

## Boundaries for Bivocational Pastors:

*How do we know when we're done?*

Near the top of the list of issues bivocational pastors face is the matter of boundaries. When one works for more than one employer (as I have for 20 years), it becomes critical to establish appropriate limits for one's time, energy, emotions and intellectual endeavors. Because pastoring is a lot like parenting, one is never truly free from responsibility. Yet just as healthy parents establish good boundaries with their children, so healthy pastors will discern suitable limits for engagement with their congregations.

One thing is clear to me after juggling two jobs for many years. There's no way to keep a typical 40-hour work week when working for two employers – at least if the church is involved. It simply can't be done. However, just because the challenge is tough doesn't mean one can't have some success at monitoring boundaries. Furthermore, one shouldn't attempt the bivocational route without an above-average supply of energy. More energy is required to work creatively with the demands and expectations of two roles. That's just the way it is.

Along the way I've learned a few lessons – often, the hard way – and have established some practices that help me remain healthy and manage the challenges of two demanding roles. Though my practices may not fit others, my list might stimulate further thinking and action.

**1. Set aside time for regular physical exercise.** Nothing messes up my boundaries worse than neglecting physical exercise. For some reason, all the rest of my disciplines – eating, praying, relating, retreating – fall apart if I don't keep this commitment. I need to be reasonably fit physically in order to maintain good boundaries in other areas of my life.

For some people, adequate physical exercise is part of their second job – and that's great! Two sedentary jobs, however, make physical exercise a necessity – whether that's walking, gardening, joining a fitness center, or taking up golf. One thing that helps is finding a friend who will join you in the endeavor.

**2. Pray – often and regularly.** Maintaining a vital personal relationship with God is imperative. Though prayer isn't the only practice that sustains our relationship with God, it's essential for intimacy with God. It's well worth investing time to discover what kind of prayer is most fruitful for one's personality and stage of spiritual maturity. Here's where a spiritual director can be useful, someone who is trained to guide people in prayer and offer wise counsel.

Each person needs to find a path of prayer that deepens and expands his or her spiritual life. I've come to depend upon several basic prayer practices. At least once a week, I engage in the *consciousness examen*, a prayer that invites me to look at my life and become aware of where God is at work and where I may be overlooking God's call. I also spend time praying scripture (*Lectio Divina*), listening for God's word to me or to my work. Because of the busy schedule I keep, I find centering prayer, a way of praying without words, to be fruitful (for a description of each of these ways of praying, see <http://peace.mennolink.org/articles/prayerpractices.html>). At breakfast each morning I follow a daily office with my husband. Intercessory prayer with a small group is also an important weekly commitment. Though I'm not a regular visitor to internet prayer sites, many people find these sites helpful. For example, check out: <http://www.ambbs.edu/prayerbook> or [www.sacredspace.ie/](http://www.sacredspace.ie/).

**3. Find a spiritual friend.** The encouragement and counsel of a trusted spiritual friend (and/or spiritual director) helps me stay faithful to my commitments. At least every other week, my spiritual

friend and I meet for breakfast to share our lives with each other, to be absolutely honest and vulnerable, and to discover how we can pray for each other. Each of us knows we won't get too far off the track as long as we keep our commitment to each other. For a list of trained Mennonite spiritual directors, see [http://www.mennoniteusa.org/executive/congregational\\_life/docs/Spiritual-Directors.pdf](http://www.mennoniteusa.org/executive/congregational_life/docs/Spiritual-Directors.pdf).

**4. Detach from work on a daily basis.** It can be dreadfully tempting to take work home. And while it's sometimes necessary, I try to avoid this habit. I don't take my computer home. I don't even have e-mail access at home – as a way of guarding my off-hours. And I don't give my cell phone number to anyone except family and very close friends.

It can be helpful to develop personal rituals for entering and leaving work. Whether it's reading the daily newspaper, watering the garden, drinking a cup of tea, or playing with one's children, we need to signal our transition from work to home life in order to relax and be renewed.

**5. Enjoy your family and friends.** Whether a pastor is single or married, taking time to enjoy family and friends is essential for good emotional health and keeping boundaries around one's work life. Scheduling a family night each week or a date night with a spouse – even if the time is spent quietly at home – sends a strong signal about priorities. If possible, telephone calls should not be answered during mealtimes. Special family events, such as birthday or anniversary celebrations, should have more importance than church meetings.

**6. Keep the Sabbath – at least part of it.** While Sunday is a work day for pastors, it should also include time for rest and leisure activities. Since most bivocational pastors find it difficult to take off another day of the week than Sunday, it's especially important to treat Sunday afternoon and evening as personal or family time.

If at all possible, create some Sabbath space by scheduling a retreat day at least once a quarter or twice a year. Many church camps offer pastors free space or reduced fees for personal retreats.

**7. Treat vacations as sacred obligations.** Avoid taking work along on vacations – unless it's reading that you will enjoy. Don't call the office. And remember that attending church conferences doesn't count as vacation time. Getting away from work for a full two weeks each year (more, if you can manage it) is one of the most important investments a bivocational pastor can make for the long haul. There's simply no substitute for a clean break with work.

**8. Adopt the principle of "It's good enough."** Since you won't be able to do everything a full-time pastor does, you and your congregation will need to establish work priorities. Even so, there will be too much to do. You'll have to develop the ability to say "no" when necessary. And you'll have to be satisfied with something less than perfection. In recent years I've adopted the useful principle of "It's good enough." One thing that means practically is that I no longer develop plans for a full class period or cram the agenda full for a meeting; instead, I plan for about three-fourths of the allotted time – and then it's just about right. My lifelong habit of over-preparing for work assignments actually got in the way of some other important goals such as time for relationships and interaction.

**9. Develop a strong lay leadership team.** Pastors don't need to do all the work. Working collaboratively is a more creative, more spiritually enriching and more growth-producing style. Invest in mentoring other leaders, especially young people. Then let them lead.

**10. When you mess up, just begin again.** Even with the best of intentions, I don't always maintain good boundaries between work and other priorities. Typically I review what went wrong, usually with my spouse and my spiritual friend. And then I try not to waste time feeling anxious or guilty. The next day will be a new day! And if I am clear about what is at the center of my life, I will have a much easier time with boundaries.