

Negotiation Guidelines

*You **can** talk with congregations about time percentages, expectations and coverage when the other job is pressing. A clear agreement on these matters between a pastor and congregation is always useful, but absolutely essential in a bivocational setting.*

Many times pastors feel at the mercy of whatever committee is deciding their salary. This need not be so. Pastors can be both faithful servants of God and empowered to bring their own salary/benefit needs to the negotiating table. Pastor salary guidelines (denominational recommendations) are available online at www.mennoniteusa.org. There is even a software calculator available on the same website, free to conferences who subscribe. Calculate your own salary with education and experience and geographic units and be prepared with that knowledge before the negotiating meeting. Pastors may choose to accept less than the recommended salary, but can be an active part in determining what that is.

One of the key ingredients in negotiating a bivocational arrangement is a justice issue. Is the congregation able to pay a full time salary but simply unwilling? Bivocational ministry has rich potential of extending witness well beyond the walls of the church, and well beyond the centers of influence of the families of the congregation. But it can quickly become soured and all parties become bitter if it is used unjustly or if it is used to prop up a congregation that isn't viable anymore and needs to take the brave step of closing. These are very difficult decisions and conference ministers should be consulted for the discernment process.

A pastoral contract, written between the congregation and the bivocational minister, is an absolutely essential document to enhance this ministry. The following are some suggested guidelines of such a contract:

1. **Time Expectation.** The congregation and pastor must come to an agreement as to how much time is expected of the bivocational pastor. This includes time spent in the church office and appropriate office hours, time for preparation of messages, preparation for any Bible studies, small groups or any special groups. If the pastor is an ex-officio member of church committees, that time needs to be considered. Also calculate time for church family visits, and hospital and sick visits. The pastor must also provide time for family and for a day of rest.
2. **Salary and Financial Compensation.** The financial compensation should be a part of the written contract. If, for example, the pastor is considered to be half-time the salary should consider the guidelines provided by Mennonite Church USA. Currently, the document reads as follows for part-time pastors:

***7.E. Part-time Application of the Guidelines.** To apply these salary and benefit guidelines to persons in part-time employment, the guidelines should be figured as if full-time. The part-time percentage should then be applied. Congregations that cannot pay at the full-time level should allow the pastor to seek employment elsewhere that is compatible with the pastoral role.*

Creative congregations who recognize the need for benefits not provided by a pastor's second job may want to consider offering full-time health coverage. Some pastors have proposed willingness to negotiate more hours if full-time benefits were covered—particularly health insurance. If the congregation is unable to afford the specified salary, an agreement must then be made between both parties as to what they are able to afford.

3. **Benefits.** Define the benefit package carefully. Vacation time, spiritual renewal time, health and life insurance, travel miles, conference expenses, housing allowance and other expenses regularly accrued in the line of ministry by the pastor need to be factored in. Remembering that the secular part-time job might not offer health insurance, consider offering full coverage.
4. **Congregational Ministry Opportunities.** The congregation that calls a bivocational pastor should consider ways in which maturing members of the congregation minister to others as a team player with the pastor. A lay leadership team needs to be in place, particularly to lead the congregation in crisis care and worship when the pastor is not available. Tasks that may be fulfilled with a minimal amount of training can really lighten the load of small congregation pastor expectations: lawn care, folding and distributing bulletins, secretarial tasks, hosting a small group, visiting and reading with the sick and elderly, just to mention a few. These tasks not only free up the pastor's time, but will multiply the effectiveness of the ministries of the congregation.
5. **Continuing Education.** The pastor must maintain the Continuing Education Units (CEUs) required by the conference for credentialing, in addition to other requirements for the secular job. The bivocational pastor may need to maintain a license in the secular job. But in the world of the ministry it is imperative that the pastor remain abreast with the world in which ministry occurs. Degree aspirations on the part of the pastor will need to be addressed at the point of contract negotiations as well. The congregation needs to recognize these requirements and be willing to help finance and encourage them when possible.
6. **Sabbatical.** Without planned time off, the pastor will burn out and the congregation that thinks it can't afford a pastoral sabbatical (in time or money) will find itself without a pastor altogether.
7. **Review and evaluation.** The governing body and the pastor need to review the process of bivocational ministry periodically, at least annually. Determine the criteria needed to evaluate the ministry and set up termination arrangements by either party. A pastoral review packet is available from the denominational offices.

Having a working draft of the contract, the bivocational pastor and congregational leaders need to consider a proper method of discernment in the final negotiation with the congregation:

1. Spend time in prayer. This is God's ministry and God's calling. Study scripture related to God's calling. Fast, meditate and do what it takes to get the mind of God in this matter.
2. Review the entire proposed contract with the spouse and the family (when appropriate). The spouse is the most deeply affected by the ministry next to the pastor, and spouses need to be aware of the implications of this agreement that is about to be finalized. Any objections on their part must be seriously considered in the negotiations.
3. Where applicable, review the document with the appropriate conference pastoral leadership team or conference minister.
4. Review the points of the proposal with the governing church leader.
5. Finally, take the contract to the governing body of the congregation for their final approval and action.
6. In some cases it will be appropriate to make a copy of the final contract available to the congregation as a whole.

This is a process that has worked in a real church. Adapt and make the process fit your own congregation, but remember the principle: when both pastor and congregation agree on expectations, hurt and resentments fade and God's ministry can shine forth.

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