



## “Qualities to look for: what makes a good bivocational pastor”

Pastors who are sensitive to the needs of the denomination will ask themselves: might I be a bivocational pastor? There is a unique gifting and combination of characteristics that makes for successful bivocational pastors. Not everyone is made to be bivocational. Mennonite Church USA has tragic stories of burn-out and emotional breakdown of pastors trying to keep up with, in essence, two full time jobs. So while the need for bivocational capability is real, it is not for everyone and the health of pastors is also a concern of the denomination.

The following qualities are offered both to help pastors discern their calling and to aid congregations in their pastoral search.

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;
- a vision for future which includes member involvement.<sup>1</sup>

Dennis Bicker describes a unique profile of the bivocational pastor.<sup>2</sup> He suggests asking oneself these questions before embarking on the bivocational route:

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

Lowell Barnes<sup>3</sup> cites helpful criteria that should aid in selecting a successful tent-making ministry. The bivocational pastor needs to be:

- a mature Christian;
- person who can function relatively well without direct supervision—a bit of an entrepreneurial spirit;

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<sup>1</sup>W. Arthur Lewis, “Tentmaking: a bivocational ministry” (D.Min. diss., Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Bicker

<sup>3</sup> Lowell Barnes, “How do they all serve?” (D.Min. major project, Deerfield, IL: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1990).

- 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)
- proper training— which is difficult to define- somewhere between seminary graduate (although may not be best fit) to “street smarts” ;
- emotionally stable to handle stress of juggling two jobs and divergent identities and family responsibilities;
- secular job skills or willingness to accept alternative employment;
- a team player as well as able to function independently—this ministry tends to isolate so avoid candidates who are loners by nature;
- a strong clear sense of calling to this type of ministry—no room for martyr complexes;
- support of the spouse and family.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Barnes.