

How can I and my Church Transition to Bi-vocational Ministry?

Presented by Mickie and Rob Norman 4/10/2016

Mickie and I have been involved in Bi-vocational ministry for a number of years. For the past 15 years Mickie has served as Hospice Chaplain for Lower Cape Fear Hospice and Life Care Center. And for the past 13 years has been church planter and Co-pastor with Me at North Brunswick Fellowship Church in Leland. In August 2003 When we began the church start the funds provided by our sponsor churches covered my salary pretty well. I was full time and Mickie was part time.

As our church grew and as our mother churches began to lessen their funding, we had to come up with a means to maintain our living. Both Mickie and I had been teaching for Gardner-Webb University as Adjunct instructor of Old and New Testament Classes for the Goal Program in both Brunswick and Richmond Community Colleges for a few years so we continued to do this for a while until online classes took off. But by 2008 our finances had become very difficult and the church was struggling to support us. At that time I took a Real Estate Brokers class and received my license in that field and went to work With Live Oak Real Estate in Wilmington.

At the same time we began to cut our salaries with our church way back so that funds could be available for ministry and for rental of a building and so forth. And that is where we are today. Doing ministry as Co-pastors and serving other jobs outside of the church building.

Because of our experiences over the past years we have been asked to share today some ideas about transitioning to Bi-Vocational Ministry. We do not know it all, and some of these ideas will work differently in your situation. But maybe this will help you with some ideas if Bi-Vocational ministry is in your future.

Why should you consider entering into Bi-vocational Ministry?

- Many churches today are feeling the strain of decline. Budgets, which use to be large enough to pay a multi-minister staff, take care of a large building including maintenance, pay a pastor enough to live on are now becoming a thing of the past. Some churches have cut staff positions, made staff positions part time and almost put a freeze on pastor's salaries.
- **Therefore, one reason to consider Bi-vocational ministry is that your church is not able to provide for you financially at a level that will meet your needs.**
- **Another reason to consider Bi-vocational ministry is that you intentionally choose to do so in order to start a church or in order to be able to pursue two dreams at once.**
- **Maybe you feel called to Bi-vocational ministry because that is the way you have always pictured the New Testament church.**
- **We always encourage young people considering ministry going in to University to get their undergraduate degree in another field or be a double major so that they can make a livable wage in case they would need to be bi-vocational as they do local church ministry as pastor or staff.**

- But today, for this conference, I would guess that most of you, in small churches, are feeling the strain of shrinking budgets and congregational numbers and see that the day may be coming quickly when you may have to be bi-vocational to survive as a church and as a minister.

So What Can You Do?

- **Prepare yourself.**
 - understand that you need to begin to consider what other “job” you could do and be content, competent, and capable. Maybe you got an undergraduate degree in a field that you have not used as a pastor. Consider taking some update classes. Do some online research. See if there is anything available in your field. Update licenses and whatever to get to a level that you would have an opportunity to use your training.. Consider if you even still have a passion for that field.
 - if you do not have another field that you feel qualified for you may have to come up with something else totally outside of your expertise and seek training.
 - Caution: a job in retail, service and so forth may supplement your income or secure your medical insurance but often working times are inflexible and if you are part time you may end up working weekends and all the hours that conflict with church work. Just a thought, it may not be best to be employed by a church member.
- **Prepare your church.**
 - after you get yourself together, you will want to bring the idea to the leadership of your church. It may be that they have been feeling the pinch but have not even thought about the Pastor or Staff serving in another field at the same time.
 - this may give them a sense of relief... or it could give them a feeling a doom, thinking that their church is failing and if their pastor was better at his or her job the church would be drawing in huge crowds like the new church down the street.
 - you can set up meetings and discuss openly what a Bi-vocational ministry would look like. ie...how many hours would you be working at another job, how many would you work at the church? When would you be available? What about funerals, or emergencies, how would these be dealt with? What about vacations, days off (if any) How would your job description have to change. Who would pick up the slack or better yet, how would the congregation pick up the slack. How will this benefit the church in the long run, how will it be a detriment to the church in the long run?
 - if you are in a traditional setting, this preparation may take some time because change is so hard.
 - Whatever you and the church decide, make sure that they travel with you along the decision making road, that will make the transition much easier.

Who should consider Bi-vocational Ministry?

1. It is best to be a self starter because there are days when it is hard to get going.

2. It is best to be organized. A good time manager.
 3. It is best to be creative. Things cannot always be done the way they use to be.
 4. It is best to be flexible.
 5. It is a benefit to be able to let a sermon or sermons cook in your brain as you do other things. You may not have as much time for research as before.
 6. It is best to be a person who does not feel the need to control everything that is going on at the church because a Bi-vocational minister needs to trust others and give them freedom to serve.
 7. It is best to be confident in your abilities as a minister and secure in your commitment to Bi-vocational ministry. Sometimes people may insinuate that you are less than so and so because he or she has a full time ministry and you do not... (at least in their eyes).
 8. One needs to be comfortable about not being able to go to every conference, every special ministry event, every college lecture series and so forth.
 9. Someone who can set aside time for family, and self apart from the two jobs in order to relax, refresh and retool. (take more short vacations, make sure that you guard time for yourself. Learn to say NO!) You may not have days off, but sometimes just hours.
- **What type of Job should you seek?**
 1. Something you love or at least something that has elements of things you are comfortable with and enjoy.
 2. A job that is flexible is great...but not always available.
 3. Something that financially does what you require. What good is it to have a job that you can't make any money at?
 - **What are some of the benefits?**
 1. You are modeling ministry in the workplace to your congregation.
 2. You are freeing up funds that you church can use to enhance the ministry.
 3. You can find fulfillment in another area. Sometimes church work does not give you a "Well done Moment," because the work is never ending.
 4. You meet new people, many who are not church goers and many who have never had a church relationship. This gives you a chance to be a witness through your life and actions and minister in situations that was never possible before.
 5. You will learn to be more open minded and less rigid concerning church activities and programs as you see what the rest of the world has to put up with in the work place and the time consumption that some church activities take from members families etc...
 6. You will have freedom to not allow one or two persons in the church threaten your livelihood because you can continue to exist without them if need be.
 7. You help the local church see that "Church" is actually done outside the walls not just in a service on Sunday.

- **What are some of the Negatives?**
 1. Time consumption, Long hours, working all day and often late in the evening as well, along with weekends.
 2. Mixed loyalties, the treat of feeling torn in two...
 3. Stress over what must be done, when, are you doing enough, are you living up to expectations in church and the workplace...
 4. Loss of control over certain aspects of church ministry and possibly over your own family time and life..
 5. You are freeing up yourself by making money that is not governed by the church and reason for others to continuously speak about how much you are paid. But that can be negative because you will have people who think that you are getting rich in your second job. The uncertainty in a setting where they was always certainty about the pastor's salary may raise some questions for some people.
 6. Burn out. Make sure to plan down time.
 7. Interruptions. Bosses sometimes do not understand Church demands...funerals; retreats etc... and Churches do not always understand why the pastor cannot be at the Senior ladies luncheon every week.

We believe that Bi-vocational ministries are here to stay and may be coming for some who are ready or not. Many going into ministry need to be prepared with a Tent Making vocation with church work along side. We believe that this type of ministry gets us back to what the church was in the beginning, people committed to God and each other. Living their lives in the world and supporting one another though ministry in their everyday workaday world.