

to happen. Tentmakers are often geographically bound because of their non-church employment, boosting the likelihood of commitment to the local community.

The downside for the pastor. The myth that bivocational ministry is a second-rate ministry persists. This myth may prevent some of the most creative and entrepreneurial leaders from seeking out what seems like a riskier path. Research confirms high levels of ministry satisfaction among tentmakers, but they are too often undercompensated and provided few or no job benefits, which keeps them and their families on the financial edge. Other issues include long commutes, exhaustion, few or no days off, and limited chances for continuing education.

How Do Congregations Respond?

Only when the congregation embraces their bivocational pastor's dual roles and sees that dual calling as fundamental to their own ministry vision are they bivocational too. One definition, from "The Bivocational Congregation," states that when local churches welcome bivocational ministry they operate on two callings: "the calling of function and the calling of mission." The authors go on to describe how churches live out this calling in five distinct ways.³

We've always been a bivocational church. This type often occurs in small towns or rural areas where the congregation has never had a full-time pastor. Because members carry out most roles and part-time pastors come and go, they have limited pastoral expectations.

We seek to be a missional, bivocational church. This second type exhibits a greater degree of intentionality to serve their local community. They want a pastor to be an equal companion in their understanding of what it means to be the church. Their church health and viability depend on their ministry outreach.

We are a transitional bivocational church. In this model, typically one church invites another congregation to share its building (sometimes called a nested congregation). The long-term outcome of the arrangement is unplanned and uncertain. In the meantime, both congregations benefit from the dual mission of support for one another.

We are an experimental bivocational church. Two or more worshiping communities form a cluster to carry out their respective ministries. Together they call a full-time pastor, but each church experiences the leadership arrangement as a part-time clergy role for their site. Over time, they may develop collaborative Christian Education, music, or social activities.

"We want out" bivocational church. In this situation, church leaders unhappily accept a part-time pastor, but their real yearning is for a full-time pastoral leader as soon as possible. Organizationally, the congregation functions as a church with a part-time pastor, but never as a bivocational congregation with a unique mission. In the end, they draw from endowments or other funds to call a full-time pastor. Rarely does exhausting all resources in the full-time clergy pursuit lead to long-term viability.

What Does This Mean for the Congregation?

Whether a congregation has always been bivocational or is just beginning to experiment with it, there are pros and cons for all involved.

The benefits for the congregation. The most obvious one is a decreased financial burden for staff expenses. Healthy congregations direct these budget savings toward other priorities and find joy in supporting ministry outside the congregation's walls. For financially struggling churches, they see a part-time pastor as their only alternative to no pastor at all.

The downside for the congregation. Most members experience transitioning away from full-time clergy leadership to a part-time pastor as a loss, triggering a loss of identity and self-esteem. Instead of highlighting the congregation's gifts and strengths, members may only describe to potential candidates what they have lost and what is not working. Their lack of church self-esteem may keep them from attracting creative and talented pastors. Instead, they may settle for whoever is willing and available immediately.

The Bottom Line

What makes a congregation thrive today and into the future? Bivocational churches and pastors face the same temptations as other congregations—the strong pull back to old systems and habits. Yet bivocational churches and pastors possess positive qualities that give them the flexibility to experiment, adapt, and respond quickly to new opportunities. They have all that they need to respond to what God is calling them to do.

1. Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *Leadership That Fits Your Church* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice: 2012), 16.

2. Thom Rainer, "Eight Reasons Why Some Full-time Pastors and Staff Should Go Bivocational," <http://thomrainer.com/2015/01/19/eight-reasons-fulltime-pastors-staff-go-bivocational/>.

3. A. Pappas, N. Faramelli, and E. Pease, "The Bivocational Congregation: Tomorrow's Church?" *Congregations* (Alban Institute: 2009), Winter, Vol. 35, no. 1.