

Vital Churches

Building Vital Churches Through Bivocational Ministry

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In Partnership with National Ministries

Rev. Dennis Bickers, Project Director

Volume Nine – Summer 2006

The Busy Life of a Bivocational Minister

When I began as the Project Director of BivoNet I was determined to mail *Vital Churches* each quarter to help encourage and support the bivocational ministers in the American Baptist Churches. The problem is that life keeps getting in the way! This past winter and spring has been very busy. How busy? I have yet to ride my motorcycle this year, and I have only played golf once. That is way too busy. I think it might be good if I pulled out the last issue of *Vital Churches* and re-read what I wrote about clergy health and maintaining margin in our lives!

In December I finally finished work on my master's degree earning a Master of Arts in Religion with a concentration in Leadership. I will travel to Lynchburg, VA in May to receive my degree. I had set a goal of completing the work in 2005. Although it was close, the goal was reached.

Beacon Hill Press planned a March 2006 release of my newest book, *The Healthy Small Church: Diagnosis and Treatment for the Big Issues*. That meant a lot of extra work and re-writes to reach that deadline, but we did it, and the book is now available.

I was involved in an excellent conference for bivocational ministers in Louisville, KY this spring as well. One of the unique things about this conference was

the variety of sponsors. Campbellsville University, the Kentucky Baptist Convention, the Long Run Association, two African-American denominational groups in Louisville, and the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky were all joint sponsors of this event.

I doubt that these organizations have jointly sponsored any event in the past, and I think this says something about bivocational ministry. Denominations see the importance of bivocational ministry and are willing to work together to promote it and provide training for their bivocational leaders.

This was an excellent event that we hope will become an annual gathering that will grow larger as we continue to provide excellent training and fellowship opportunities. I also believe that we will see more of these kinds of events take place in other areas of the country. Bivocational ministry is becoming more and more needed, and if denominations want their bivocational leaders and the churches they serve to enjoy successful ministries they will have to provide these types of events for them.

Busy? Yes, but doing things that I enjoy doing and things that I hope add value to those whom God has called to this ministry. I pray that describes your life as well.

Dennis

Finding a Place to Serve

A few months ago I received a letter from an individual who feels called to serve a bivocational church. His question to me was how to find an open position. It is a question that I've been asked before, so let me share with you part of my answer to this individual.

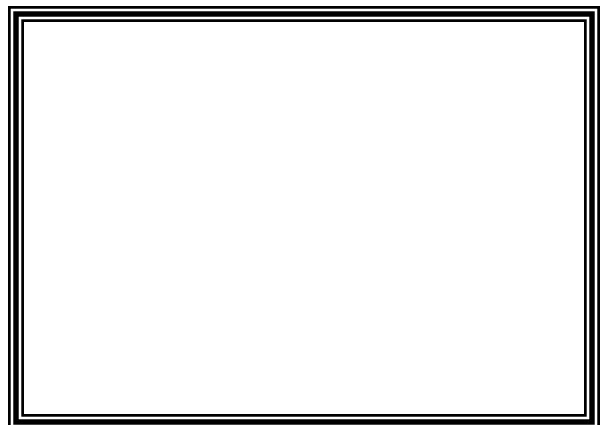
Always begin with your Area Minister. This is a great person to discuss your sense of call to bivocational ministry. He or she can help you confirm that call and make some recommendations about how to best prepare for this ministry. There is a good chance that he or she has some bivocational churches open. I almost always have more bivocational churches seeking pastors than I have fully-funded churches looking for new pastoral leadership, and it is normally much more difficult to find persons for the bivocational churches. Your Area Minister would love to have additional prospects for these churches.

Enroll in the American Baptist Personnel Services (ABPS) and develop a profile. There is space on the form to indicate that you are interested in bivocational ministry, and we need more bivocational ministers included in our system. There are currently very few bivocational ministers enrolled in ABPS. Even if you are not able to move to a new location, there may be a church in a nearby association that is seeking bivocational leadership, and the Area Minister assisting that church may not know you are available.

My next two suggestions will take us outside the box of how we are *supposed* to do things, but they are certainly in line with how things often actually *happen*. As an Area Minister I always encourage churches to use us as resources when searching for

pastoral leadership, but I also know the reality is that smaller, bivocational churches often call persons they have heard about from other people. Be sure to talk to your pastor about your sense of call. He or she may know of churches in your area that are seeking bivocational leadership and may be able to give you contact information for that church. It is my hope that your pastor will also encourage you to contact your Area Minister, or will do so on your behalf, but your pastor can be a great place to begin.

We are living in an information age that has changed many of the ways we do things. There are several web sites on the Internet that list churches seeking pastoral leadership, and many of these churches are bivocational. Included in those lists will be some American Baptist churches. Some of these are excellent churches, and there have been some very good relationships develop between these churches and the ministers they discovered on the Internet. There are also some real pitfalls to watch, so I would strongly encourage anyone looking at these churches to do some serious investigative work before proceeding. Be sure to contact their denominational leadership to find out if there are issues you should know about before contacting them. Despite the potential problems, the Internet is providing another tool for persons seeking to serve in a bivocational church.



Going Deeper

A few years ago I heard John Maxwell speak on the Law of the Lid. This leadership law says that no organization can go any higher than the lid of its leadership. Hearing him speak on this law challenged me to improve my own leadership skills and has motivated much of my ministry to other bivocational ministers. Today, there is a lot of material on helping leaders develop new skills and improve their leadership techniques. However, there is little help to help leaders grow deeper in their relationship with God.

This concern comes from my personal 25 years in the ministry. I have to admit that there have been few times in my own journey when I've been satisfied with my spiritual life. Bible study has too often been limited to preparing for sermons and other teaching opportunities. Prayers have been hurried. Eugene Peterson talks about "cut flower prayers" which may sound good but have been uprooted from the soil of God's word. Such prayers come from "cut flower lives" and can never sustain us long-term in the ministry God has given us.

It would be great if someone could give us a three step formula for going deeper with God, but each of us are wired different. Each of us will find different things that will help us go deeper with God. Certainly, Bible study, prayer, meditation, fasting, reading inspirational literature, journaling, and a host of other spiritual disciplines will be a part of our journey, but each of us will find that different aspects of this list will become more helpful than others. My recommendation is that you begin to experiment to see which works best for you.

I also suggest that judicatory leaders reading this to consider how they might help

their bivocational and fully-funded ministers develop a deeper spiritual life. God called us to be something before He called us to do something, and our most effective *doing* will come out of our *being*. As we go deeper with God we will find our ministries will also become more effective.

What can you begin to do today that will help you with your spiritual walk with God?

Book Review

Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987)

For twenty-nine years Peterson served as a pastor. He now is professor of spiritual theology at Regent College. In this book he calls ministers back to the basics of pastoral ministry which he identifies as prayer, the reading of Scripture, and the practice of spiritual direction. He correctly notes that the demands of pastoral ministry often pull us away from these aspects of our calling to the more visible activities of ministry. We often prefer these visible activities because it is here that we receive the applause and appreciation of the people we serve. However, if we ignore the basics there will come a time when we are simply going through the motions of pastoral ministry without much more than superficial attention to God.

We in bivocational ministry need to read this book to help keep us centered on our true calling. Peterson explores each of these basic aspects at length as he guides us into once again becoming the persons God has called us to be. It is a stimulating book that you will likely re-read often.

Christian Coaching

Are you feeling stuck in life or ministry and wonder who could help you get unstuck? Many people are finding that a Christian Life Coach can be a useful resource to help them sort through their options and begin moving forward again. I am in the process of becoming certified as a Coach, and one of the requirements for certification is that I provide a certain number of hours coaching individuals. Because of my interest in bivocational ministry I feel that much of my coaching will involve bivocational ministers. Coaching is an excellent means of discovering God's purpose for your life and overcoming the roadblocks that prevent that purpose from being fulfilled. It is sometimes defined as the quickest way to go from where you are to where God wants you to be. If interested, please e-mail me as soon as possible.



“You’re saying that the last pastor was a better painter, too?”

“Copyright 1994 Nick Hobart. Reprinted from Leadership.”

Bivocational Ministry Certification

The Moench Center for Church Leadership offers an excellent Bivocational Ministry Leadership Certification program that is very flexible. The Moench Center is a part of Belmont University and offers a number of SkillTracks online that covers a variety of biblical and practical ministry skills that will be helpful to bivocational ministers. These SkillTracks are available on CD and on the Internet for maximum convenience. A few courses are now available in Spanish, and more are being developed. The cost of this program is very reasonable. Dr. Lloyd Elder is the founding director of the Moench Center which has now been in existence for seven years. For more information check their website, www.belmont.edu/skilltrack.

Monthly E-Newsletter

Each month I send a newsletter out by e-mail that addresses issues important to bivocational ministers and the churches they serve. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, send me an e-mail at dbickers@adelphia.net and ask to be added to the mailing list. Your name will never be sold to another organization. This is a great way to receive current information that will benefit you and your ministry.

Blog

I have now added a blog for bivocational ministers so we can share information and questions more quickly with one another. You can find it at bivocationalministries.blogspot.com. Join in the discussion so we can learn from one another.

Bivocational Ministers can't do it alone.

For personal and professional
support, join



The Ministers Council

Call 1-800-ABC3USA, ext. 2334
<http://www.ministerscouncil.com>

ABC Regions and Bivocational Leadership

I would like to know how many of our ABC Regions have staff persons carrying bivocational ministry concerns in their portfolios. BivoNet is designed to provide resources, encouragement, and assistance for our bivocational ministers, and one of the ways I would like to do that in the future is by working with the persons in each Region who have the responsibility of working with these ministers.

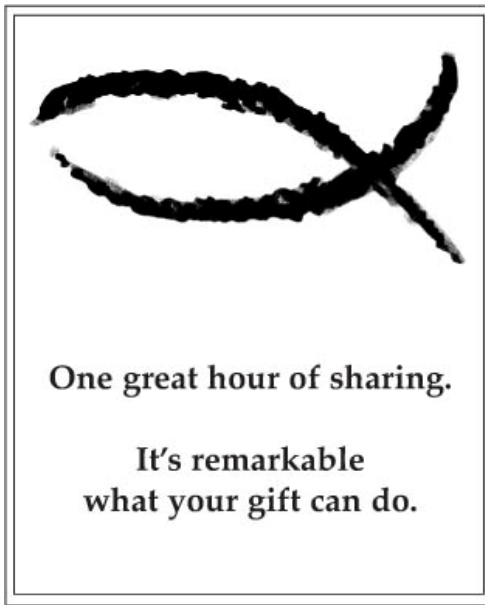
I am requesting that each Region office send me the name and e-mail address of the person with this responsibility for your Region. You may send that information to dbickers@adelphia.net. If you currently do not have anyone with this responsibility, please consider adding that to a staff member's portfolio. We want to be able to serve all the bivocational ministers in our denomination. Thank you.

Pastor Evaluation Tools

Occasionally a pastor will call my office to tell me the church wants an evaluation tools they can use to measure the effectiveness of the pastor. My first response is to ask what the church intends to measure. In most cases, such evaluations are very subjective and often occur because some group in the church has become unhappy with things occurring in the church. I explain to the pastor that unless the church and pastor have agreed upon certain goals for the year, it is very difficult to evaluate the pastor.

Jill Hudson, in her book *When Better Isn't Enough*, writes that "The goal of an evaluation or review process should always be to improve the ministry of the congregation and the effectiveness of its members and staff." In order to truly accomplish this task, Hudson believes very strongly that both the pastoral staff and the congregation must be evaluated. Her book, published by The Alban Institute, provides evaluation questions for both the pastor and congregation in many areas of church life in order to measure the effectiveness of the church and to identify areas of potential growth.

Whether or not the church wants to use this evaluation tool, it is a great resource for any pastor, including bivocational leaders, to measure their own effectiveness and that of the church. It includes not only evaluation questions about the activities of the church but also questions that measure the personal and spiritual growth of the minister and how well the church encourages the overall health of the minister. There are even evaluation questions that Hudson has designed to evaluate the volunteer workers in our churches.



Many of our ABC churches receive the One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) offering during the months of May and June, but gifts to this wonderful offering can be made at any time of the year. OGHS monies were used after many of the catastrophic events in 2005 to provide relief and assistance to persons who suffered loss. Your church can share in the rebuilding of lives by giving to the OGHS this year. Every gift matters.

Leading By Example

Pastors sometimes try to explain why their churches do not support some event or offering with the excuse that they just can't get their church to see the value of it. It reminds me of the old Alive in Mission program from a few years ago. I was asked to serve as a Mission Cluster Director and given responsibility for about nine churches. At one of the early meetings we were asked how many of our churches had agreed to participate. One Cluster Director, a pastor, replied that none of his churches were interested. He was asked why his church was not listed as giving anything. Again, he responded that he just could not get the

church leadership to agree to support the Alive in Mission campaign. Finally, he was asked why he had not given to the campaign himself. Perhaps he could not get the church to agree to support Alive in Mission but his personal gift would have counted as a contribution from his church. Regardless of whether the church voted to support Alive in Mission no one could stop him from contributing to it. He had no answer. (When it became my turn to report I was very happy to announce that 7 of my 9 churches had voted to support Alive in Mission including the church I pastored!)

Smaller churches can be reluctant to embrace new things, but that doesn't mean that you as their pastor cannot participate. In fact, your involvement in the activity may be the catalyst that leads the church to later involvement in the activity. When I see church reports indicating that a church gave nothing to an ABC mission offering I know the pastor also did not give to it. When I see churches that never participate in denominational and regional activities I know the leadership also did not participate in those events. That non-involvement sends a strong message to the rest of the church that this is not something that is worthy of their support.

There are many things in ABC life that are good and helpful to our bivocational churches, but it is very difficult to get these churches involved in them. Workshops, resources, programs, leadership retreats, mission trips, opportunities to support mission activity around the world, and many other opportunities exist to help our churches fulfill the mission God has given them. But, they need you as their leader to lead by example through your own involvement and support. What new opportunity will you introduce to your church in 2006?

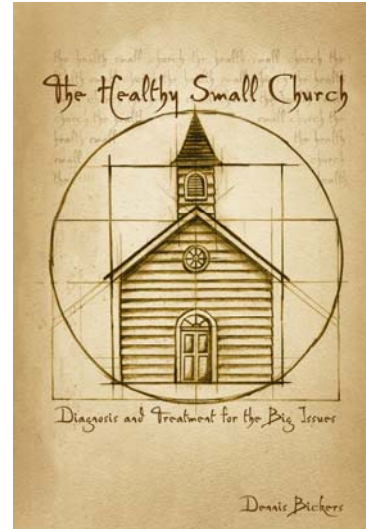
Working Together

Last fall I joined about sixteen men from several churches in an association for a work trip to Appalachia. One of the bivocational churches in that association had become involved in a ministry there, and they were leading this trip to help prepare some homes for winter. It was a long, tiring day, but we accomplished some good work before returning home late that night.

In the days following I thought about the work we had done. Most of the churches involved were bivocational, and few of them could have accomplished what we did by themselves. By working together we were able to accomplish quite a bit in only one day, and we brought a blessing to several families by the work we did on their homes.

Small bivocational churches often struggle due to limited resources. New ideas for ministry are often rejected because of limited funds and few people. But what could happen if these churches joined forces with other churches to achieve a common goal? When you multiply a few people and a few dollars from each church by several churches you suddenly find that you have a lot of resources available for ministry. Working together can enable smaller churches to impact their communities in ways that none of them could if they simply did what each of them could do by themselves.

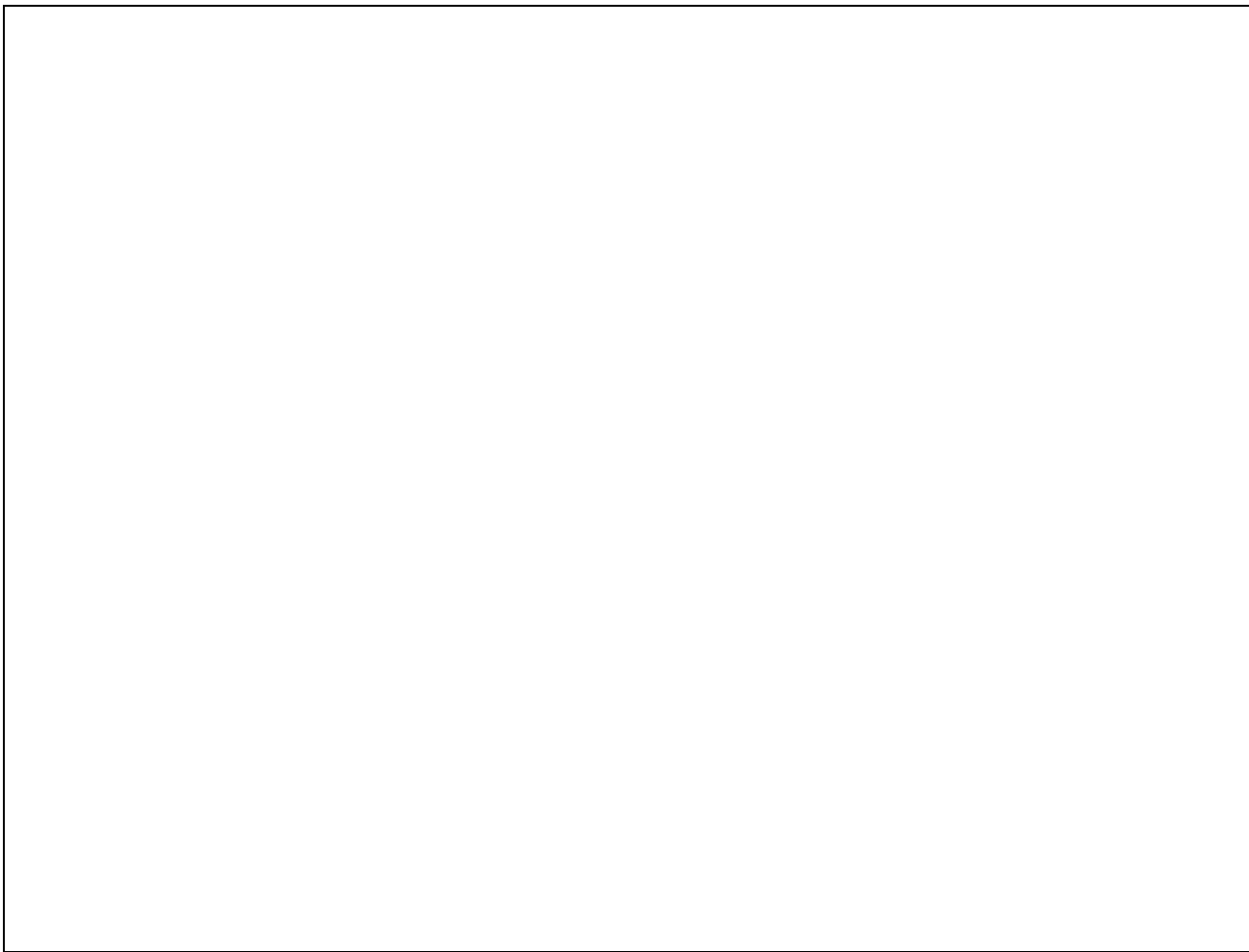
What needs exist in your community? Are there other churches in your association or community that could work together with your church to meet these needs? Are you willing to be the leader that brings these churches together to see what great things you might accomplish by working together to impact your community for the Kingdom of God?



Beacon Hill Press released my third book in March. *The Healthy Small Church: Diagnostic and Treatment for the Big Issues* explores church health issues from a smaller church perspective. Each chapter explores different aspects of church life such as spiritual leadership, the ability to handle conflict, acceptance of change, community, outreach, mission-mindedness, and others. The final chapter provides diagnostic questions for each area of church life covered in the book to help the church leadership determine how healthy the church is in each area. The book is available in Christian bookstores, on-line, and through my site, www.bivocationalministries.com.

How Can BivoNet Help You?

BivoNet and *Vital Churches* exist to support you in your work as a bivocational minister and the churches you serve. How can we better help you? Are there specific topics you would like to see covered in this newsletter? Are there resources you need? Are there roadblocks that seem to prevent you from achieving the ministry God has given you? I would love to hear from you at dbickers@adelphia.net. See you next time!



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