

# **INTENTIONAL BIVOCATIONAL MINISTRY: A DISCUSSION OF THE IDEAS**

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## Introduction

Bivocational ministry is an approach to leadership, witness and service which has developed and been utilized consistently throughout the institutionalization of the Christian church. Many communities within Christendom have been served by men or women who combined in one period of time productive labor in some non-church sector and church-related ministry.

It is a significant part of our present life. The Southern Baptist Convention, through our Home Mission Board and strategically placed persons in the various State Conventions, provides encouragement, resources and continuing education for those in bivocational ministry.

## Background of Student Ministry Involvement

We were doing nothing really new, thus, when in 1987 members of the State Student Directors Association began to look at the concept. These men and women, who have been named by their respective State Baptist Conventions to lead in student ministry, are exploring for the first time, however, their possible contributions to the development of this increasingly important ministerial role.

We might provide something which has not been a major component in bivocational ministry, as practiced at least in Southern Baptist life. This group is in a position to help the individual youth or college student plan toward simultaneously entering church-related work and a non-church job. Thus we have coined, for interim usage as we explore the roles with others, the term "intentional bivocationality."

The motivation for this paper comes out of the State Student Director's meeting; it was originally intended for

their use only. As I ask questions of others it becomes clear, however, that interest and knowledge/experience on the part of many people demand that my vision be broadened. I offer these pages, therefore, for correction and clarification, to the many who are already at work in the area and from whom I am learning.

I will write in the first person singular to make disagreement easier, dialogue more probable and to underline the fact that I speak here only for one person. These are my thoughts as of August 1987; if you who read will respond, my understanding will be broader in January—and perhaps by next July we will together be doing something more in intentionally bivocational ministry!

### The Concept

There are problems with terminology; I touch on some of those below; what term to use is an issue we must decide fairly quickly.

There are some disagreements about appropriate education and instructive experience; that issue will be joined in time, if we decide to work together to encourage people toward bivocationality.

There are soul-rattling issues of spiritual maturity and self-esteem. These and the implications of swimming against the cultural and ecclesiastical stream will be most effectively addressed by those who have decided or will decide to “take the plunge.” Our denomination, thus, may be forced to look more closely than in recent years at who we are as God’s servants, His leaven and salt as well [we’d rather think] His light.

The concept is relatively simple: some persons, in responding to God’s call toward ministry, can healthily combine, during the same time period, significant and financially supporting work in a non-church job and significant work in a church-related job.

The apostle Paul apparently supported himself in part by “making tents,” however that trade was practiced in his day. A large percentage of our church ministers of music now support themselves in large part by teaching or performing in some non-church setting. A good number of

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pastors presently get financial support for themselves and their families from work other than in the church which they serve.

It is my contention that this model can be expanded and, perhaps, refined in order to provide ourselves yet another avenue of witness and ministry as we seek to serve God faithfully.

Bivocational Ministers are a fact of Southern Baptist life. As Morris Ashcraft pointed out to the State Student Directors Association, our ministers in the early days were almost always "unintentionally bivocational." These people were already "carpenters and farmers and trademen when they entered the ministry."

Today Southern Baptists depend on a large number of bivocational ministers. In 1983, 9026 of our churches reported bivocational pastoral leadership and over 10,000 persons served as part-time ministers of music. Fifty-one percent of SBC pastors in churches of less than 300 members, according to an earlier study, has some sort of "secular" employment. Dale Holloway's latest figures (and he is our expert in this area) shows 9,415 bivocational pastors serving 18% of SBC membership. Of these persons, 7,323 work in churches of 300 members or less in open country, village or towns; 574 serve in median cities and 604 serve in our large cities.

A portion of these people have limited formal training; some are exceptionally well educated. Thirty percent, according to Dr. Holloway's statistics, have never taken a course designed for pastors. About 26% attended college, but did not finish and almost 28% have a high school education or less. (A 1973 study of all SBC pastors indicated that 22% had no more formal education than high school.) Thirty-four percent have 17 years of formal education or more (compared to the 47% of all SBC pastors who have done some seminary work).

Some bivocational ministers serve very effectively; some are relatively ineffective. In all ways this group as a whole are not significantly different from their colleagues in full-time salaried church work.

Dr. Doran McCarty lists five types of ministers without formal training for the ministerial responsibilities which they carry. There are, in addition, a growing number of

men and women who possess both the ministerial/theological education and significant expertise/education in another field. More and more men and women are retiring from one field, receiving theological education and entering full-time church-related ministry. They can and do serve many times in economically difficult settings and survive because of their retirement benefits. The numbers may increase and these persons will continue to make a significant contribution. For my purposes in this paper, however, they are not considered bivocational.

Some of the individuals who combine church and non-church work consistently derive their financial support primarily from their church-related work; some support themselves primarily through their non-church work.

We as a denomination must continue to enhance the effectiveness of all our bivocational ministers. It is this latter group, who support themselves primarily through non-church work, however, that will serve as the model for the emphasis which I hope our Student Ministers will endorse and encourage. We will continue to help numbers of our students respond to God's call into church-related work and seek full-time salaried positions in ministry. My plea is for the additional focus on intentional bivocationality.

### The Theological Issues

The Apostle Paul and perhaps Luke, the bivocational physician-evangelist, are our models. In I Corinthians 9, Paul seems to indicate that, though he supports himself by his other trade, the ideal is for the church to provide for the communicators of the Gospel. He might, here, however, be attempting simply not to impose his style on the communities as the norm.

My feeling is that his focus was on the missionary, primarily; our practices in the twentieth century have made professional and paid ministers the norm for all churches. The questions which some of us will have to address are complex.

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- What does our culture's assumption that paid lobbyists are inherently suspect as credible witnesses mean for the church in an increasingly secular society?

- Do responsible stewardship and "doing church" in the New Testament pattern mean that we ought to completely support financially those who serve and minister with us?

- Present abuse of material benefits gained by very visible televangelists certainly calls for clear accountability; does a renewedly authentic Christian witness also call for some clear financial symbol of witness/ministry/outreach priority?

- Some of us are uncomfortable (at least) with the "big equals successful equals rich equals God's blessing" mindset. This supposedly Christian theology simply reflects simplistically the country's secular vision. Could the clear limitation and disciplined leanness which accompanies bivocational ministry be a powerful and redemptive "cross" for some who would follow Jesus in these days?

As in no other age and place, titles and work and money define who individuals are in the United States of the latter twentieth century. Even inside the churches today Jesus' "God or mammon" gauntlet is blurred. Doing theology involves individual and group struggle with Scripture and tradition, with the culture in which people live, and with their experiences as children/heirs of God. Christians must today—perhaps as never before—grapple with the meaning of work and money, status, position and power in light of the Gospel, the world's need, and with Spirit-open minds and lives.

We in middle and upper class churches live with a daily diet of unexamined entitlement. If we open ourselves to the spirit of Biblical servanthood, it may be that some of us will find that a first step toward renewal of spiritual power is congregational and leadership exploration of renewed congregational as over against (or in addition to) professional ministry. We have seen this in other dimensions of our church life such as, for example, deacon family ministry. Perhaps it is time to look clearly at the issue of congregational responsibility and power as it is reflected in bivocational ministry.

### The Practical Issues

Any division of the many issues and problems to be addressed is an arbitrary division. That is already clear to the thoughtful reader. These issues are so inextricably intertwined that they must be dealt with at the same time and by several of us in continuing dialogue.

We Southern Baptists must find and adopt an acceptable and unencumbered term if we are to encourage our youth and young professionals to choose, in response to God's call, this lifestyle of ministry. The term "bivocational" has now a heavy load of connotations from which we must be free. These include:

1. "trapped-ness" which is rooted in the consistent experience of church and minister living with inadequate financial resources,
2. "second class" as experienced by all involved, underlined by the denomination's actions and related primarily to problems involving availability of time,
3. "inferiority" of preaching and program occasioned by inadequate training and/or preparation for shared ministry, and
4. "transitory" because we have perceived dual-role leadership as appropriate only for churches enroute to health or death.

Dale Holloway, National Consultant on Bivocational Ministries for the Home Mission Board and our most knowledgeable leader in the field, acknowledges the clarity of "intentional bivocationality," but knows better than any of us the problems with continuation of its usage.

Lowell Lawson, Director of Chaplaincy Development for the Home Mission Board, addresses some of the issues related to terminology and puts his fertile mind to work and comes up with: theological minister, theocationist or vocatheologist which attempt to emphasize our concern for theological and vocational role. Another grouping of terms relate to training and the possibility of some type of validation process for the minister-worker. Lawson's

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second list included terms such as Certified Minister (with several specific variations) and Vocational Minister.

What titles or names do you suggest from among these usages or this listing or out of your experience which will address the very significant issues encompassed in the discussion of terminology?

#### Personal and Professional Issues

I will limit my discussion of these concerns to two: self-image and continuing education. Each of these had been touched upon already and will be further noted as I suggest, below, some institutional issues which should be addressed.

#### Self Image

Ministerial self-image may be the insurmountable problem with bivocationality. It may become, like Gideon's giving his recruits the chance to drink, the significant test of who can and should serve in this ministerial style.

The denomination's intentional affirmation of both need and model—as well as our institutions' provision of resources—will help, if these things occur. Public focus on some "successful" bivocational role models will enhance the image. Development of skills which allow one to function with satisfaction and minimum energy drain will contribute. The attempt to make this a prayed through, thought through choice of work-and-life-style can be a freeing and fulfilling exercise. If, in fact, we lay bare the theological and ecclesiological roots of this ministry style and its potential for our next century, those who choose it may experience themselves as powerful and pioneering ministers. This will make self-image, regardless of general public acceptance, more solid.

Personal maturity is essential; how it can be encouraged in a relatively short time is already being addressed as secondary issue in many of the spiritual formation programs. This combination of deepening spiritual roots and broadening personal self-awareness may be the key to sufficient self-esteem for effective bivocationality.

Certainly participation in supporting/confronting community is essential, preferably at family, congregational and support group levels. How we attempt to enhance these community roots remains to be seen.

Perhaps some symbol of professionalism and modernity is needed to enhance the self-perception of dual-role clergy. I would suggest, as a place to begin the search for a practical symbol/tool, that a computer and modem be provided each bivocational practitioner, that in-depth training in its use be required and that a network of users be developed around an innovative seminary library.

Clear analysis, understanding and evaluation of our culture, finally, and the ways in which it runs counter to the Biblical understanding of life will be essential. We must look squarely at who we are—as citizens of two differently oriented worlds. As we seek to involve God's people in catching a God's eye view of His world, our image will change; a new dimension of redemption may, in fact, emerge.

Our culture pressures all of us to value "upward mobility"; the increase of an American's self-esteem is tied, in a totally unBiblical fashion, to the bigger setting, possession of more things, a larger salary, and more power.

Careful study of effective dual-role clergy shows that a disciplined limitation of ambition related to "upward mobility" is essential. Middle management responsibilities, for example, and a medium sized church ministry are all the energy and time drain one person can take over any extended period. Ambition and satisfaction must be directed toward "outward mobility," as Dorothy Greenwood phrases it. Bivocational ministers have a unique opportunity to grow in two areas without being pressured to arrive at some great, powerful, respected or lucrative position in either.

This counter-cultural, but probably deeply Christian, way of viewing life and work can be accomplished only by spiritually mature, culturally alert persons.



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Continuing education will be important for a continually joyful life as dual-role minister. Until associations, conventions and pastor's conferences decide to set their gatherings and educational meetings so that dual-role folk can participate, we will have to rely on our own networking for support and continuing education. Some are insisting that the immediacy and the versatility of the computer make personal interaction of "isolated" individuals a possibility, utilizing this medium.

Our Boards, agencies and seminaries can provide until-now-unthought-of resources and access, if we together address the issue of adequate and appropriate support for bivocational servants of the church and the Lord. We might even help these people to become more involved with the Conventions! I am convinced that a number of (or a few of) our committed lay people will catch this vision more quickly than many of our educators and ministers. The money for resources and the development of models can be located, and, with appropriate accountability, made available from individuals, businesses and foundations.

### Where Do We Go From Here

A. Who are the people presently at work as intentionally bivocational ministers? What are they thinking? How can we learn from them? Where are they? What responsibilities do they carry? What is their training? What are their problems and satisfactions?

B. Are there some recent seminary graduates who have skills in a non-church field and who might be interested in working on a project such as this? Where are they? What can they contribute? What resources do they need?

C. What are the needs and trends in Southern Baptist life which might contribute to the effectiveness of this emphasis? What are the major issues which may give us problems?

D. Who among us is open to exploration of these issues? Are there some Southern Baptist opinion-makers who might work with us? What categories of people must be involved if the emphasis is to be effective?

If several of us succeed in clarifying the issues, how do we raise Southern Baptist consciousness and sense of priority here?

How do we begin to put together the mosaic which is necessary if a substantial number of our present college students are to commit to, prepare for and begin a bivocational ministry lifestyle?

Is a convocation where we bring together students, selected present bivocational ministers, denominational leaders, youth ministers and student ministers possible or feasible?

Do we try the approach of writing? Produce some video materials? Is it feasible to train a team of persons to set up and conduct a series of strategic conversations with SBC opinion-makers and administrators?

### Development of the Mosaic

Perhaps a group of people [representing the practitioners of bivocational ministry, state and local directors of Student Ministry, youth ministers, convention administrators, development officers, seminary educators, communicators, et al] could divide up tasks and personnel to explore a number of areas concurrently in depth. Those would include:

- A. Terminology. What is the best term for an emphasis on intentional bivocational ministry?
- B. Financial resources. What is a realistic figure necessary to attempt this sort of thing? Which of our SBC entities has some investment here and might provide some funding? What are other funding sources? How do we cultivate these?
- C. Recruitment. Who are those students who might explore intentional bivocationality? How do we find them and challenge them?
- D. Research. What are the theological foundations of bivocational ministry? What are the historical precedents? What are the present practices in SBC life and in other groups? What projections can we make about ramifications of such an emphasis in Southern Baptist life?

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- E. Resources/Personnel. How do we continue to locate and establish communication with seminary educated bivocational ministers? How do we locate and catalogue bivocational resources? What resources, in addition, are needed? How do we generate those?
- F. Needs/Opportunities. What needs now present or anticipated in the next fifty years can be met by bivocational ministers:
- overseas?
  - in HMB areas?
  - in new church locations?
  - in established churches?
  - in specialized ministries?
- How is such a listing of opportunities to be updated regularly and made available? To whom?
- G. Education. Is seminary training needed? How much? How/where can it be provided? Can near-seminary churches become creative laboratories/mission stations for supervised experience? Can near-seminary businesses and professional offices become involved in the sharpening and utilization of previously acquired skills possessed by bivocationally oriented seminarians? What are continuing educational needs of bivocational ministers? What resource needs are most pressing? How can these be most adequately met?
- H. Interpretation/Image Building. How can we utilize SBC opinion forming resources to interpret what we are discovering and attempting?
- Are there some symbols which can help to make bivocational ministry increasingly credible and its practitioners self-confident?
- I. And... ?