average everyday tasks. Working bivocationally also frees me to substitute teach at times, which keeps me involved at my children's school. At times there is humor with the variety of work I do. I have taken a bi-national conference call on my cell phone in the middle of a pasture, while my husband was clamoring for my help as the calves were breaking down a fence!

But I have been surprised in these last six years to find myself questioning my own sense of pastoral call as a part-time denominational minister, and when I began this thesis process two years ago was feeling a real lack of fulfillment and joy. I suspected part of the cause was simply the lack of enough time to be effective in as many areas as I'd like. But I also suspected a psychological cause- I think I felt captive to the ethos that part-time is held in less esteem. I sometimes personally felt that I am only "partly" a pastor. When talking about my work with other church folk, if I mention I'm "half-time" the response is almost always a disheartening, "oh". I can't tell if that's empathy or a comment on my potential effectiveness in their minds. I've questioned whether I am fulfilling my call from God and the church to use my leadership gifts for God when I'm hauling manure or chasing cows in a remote corner of the pasture. So I generalized from my experience to all part-time and bivocational pastors – do they get enough affirmation and recognition for their ministry from their peers, from the conferences and the denomination? Is their pastoral identity solid enough if they work in two vocations or in pastoral ministry less than full-time? Do they find fulfillment in part-time or two vocation work? So the personal questions drove this thesis as well.

A final note on the ministry situation in 2007: because of national goals to become a missional denomination, all pastors in Mennonite Church USA need to orient themselves to missional church theology and praxis. We don't simply need more pastors. We need pastors with the core motivation to notice what God is up to in the world and lead others into the stream of God's work in the world, and the ability to fill a part-time pastorate. Bivocational ministry has long been a model for Christian mission, and needs a fresh look again today.

RESEARCH

Mennonites have not constructed a solid vision for bivocational ministry, although it's been in practice since our inception.⁹ A clear-eyed vision is needed that looks at the benefits as well as the liabilities of such ministry. In this section I draw on scripture, the experiences of other Christian traditions, my own survey of Mennonite bivocational pastors, as well as my personal experience with this kind of ministry to outline such a vision.

Scripture and theology. Paul, Jesus, and the disciples were fisherman as well as ministers. In Paul's time, likely heads of households were leaders both in the church and in their guild, for example, Lydia in Thyatira. These were the first bivocational ministers. Ronald Hock's work indicates Paul intentionally kept his leather-working trade to "work with his hands and be dependent on no one" (1 Thess 4:10b-12). He debated Christ with the religious leaders in the synagogue but also in the marketplace with whoever happened to be there (Acts 17:17). His tent-making (a more honorable name than leather-working) supported his admonition that Christians (as well as ministers) should not be oddities but be part of recognized society toward the goal of saving some of them (I Cor 9:19-23). Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy wrote to the Thessalonians, recounting their labor and toil- "we worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God"(I Thess 2:1). If I Corinthians 9 is the theological heart of Paul's ministry, as Hock claims, then Paul certainly does not discourage salaries and benefits for pastors- he makes a strong argument in vv 3-14 for the right to eat some of the fruit of the vineyard one has tended, and quotes Mosaic law forbidding the muzzling

⁹ Everett J. Thomas, ed., *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1996).

of the ox who is tramping out the grain- even the ox has the right to eat. But Paul sets himself apart from the rights of a living wage, so as to fit in with the people to whom he is witnessing. All work is done for the sake of the gospel to share in its blessing.

Secular and religion's societal roles would not be separated until the Reformation. Some have argued for healing of the sacred/secular split, and suggest that bivocational ministry may be an exciting model for the next generation of pastors to explore as they seek to meet the needs of the 21st century (Hall)¹⁰ (Murray)¹¹.

Scripture teaches that leadership gifts are given by God for the benefit of all and not for one's own career development. Ephesians 4 lists the gifts God gave, but then describes the end toward which those gifts point: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry". By our baptismal covenant, we are all given a ministry to live out as part of our loving relationship with Christ. But this often cannot be done without equipping and encouraging. Mennonites intend to call pastors with the mandate to equip others.¹² The ministry of all, priesthood of all believers, is a tenet of Mennonite theology as well. As lay members grow in ministry, people discover their own gifts for ministry or leadership. Pastors who can help develop new ministries and leaders are sorely needed. All pastors need to be convinced of their calling to equip rather than dazzle the saints with their own seminary brilliance. Bivocational and part-time pastors have a natural incentive to equip others to lead: their own limited time.

¹⁰ Daniel Emerson Hall, "Stole and Stethoscope", in *Gathering the NeXt Generation: essays on the formation and ministry of GenX Priests* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2000) , 66-79.

¹¹ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (UK: Paternoster Press, 2004), 263.

¹² Everett J. Thomas, ed., *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1996).

We need a renewed commitment to the Old Testament Abrahamic covenant: we sectarian Mennonites are part of a larger picture that we have received from our ancestors just as all Christians have. Our particular interpretation of the gospel is not for the good of Mennonites or preserving our own heritage or ensuring us against further persecution. Our calling is to orient our faith and churches so that, through us, all nations might be blessed. Abrahamic covenant promises fit into and were furthered by Jesus' own ministry. Mary sees Abrahamic grounding in her call to give birth to Jesus (Luke 1:54-55). Jesus' understanding of his own ministry, to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom to captives (Luke 4:18-19) is certainly an extension of "all nations" that God promised would be blessed. As we understand our own ministries as extensions of Christ's ministry, how can we strive to do any less than serve all people? Certainly this theological perspective calls pastors to consider the challenging route of bi-vocational ministry so that under-served congregations, "all nations" might benefit from pastoral leadership, not just large congregations with salary and benefits for full-time pastors.

God calls us, and we go where we are sent. "Here I am, send me" (Isaiah 6:8). But in Mennonite theology, an inner call is validated by an outer call from the Christian community. The example most dear to us is Eli's confirmation of Samuel's call. As our denomination intentionally hones our "shoulder-tapping" skills, we must also discern with candidates if part-time or bivocational settings are part of God's call on their lives. Mennonites respond to need; we must clarify what kind of pastors Mennonite Church USA really needs.

I think Mennonite theology opens the way for our leaders to serve part-time. Pastors have an opportunity to demonstrate the Christian life in a public way that church members do not. One tenant of Mennonite theology is nonconformity to the world. One way to demonstrate nonconformity to today's culture is to work *less* rather than *more* as culture seems to demand. Working less than full-time makes possible time for service and volunteer work, time to raise a family, time for more adequate spiritual contemplation and reflection, and time to enjoy life. A pastor who chooses to work part-time models nonconformity to American culture and encourages their church members to do the same as they strive to live faithfully in a culture emerging from industrial/technical workaholics to embrace post-modern sensibilities that long to rediscover spirituality. Jennifer Davis Sensenig, a part-time Mennonite pastor, who was a "star" seminary graduate and has had two part-time pastorates since, claims that pastors can cultivate a culture of call, our denominational objective, only if we live "the good life" in the eyes of our youth who may be feeling God's call to ministry. She notes that all members have some idea about the life and work of their pastors. "If it doesn't look like a good life, it probably isn't."¹³ She is not defining the good life as the American Dream or Protestant work ethic which says "more work is better". Rather, she asserts that most Mennonite pastors work too much and rest too little, and most young people considering the ministry just don't want a life like that of their pastor.

Mennonite ministerial history and tradition. From the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement during the Reformation, shared leadership was foundational. Two Anabaptist Mennonite communions, the General Conference tradition and the "old" Mennonite tradition integrated in 2002 into Mennonite Church USA. The polity document, that was

¹³ Jennifer Davis Sensenig, letter to LEAD IT team, Pasadena, California, summer 2002.

written to contribute to the unity of an integrating Mennonite denomination in North America, still serves to outline ministerial theology and practice for the denomination today. But it does not offer much about the validity of bivocational ministry. In fact, the paragraph in which the definition is located is entitled “professional ministry and lay ministry” and could be interpreted as understanding bivocational ministry as less than professional. It defines *professional* ministry as ministers who are 1) trained to do the work 2) paid so they have time to do the work and 3) accountable to a group for the quality of the work.¹⁴ The *Polity* quotes from the *Ordinal*, a document with General Conference roots, which was calling for establishment of a seminary for training pastors as early as 1675. The *Polity* then mentions “another form” of ministry which often emerges in smaller congregations *unable to support a full-time pastor*, bivocational ministry. It hints at the assumption that the bivocational minister would not be seminary trained and would be seen as a stop-gap measure. This official document does a bit better with the definition of bivocational ministry in the glossary: “The term suggests that an ordained person has two vocations, one in ministry and one in some other field of work. A minister is always a minister, even if he/she spends some time on another job.”¹⁵ The document describes *professional* ministry first (full-time, trained, ordained), *bivocational* ministry second (ordained, part-time, *perhaps even* seminary-trained) and then *lay* ministry (a form of unordained ministry) that emerges out of the congregation through the affirmation of gifts, usually does not have seminary training, often requires another vocation, and thus is a position with a part-time commitment. Despite the admonition that “a minister is always a minister” in the glossary, by this ordering and wording in the

¹⁴ Ibid., 69-70.

¹⁵ Thomas, 130.

body of the document places a “secondary” emphasis on bivocational ministry, or equates it too closely with lay ministry. This may contribute to bivocational pastors feeling a weakened sense of being fully committed pastor.

Critiquing the *Polity* is ironic because it is our leadership team that teaches and upholds the polity for our denomination, and critiquing it means I’m assigning myself revision work! But, positively, the flexibility of ministry forms in our denominational history means we are uniquely able to embrace renewed forms as the times and wisdom warrant.

Cultural and social. I conducted a survey of Mennonite bivocational and part-time pastors, and also surveyed random full-time pastors for comparison purposes.

Respondents indicated bivocational ministry is a creative, fulfilling, imaginative, and possible option for smaller churches or as components of a pastoral team. Most needed is a stronger vision and imagination of what is possible, as well as examples to demonstrate where it’s working. But also needed alongside more bivocational pastors is a conference commitment not to sustain churches beyond their viability. Serving a congregation that should close is hard on pastoral identity. Mennonite responses are interspersed with other Christian experience in the paragraphs that follow.

Richard Lyon, in 1995 D.Min. dissertation work among Lutherans,¹⁶ found these advantages to bivocational ministry: independence; it serves smaller churches; freedom from expectations of traditional clergy; it melds ministry with workplace; it enables or necessitates shared ministry, new skills and learning develop; and it provides greater options in planning for the future. Dennis Bicker, from his own experience in a book on

¹⁶ Richard L. Lyon, “Bi-vocational ministry: an old paradigm in a new context” (D.Min. diss., Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, 1995).

the subject, also has cited advantages for the bivocational pastor.¹⁷ Two jobs make the pastor seem more real. Natural sermon illustrations present themselves. Carpenter Jesus taught with more authority than the scribes who referred, not to personal work experience, but to earlier rabbis for authentication. Bivocational pastors are known in the community and have unusual access to unchurched people in it.

Congregations can benefit from bivocational ministry model as well. Pastors who work in the community can concretely relate to the working conditions of members. Outreach is more natural as the pastor models blurred lines between ministry in secular work and ministry in church work. Pastors with second careers in the community tend to stay longer and so can provide include longer pastorates. In addition to stability, part-time ministry enables a congregation to minister as a small congregation. Not all congregations, for a variety of reasons including demographics, are likely to make significant growth. There are ministries for small congregations that are just as significant as large ones.

Bicker also finds advantages for the congregation who chooses a bivocational pastor. There are more financial resources available for ministry. There is the possibility of hiring additional staff who have needed gifts. Typically, bivocational pastors have longer pastorates. More is expected of lay people, and they have a pastor who can relate to them in a unique way. One disadvantage he finds is a potentially weaker tie to the denomination. He suggests having mailings sent to a lay person (instead of the bivocational pastor) who is appointed to keep ties strong. Additionally, the pastor is not immediately available as full-time pastors are. Personally, I think this could strengthen a

¹⁷ Dennis Bicker, *The Tentmaking Pastor: the Joy of Bivocational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

lay ministry team approach where a system of elders is set up to be available when the pastor is at the other job.

Advantages Mennonites cited for serving bivocationally include flexibility, the ability to pursue a range of interests and calling, a broader exposure to a variety of settings and the natural blending of witness in secular and pastoral work. Others liked the rhythm of doing work with their hands alongside pastoring. Some felt a clear sense of secular identity contributes to being less “wrapped up” in being a pastor and provides multiple places to get positive reinforcement. One finds her accounting/bookkeeping business job brings a relief from the ambiguity of ministry. Another strongly believes that manual work helps understand member’s lives, and is more apt to encourage lay ministry to pick up where the pastor cannot.

However, not all is glowing with the Mennonites either. Several pastors who had moved from bivocational to full-time look back on the two jobs and say it felt like having two wives and find the singular focus of full-time a better fit. Deterrents to bivocational work, (cited by all three groups of pastors surveyed: full-time, part-time and bivocational) include challenging time management, the difficulty of finding the second vocation that fits well with pastoring, and the lack of benefits in either vocation. At the top of the list was the difficulty of maintaining boundaries in a field with few natural 9-5 boundaries (although some bivocational pastors felt the second job helped maintain boundaries- the church doesn’t “own” all the pastors time). Many pastors in all three groups cited the education deterrent: the understood next step after 7 years of training is a full-time pastorate. Not surprising then, the bivocational pastors said they didn’t have educational debt but the full-time pastors did, thus indicating that ministry training debt drives pastors

to work full-time. More nuanced but present was the diminished identity, ego, recognition and value placed on part-time ministry from the self, the congregation and the conference and denomination.

Arthur Lewis, in his 1992 D.Min. dissertation, delineates qualities necessary in candidates for bivocational ministry: a strong self-understanding, the ability to share leadership with laity, and a vision for future which includes member involvement.¹⁸

Bicker also suggests there is a unique profile of the bivocational pastor. He suggests asking oneself these questions before embarking on the bivocational route:

- 1) Are you called to minister?
- 2) Is there a need? The need is often the call.
- 3) Is your family supportive? If not, don't do it. You are not the only one to hear from God.
- 4) Do you have gifts? Some are given, some are taught.

Lowell Barnes¹⁹ cites helpful criteria that should aid in selecting a successful tent-making ministry. I believe these could be very helpful in a bivocational handbook for pastors and congregations thinking about a bivocational arrangement. The bivocational pastor needs to be:

- 1) a mature Christian
- 2) person who can function relatively well without direct supervision- a bit of an entrepreneurial spirit
- 3) previous experience in dealing with problems in a Christian community (rationale that Christians can be more difficult to deal with than those outside the church- and with more far-reaching ramifications)
- 4) proper training- which is difficult to define- somewhere between seminary graduate (although may not be best fit) to "street smarts"
- 5) emotionally stable to handle stress of juggling two jobs and divergent identities and family responsibilities
- 6) secular job skills or willingness to accept alternative employment

¹⁸W. Arthur Lewis, "Tentmaking: a bi-vocational ministry" (D.Min. diss., Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology, 1992).

¹⁹ Lowell Barnes, "How do they all serve?" (D.Min. major project, Deerfield, IL: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1990).

- 7) a team player as well as able to function independently- this ministry tends to isolate so avoid candidates who are loners by nature
- 8) a strong clear sense of calling to this type of ministry- no room for martyr complexes
- 9) support of the spouse and family.²⁰

There are some jobs that are typical for combining with a pastorate. Marianne O. Rhebergen studied the placement of part-time clergywomen in the Presbyterian Church USA, Synod of the Northwest.²¹ She found typical accompanying jobs for women were pastoral counseling, social serves, and teaching. Some were executive employees and others were chaplains. She recommends placement tips for women, for older candidates, for part-time or for handicapped candidates. Exposure of successful candidates is essential. Serving interims is a good way to gain experience. Advocates or sponsors in the system can help as well.

Steve Clapp also gives concrete examples that fit well with ministry from a Church of the Brethren study of bivocational ministers: social work, educator, clerk, real estate, plumber, government work, physician, electrician, business owner, banker, journalist, sports coach and computer design.²²

Mennonite bivocational pastors work at a variety of professions as indicated on the following chart.

Professional	Business	Skilled Labor
consultant, graphic designer, temporary conference work,	sales/bookkeeping/management, cabinet-maker truck company manager/owner	self-employed housing rehabilitation, self-employed home improvement, farmer

²⁰ Barnes.

²¹ Rhebergen, Marianne O., *Varieties of gifts : a study of the placement of clergywomen, racial and ethnic minority ministers, clergy couples, part-time and older pastors in churches of the Synod of the Northeast, United Presbyterian Church (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1983).*

²² Steve Clapp, Ron Finney, and Angela Zimmerman, *Preaching, Planning and Plumbing* (Richmond and Fort Wayne, IN: Brethren Academy and Christian Community, 1999), 50.

non-profit program director, conference mission agency staff, hospice chaplain, chaplain, working with developmentally challenged adults in work setting, professor (2), administrator of camp and retreat center, teacher (3) secondary special ed teacher	funeral director music instrument repair/teacher	(2), school bus driver, maintenance, picture framer forester
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Stephen Norcross²³ who is called to be a pastor and a teacher/writer, suggests all congregations and pastors making bivocational agreements carve this in stone: *A part-time arrangement between pastor and congregation does not mean that the person is a part-time pastor, nor that the congregation is a part-time church.* He suggests ministers can no more be a part-time pastor than one can be a part-time husband, part-time father, or part-time musician. The character that is bestowed at ordination is not dependent on one's outward situation. Using part-time pastors can enhance, rather than negate, a vital sense of the congregation's mission. Compare these two positions Norcross suggests a congregation might take:

For many years we have enjoyed the services of a full-time clergyperson. However, the economy in our town has suffered some reversals, and it appears that we can no longer afford the compensation package of a full-time pastor. Therefore, we'll just have to adjust our expectations, and do without much of what we used to enjoy.

Or:

Though for many years this congregation has enjoyed the arrangement with clergy for full-time service, our circumstances are changing. Now, we can look forward to an enhanced ministry of the people of this church, living out our baptismal covenants in ways that have been previously reserved for the clergy. It's an exciting time for our church, and we look for member of the clergy who, employed with us part-time, will support our ministries as we grow and stretch into what God is calling us to.

²³ Stephen Norcross, "The Bivocational Option", and "Four myths about Bivocational Pastoring," in *Inside the Small Church*, Anthony G. Papas, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 2002).

Norcross admits that part-time clergy can be exploited (expectations for full-time service for part-time pay), and asserts that a good letter of agreement protects all, and offers an Episcopal example.²⁴ He is honest about four disappointments in his experience. One can feel marginalized by not having the time to attend conference and denominational gatherings and boards. Two part-time jobs can add up to more than one full-time. He has found cell phones voicemail to be a mixed blessing--offering no time off. But he also realizes if he is being taken advantage of, it is probably because he failed to set and stick to boundaries. Machines can be turned off! From his experience, he has been unable to return to full-time ministry and the church that rejected his application because he has not shown the ability to be full-time. Although part-time clergy can return to full-time, it may be difficult.

Mennonite part-time and bivocational pastors are not alone in low self-esteem or low sense of authentication and validity. Anthony Pappas, for his Alban Institute publication, discovered a negative attitude bivocational clergy have toward themselves.²⁵ He finds four myths about bivocational pastoring that must be exposed, much as the boy did to the emperor's "new clothes":

Myth #1 "If only I'd gone to seminary, I'd be a better pastor." Seminary does a lot of good things, but should not be elevated to the New Jerusalem. It's okay to feel inadequate given the awesome nature of the pastoral task.

Myth #2 "If only I were more committed, I would be a full-time pastor." Full-time pastors seldom experience the same stresses as secularly employed parishioners, can be the "holy one" for the congregation absolving members from responsibility, and can hesitate to be prophetic as it might cost them their jobs.

²⁴ Ibid., 69

²⁵ Anthony Pappas, ed., *Inside the Small Church* (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute), 2002.

Myth #3 “If only I were a good pastor, our church would grow.” A half-truth at best, factors that contribute to growth include the situation, the congregation, and Christianity’s lessening reinforcement in our culture.

Myth #4 “If only I had more time to give to pastoring, more would get done.” Maybe, but more time sometimes means less ministry is done by the rest of the congregation.

The worker-priest model is an ancient, respectable and widely used in our world, finds H. Karl Reko in a 1987 D.Min. dissertation.²⁶ One wonders if it is just the Americans that have a problem with bivocational ministry, and if it has difficulty fitting into the American dream?

The 2001 U.S. Congregational Life survey²⁷ found that empowering the laity to ministry made for strong churches, and small congregations -- those with fewer than 100 in worship -- tend to do better than bigger congregations at identifying and nurturing leaders. Smaller congregations may be places where people feel they’re known; where they feel they’re a real part of what’s going on and can play a significant role in determining where the congregation will go.

Another finding from this national survey: conservative Protestant churches and congregations in historically black denominations score higher than average on empowering leaders. Mainline Protestant churches and Catholic congregations tend not to do as well.

Mennonite perspectives matched those in other denominations. Lowell Barnes concludes, in a 1990 survey of E. Free bivocational pastors, that there needs to be more value placed on the work of their bivocational pastors by the Christian community. He

²⁶ H. Karl Reko, “Determinative Factors in Worker-Priest Ministries” (D.Min. diss., Chicago: Christ Seminary-Seminex, 1987).

²⁷ The U.S. Congregational Life Survey, Louisville, Kentucky: U.S. Congregations and Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). www.USCongregations.org

surveyed both district superintendents (DS) and the pastors themselves. The findings with the DS survey ranged from reports of limited or negative experiences to requests for these pastors to be utilized as missionary pastors. In his closing paragraphs, he makes these recommendations that are in line with my own: 1) bivocational ministry needs to be presented as an attractive option by the training institutions 2) there should be a well defined support system within local districts 3) on the denominational level there needs to be recognition for dual role pastors (feature articles, district and national gatherings, sponsor tent-maker speakers at colleges/seminaries 4) the bivocational pastor needs access to the denominational health insurance and retirement plans 5) districts should monitor congregations that “slip” from being able to afford a full-time pastor to using a dual role pastor and ask hard questions about sustainability and closing.²⁸

Case studies sometimes make the most compelling case, and there are examples of congregations building vitality in rural congregations that may spark ideas transportable to many settings. Tri-county Ministry in North Dakota is a model of a cooperating ministry with seven ELCA congregations and one Presbyterian (USA). A 165 member anchor church that could have sustained a full-time pastor with some part-time staff, instead envisioned a stronger area ministry with the benefit of more full-time staff and entered cooperative negotiations with surrounding small congregations. More such success stories are available, including strategy manuals for such ministries.²⁹ For

²⁸Barnes.

²⁹ Gilson A.C. Waldenkenig and William O. Avery. *Cooperating Congregations: Portraits of Mission Strategies* (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1999).
Edward A. Kail with Julia Kuhn Wallace, *Partnersteps: Developing Cooperative Ministries Today* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2003).

rural congregations considering a bivocational pastor, I highly recommend a book/video set on discovering hope and vitalization for the future.³⁰

Personal Faith Experience. Since undertaking this project two years ago, my own sense of calling to bivocational work has increased. I've had to acknowledge the lure of administrative "climbing"- and questioning why all of my gifts are not being used. I also realized I bought into the myth that "part-time means I'm only partly a minister." I worked at this with my own spiritual director, prayer and meditation. Recently, a full-time job possibility presented itself, and it was then I realized how much I'd miss the flexibility of bivocational work- and the grounding that farming provides for me. Variety continues to be one of the joys of bivocational work. In any one day, I might counsel a pastor in transition, project trends of the future of pastoral ministry, substitute teach in 3rd grade, eat lunch with farmers at the local sale barn, operate extremely large farm machinery, or study agricultural marketing trends. The local farmers acknowledge that I am a pastor who also does physical work like her neighbors. I struggle with maintaining good boundaries and likely always will; and the pressure of "the other" helps me stop before I feel "finished".

I have discovered are many challenges to two vocations. I always felt a time shortage in full-time work, but with only half-time in ministry it almost seems insurmountable at times to get enough real work done to affect change. Getting away for sabbatical, theological study and continuing education is very difficult. Although my employer agreed to a full sabbatical even though I am halftime (Fall 2006), I couldn't take a sabbatical from the farm. However, it was wonderful to be freed from one job for

³⁰, David Goldenne-Poling and L. Shannon Jung, *Discovering Hope*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001).

3 months. Our family continues to suffer the high cost of health care and had to switch the liability of our health care benefit from my work to the farm. It takes organization and attention to details to be a successful bivocational pastor. The ability to dwell “in two minds” much of the time also seems to be required. I have a successful pastoral colleague who says he never thought he was smart enough to manage bivocational work!

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As we understand our own ministries as extensions of Christ’s ministry, we can do no less than strive to serve all people. I believe this missional theological perspective calls some pastors to the challenging route of bivocational ministry so that under-served congregations, “all nations” might benefit from pastoral leadership, not just large congregations offering salary and benefits for full-time pastors. And such underpinnings call us to question whether “being successful” as a pastor necessarily means securing successively larger pastorates. We are finding, like many denominations, that the racial and ethnic groups are the part of the Mennonite church that is truly growing. Many people of color churches need pastors who are able to work bivocationally or part-time. Rural churches in decline are also finding it hard to afford the full-time pastor of their history and part-time or bivocational pastors are sorely needed for rural groups as well. Imaginative geographic cluster models share a trained, full-time pastor with several parishes supervising lay leadership teams in each.³¹ Rural and racial/ethnic service must become part of the awareness of pastors called by a God that aims the good news at all nations.

³¹ In my coursework with Dr. Shannon Jung, University of Dubuque’s Center for Theology and Land, Dubuque, Iowa.

Mennonites believe in the priesthood of all believers, that all baptized believers are given gifts for ministry to be used for Christ's church, does not negate that some are called to be set apart as pastoral leaders of all the ministers. Mennonite ecclesiology from the earliest Anabaptist movement in the 1600's has supported lay leadership. Today we encourage looking among members of Mennonite congregations for ministry gifts in the laity that can become part of a leadership team. But this doesn't just happen. Qualified, skilled, credentialed pastors who can share leadership, who can identify and risk providing space for emerging leaders to experiment, and pastors who can give constructive feedback are essential. This is happening in many full-time pastorates already. But nothing drives the urgency of lay leadership like a pastor that has limited time at the church. Some small Mennonite congregations can be best served, not by financially struggling to maintain a full-time pastor, but by pastors who are able and willing to be part-time or bivocational. Bivocational pastors who believe in equipping the laity for ministry, combined with a commitment from the members of the church to ministry, is a powerful combination for kingdom work. Congregations can move ahead into their missional future by releasing the desire for a former glory (large congregation/one pastor) and look to creative cooperating models with neighboring congregations. While this falls outside the scope of this thesis, pastors who are able to work part-time and in bivocational callings are essential for a missional future.

Mennonites believe in nonconformity. It pleases us to know we "don't do it like everyone else." We need to confess, then, that we have abandoned, or at least looked with disdain, on "the bench" of our past, where plural ministry was the dominant model. The

worker-priest model is an ancient and globally respectable form of ministry.³² I believe we have been too influenced by solo Protestant church models of ministry, and measured our success or value against them instead of claiming the uniqueness of our own denominational tradition. Perhaps God is not calling the Mennonites to form mega churches. Perhaps small churches, with part-time pastors who release the gifts of all members in ministry, are Mennonites' unique contribution to the Christian family.

Mennonite Church USA has joined other denominations in calling members to be missional; discovering where God is at work and then joining what God is already doing. I believe God is working in small rural or urban congregations that cannot support a full-time pastor. Mennonite clerics cannot lead others to be missional and ignore the call to “go join what God is doing”. Our church-wide goal necessitates good leadership. And that means qualified, gifted leaders must be ready and willing to consider serving part-time. If not, then 50% of MCUSA congregations will hire whoever is in the neighborhood – whether or not they own an Anabaptist/Mennonite theological grounding or share a missional vision for the Mennonite church.

CHANGE THEORY

The insights of reframing are essential. Raising awareness of the present situation in Mennonite Church USA addresses the motivational impediment as many pastors have sincere and sensitive hearts to serve where the church most needs them. The disorientation of the reframing theory (orientation-disorientation-reorientation) is proving effective as it addresses pastoral candidate illusions. Since the denominational emphasis on a Culture of Call (shoulder-tapping more pastors) was initiated in 2002, candidates have lived with the illusion that there is such a pastoral shortage in the Mennonite church

³² Reko.

that upon graduation there'll be plenty of nice full-time, salary-and-benefit jobs to choose from. The little known reality was that we have no shortage of pastors for that kind of congregation. The realization that the job scenario is 60% part-time openings may just be shocking enough to prompt pastoral candidates to consider the benefits of part-time or bivocational ministry. The shortage is in good part-time, bivocational well-trained and missionally minded pastors. The fruit of interventions will bring persons forward to fill the need for bivocational pastors.

INTERVENTIONS

With a bead on the challenge of bivocational shortage, and knowing that many Mennonite pastors respond to need, I set out to raise awareness of the denominational need while affirming and honoring those bivocational pastors we have.

Rhetorical interventions. I used as many types of media and every public chance I could to focus the denominational need on the type of pastoral shortage we have. I wrote two articles for the leadership column of our national paper, The Mennonite. Bivocational and part-time pastors started to notice and went out of their way with phone calls, notes and emails to convey their appreciation. After the Macedonian call article, a lay person responded to me reminding me that call language in scripture is intended for all believers by virtue of their baptismal covenant³³ and not just for leaders. While this is a valid point, I reminded him that in the leadership column my audience was in particular, pastors who fail to listen to God's voice to go where the real needs are: part-time and bivocational. But this does remind us that as we issue the call for shoulder-tapping of more pastors, we need to remember to work on nurturing everyone's call to ministry even if it isn't to leadership.

³³ Email exchange with David Alleman

I presented a portion of this thesis at a Vocations Conference at Goshen College, October 2005, funded by a culture of call grant from the Lily Endowment. There seemed to be a good deal of interest in the topic although the conference in general proved to be more academicians talking to each other than pastors. The academic interest, however, was fueled by one of the hosts, Robert Yoder, youth ministry faculty and former youth conference minister, who strongly encourages his college students interested in ministry to develop a second career.

At the annual gathering of conference ministers (middle judicatories) in December 2006, the discussion group I led on bivocational ministry packed out the room. They recommended best practices of bivocational pastors be compiled in a “handbook packet” with sample copies of job descriptions, covenant agreements, and success stories, as well as questions for congregations to consider. They agreed that congregations suffer lower self esteem if they cannot hire a full-time pastor- particularly if there was a full-time pastor in their history. Increased emphasis on the missional potential of a small congregation with an intentional bivocational pastor is needed to combat the demoralizing sense that “we aren’t a real or successful” congregation if we can’t support a full-time pastor.

In January 2007, I led a workshop at AMBS Pastors Week. I was surprised at the large turn-out. Planners shared evaluations that confirmed enthusiastic interest in this topic. Conference ministers, bivocational pastors, and those exploring bivocational possibilities attended to discuss the viability in our denomination. They commended plans for a “handbook.” Several solid volunteers are ready to help write this handbook

(into which much of my research material will flow nicely) and I am in the process of convening this group.

In my annual visits to interview students at Mennonite seminaries and the training school, I take care to present the need for part-time and bivocational ministry. I remain convinced, however, that first call pastors need to concentrate on developing a pastoral identity and competencies in ministry without the complication of a second job. I share the bivocational need with students only to increase awareness for long-range planning, in hopes that once experienced, they will remember the denomination's need and voluntarily and creatively serve bivocationally. However, after one visit in which I made my case that "bivocational isn't the first choice for first call", one seminary student raised her hand, and emphatically made her case that she wants to begin bivocationally as she's drawn to ministry and farming and wants to start both right away. She's looking at a congregation that owns a farm. I cheered her on!

As a new denominational resource, we are offering learning tracks at biennial assembly, intended for distinct groups of delegates: congregational moderators, search committees, pastors. A bivocational ministry track made the cut, and I will lead that along with a few Mennonite bivocational pastors in July 2007, in San Jose, California. My plans are to have the bivocational handbook ready for dispersal there.

In order to create an informal network of peers, I applied for grants for 3 bivocational retreats which would not only pay expenses but offer a stipend to cover lost income from the bivocational pastor's second job. I received funding from Schowalter Foundation to host only one of the three bivocational retreats. It is being planned for Fall 2007 in South Texas--where all the church planters are Hispanic and bivocational. I am

grateful for this opportunity to listen to bivocational pastors who are church planters especially because I have a hunch that church planters may share the same entrepreneurial spirit that draws pastors to bivocational ministry. I'm eager to test this theory, as well as to experience bivocational ministry in Hispanic culture. I will continue to seek funding to make more of these regional retreats possible, and have begun explorations with both seminaries to host such gatherings which could also serve as a platform to introduce their available programs.

Since I manage the calling system for MCUSA, I have access to all pastoral candidates and continue to raise awareness with them of the need of the denomination for part-time or bivocational pastors. I've been asking pastors who need to work fulltime to do so, but to keep in mind bivocational work as a future possibility as financial circumstances change or in early retirement when social security can provide benefits.

Perhaps my largest contribution to rhetorical intervention is to continue to tell the stories of the ministry of bivocational pastors and the good life it can be through all the channels I have access to: web, news service, feature stories, and in public speaking engagements.

A bivocational handbook. Although it was part of my planned intervention to compile a handbook of negotiating skills and self-assessment tools, so far I have only garnered encouragement to do it. Clear boundaries around time and salary and benefits are needed for a successful bivocational or part-time pastorate that can serve to set things up for the best chance at success. There is no need for bivocational pastors to "slide into" this dual role assignment without clarifications. A new awareness was raised in my pastoral

interviews: congregations need a handbook, too, as they think about new models for ministry and how to be faithful covenant-keepers with part-time pastors.

A bivocational network. Based on the Presbyterian Tentmakers model, I tested the possible formation of a network for support and a forum to share issues and common wisdom. The interest indicated on the survey in such a network was mixed, even though most said they would like more support. I set up an MSN group for discussion and invited all bivocational pastors and survey respondents (part-time and full-time) to join. I introduced myself and invited them to do so. I posted questions and invited them to do so. I got about 10 hits and then it died away. I wonder if the internet might be a helpful follow-up to continuing relationships of support that are made in person (such as at a bivocational retreat described above) rather than getting acquainted and building trust in such an impersonal way. Part of the denominational task is to network all the parts of Mennonite Church USA, and helping these pastors to know each other may offer support (such as personal emails or calls to each other) that I have no way to measure.

Additional surveys. I suspected that the survey didn't reach all MCUSA bivocational pastors, so followed up with direct conference minister contacts and solicited survey responses from 218 more. I made direct calls to nearly all the 29 bivocational pastors who returned their surveys, and discovered that the personal phone interviews, as well as two in person, was perhaps the best intervention I planned. Listening is powerful, and I was intentional about developing a relationship as well as lending authentication of their ministry by the denominational interest and blessing I sought to bestow on their work. Seeking to learn from folks with experience and then retelling their stories seemed to

increase visibility for the project and offer some of the honor and esteem for these pastors that I set out to accomplish.

These additional surveys showed me that my initial hunch was misguided. Bivocational pastors do not suffer from as much “second class pastor” thinking as part-time pastors do. When I asked three groups of pastors how they rated their identity on a Likert scale:

Clear - Clear Most Days - Murky most days - A Struggle

I was surprised to find bivocational pastors rated a higher self identity as pastor than part-time pastors did: PT- 16% clear, BV- 43% clear, and FT- 57% clear. By comparison, however, bivocational pastors felt their identity in their secular job was clearer than their pastoral identity: 76% said clear secular identity, 43% said clear pastoral identity. When I tested this with a bivocational pastor who had a clear community identity in the secular world before adding pastor to his identity, he corroborated that it was hard to become “pastor” when people knew him first as “salesman”. His salesman job has ended and he has noticed an improved sense of identity as pastor.

I also noticed that pastors are harder on themselves than their congregations are. 55% of PT and 77% of BV felt their congregations placed a high value on their ministry. But FT did top that at 95% high validity. Perhaps congregations struggle more with the value of ministry if it’s less than full time.

I expected the more involved a pastor was in conference activities and leadership, the more connected and validated they would feel. However, more felt validated than connected in all three time groupings. There seemed to be little correlation between conference activity involvement and validation. Perhaps the local congregation offers the

most important sense of validation. It could be that only those who felt validated by conference chose to answer the survey and those who don't feel validated didn't return a survey. I was not surprised that the least involved in conference activities were bivocational pastors. Likely time is the issue here, but this reinforces my concern that conferences are not benefiting from the leadership, wisdom and ideas of bivocational pastors.

Most surprising in connection to the denomination were the PT pastors who did not feel highly connected to the denomination (although one of those was a pastor who had left MCUSA). The percentages on high connection to Mennonite Church USA were 26% PT and 30% BV and 50% FT. Methods of validation of all pastors by the denomination are sorely needed as the percentages below show pastors low sense of validation by the denomination: 32% PT, 43% BV, 40% FT. When asked how they are involved in the denomination, pastors cited activities such as committee and board membership, retreat attendance and delegates to national assembly.

Denominational intervention. Our office officially lobbies for clear negotiating of proper salary/benefits packages for pastors, and publishes annual Pastors' Salaries and Benefits Guidelines to adjust for cost of living.³⁴ I tested the idea of including a clearer vision for remuneration of part-time and bivocational people in these guidelines with the pastors, the workshop members, and conference ministers. All agreed that more creative solutions could be outlined in these guidelines, such as hiring the pastor part-time but negotiating full benefits where needed. Also requested by conference ministers (who

³⁴ These guidelines can be viewed at www.mennoniteusa.org/executive/ministerial_leadership/salary_guidelines

assist with congregational negotiations) was some sample covenants of agreement to share with congregations needing to envision what is possible.

The denomination needs to say more about bivocational ministry and can say it more positively. One place to elaborate is on page 11 of our official Ministerial Polity document, as described above. I have noted a polity revision suggestion in a file I keep for the denominational team. But the revision has not yet been scheduled.

Mennonite Mutual Aid,³⁵ a fraternal insurance and investment organization, has suggested to me that bivocational ministers may benefit from a new congregational community development initiative. Their below-market or near-market investments and loans may provide the start-up to a local business that would enable an entrepreneurial pastor to work bivocationally. This is an option to be included in the bivocational handbook. Additionally, MEDA³⁶ (Mennonite Economic Development Association) which offers start-up loans through its ACCESS program may be willing to make loans to a community association that includes a pastor even though they don't make loans to personal pastors starting a business.

There are nuances in our official paperwork that can send messages that Mennonite Church USA values part-time and bivocational ministry on par with full-time ministry. I added some clarification to distinguish between “open to part-time” and “open to bivocational” on the MLI, the application and credentialing tool I manage in my office. I also added that line to the dataforms on the national Register of Pastoral Candidates that communicates with conference ministers, our “placement officers”. These things all

³⁵ Mennonite Mutual Aid can be contacted at www.mma-online.org

³⁶ MEDA can be contacted at www.meda.org

communicate subtle but important value, I believe, to bivocational pastors wondering about their status in the denomination.

EVALUATION

My own fear about this thesis project was that I would discover the detractors truly outweighed the benefits, that bivocational ministry is too difficult to sustain, and does not offer enough attractiveness to draw pastors to it. If bivocational ministry does not make for healthy pastors over the long haul for most, then I also needed to take a hard look at my own configuration of ministry. But, while a potentially negative finding, I knew that, in the end, this could be important information for a denomination such as the Mennonites. If the liabilities outweigh the benefits of bivocational ministry, then we need to stop commending it as a model of ministry. However, the opposite was true. What I learned, instead, is that great care needs to be paid to a solid vision for both congregations and pastors, and supplemented with a handbook of boundaries, negotiation skills, and experiences.

Although a formal internet group of bivocational ministers didn't seem to work--I did notice bivocational pastors gather whenever they are invited. This awareness on the part of conferences and denominations needs to continue: if you ask them they will come.

I discovered bivocational pastors did, indeed, suffer from lower status, but not to the extent of part-time pastors. The adage I sought to apply to bivocational pastors needs to be applied to part-time pastors as well: *A part-time arrangement between pastor and congregation does not mean that the person is a part-time pastor, nor that the congregation is a part-time church.*

A simple way to measure the success of these interventions was to compare statistics of pastoral candidates willing to consider bivocational work in my yearly analysis. Indeed, growth was realized in these numbers. In 2004, 10% of our candidates were open to bivocational ministry and in 2006, 60% marked openness to bivocational minister.

I celebrate this sign that interventions in raising the profile of bivocational ministers, as well as the need for them in Mennonite Church USA, seem to be setting us on a trajectory of success in more pastors being willing to serve bivocationally.

SIGNIFICANCE

Bivocational ministry can be a good fit for ministry teams or small congregations. It encourages staffing a team with people with complementary gifts. In small congregations, it necessitates the involvement of lay leaders in ministry, which provides a natural way for pastors to equip all members for ministry, something that scripture teaches through every member's baptismal call. Bivocational ministry melds ministry with the workplace; it makes the pastor seem more real and provides natural missional opportunities. It also offers pastors opportunity to pursue concrete, unambiguous work in a range of interests.

Bivocational ministry is potentially destructive to pastors and their families. Congregations need to be intentional about agreements and expectations that reflect the time percentage in the contract.

To be effective, congregations need to choose a bivocational model as a missional model and not simply a way to cut the budget.

Mennonite Church USA comprehensively needs to value bivocational ministers and their congregations as valid expressions of Christ's body on earth with a specific ministry in their locations. Denominational polity and salary/benefit guidelines need to reflect the high esteem with which bivocational pastors are held. Seminaries and training programs that prepare bivocational pastors should be encouraged. Pastors themselves need coaching before considering such ministry to determine if they have the profile of a bivocational pastor or if such work is a recipe for burn-out.

With increased visibility and clarifying the pastoral shortage (part-time and bivocational), Mennonite Church USA has increased its number of candidates available to pastor bivocationally. Change is occurring.