

BIVOCATIONAL CHURCH PLANTERS

Uniquely Wired for Kingdom Growth

Introduction

Church planting is the most effective method of evangelism that exists today. Most evangelical church leaders believe this statement is true. We at the North American Mission Board (NAMB) certainly believe it. We have learned a great deal over the years. The one thing we have learned is that we will never keep up with the population growth in North America by our existing model--finding an educated church planter, moving him to a new area, and finally sponsoring him for three years. This process, no doubt, is effective and we do not want to minimize its effectiveness, nor do away with it. However, as good as it is, we are continually losing ground as the church to population ratio continues to climb.

What else can we do? There is a great answer. Look to our roots, look to the Bible, and look to the Almighty who sanctified both. Bivocational pastors and church planters have been around for a long time, but usually as a last resort or by default. This book is written to suggest the primary place to look when starting churches, especially in the rural and urban contexts, is to bivocational church planters. In this book, you will read a variety of stories from church planters. They vary greatly, yet in some ways they are very similar. Read the stories carefully and see if you find yourself in one of them.

To the potential church planter, God has placed in your hands the kindling for a fire that could lead you out of your personal comfort zone and into the adventure of your life. Could you be the next bivocational church planter in the area where you live?

To the pastor of an existing church--whether bivocational or fully funded: Could God be inviting you to join Him in leading your church to sponsor a new bivocational church plant, or you personally to mentor a new bivocational church planter?

To the denominational worker: Have you seen bivocational work as viable, or is it just a measure for sad circumstances? Do you have a strategy for church planting that includes the calling, training, and mentoring of bivocational church planters in your area of responsibility?

All over North America, people with the responsibility of starting churches are daily praying Luke 10:2. Lord, please "send forth the laborers for the harvest." As you read this book, God may touch your spirit and say, "you are the one." There are helps in the back of the book to tell you what to do next.

So read on with an open heart. Right now your only prerequisite is the right answer to a critical question, "Are you ready to obey if God calls you?" Take a moment and pray before reading this book. Ask God for wisdom and guidance concerning His plan for your life.

Blessings and joy in your journey. . .

Biblical Perspective: The Year was 50-something A.D.

The greatest church planter that ever existed was on the move--a bivocational church planter nonetheless. This man is perhaps the most quoted speaker and writer in the history of the Christian church other than Jesus Himself. This man not only started a church planting movement, but also had time to write 13 or 14 books that have been read by millions upon millions of people. It was not easy for this man. For you see, he was well educated, had been quite wealthy, remarkably intelligent, and very successful before he was ever called into the ministry.

For him to become bivocational, he had to empty himself of everything that was in his fleshly spirit. He had to allow himself to seek God rather than what this world could offer. He had to say, "YES!"

Did I tell you that it cost this man dearly? Yes, he was likely disowned by his family, disinherited, and alone. Listen to his own words as he describes the trials in his church planting experience as a bivocational church planter:

23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches (2 Cor. 11: 23-28, NIV).

By now, you know that I am referring to the apostle Paul, one of God's choicest servants. He was a servant of God first and foremost, an apostle to the Gentiles, a preacher of the gospel, and a bivocational church planter.

You may know that Paul worked as a tentmaker so he could be free to conduct the ministry to which God called him. This was a part of his ethos, his ideal, his thought pattern, perhaps even his theology. He did not want to be indebted to the ones to whom he ministered. He had no trouble collecting money for anyone else. He did not even have trouble with people being fully funded by the ones to whom they ministered. He just simply thought it would be best for himself to be bivocational, serving the churches and working to make a living.

It is thought by some that Paul learned tent making from Pricilla and Aquilla, whom he met in Corinth after they left Italy because of persecution. However, Scripture tells us that Paul was drawn to them because they were of the “same trade” (see Acts 18:1-3, NIV). It seems that Paul was a tentmaker when he met them. He worked with his hands, making tents for a living.

It is well-known that Paul came from a wealthy family in Tarsus. Whether his family business was tent making, or he learned tent making as a means of survival in Arabia, Paul was equipped mentally and physically to be a tentmaker in order to serve his Lord as a church planter. More importantly, Paul was highly accepted and used by God to start churches in his bivocational/tent making role.¹

The Years 1517-1600: The Reformation

From the time of Ignatius of Antioch until the reformation, the Catholic bishop ran the show. They were the paid clergy and lesser ministers served over congregations that met in houses all around the region. The house churches were small and most of the money, no doubt, went to the bishop.

During the reformation, some things radically changed. People such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Charles Zwingli became the paid clergy and groups, such as the Anabaptists, created the free-church position. These men were still quite suspect of the Reformers. They did not take any salary. Since there was really no structure amongst them, often a member of the local congregation became the congregation’s preacher.²

“Few were paid except by martyrdom. Since the Anabaptists were not part of the established church, they often found that they did not have the rights and privileges of citizens such as common defense and education. Many did not want any such connection and resisted court and military duties.”³

The American Dream (1609-1880)

Bivocational church planting has been around since America’s inception. Baptists began in England and generally related to the Anabaptist groups. Upon coming to America,

¹ Richard H. Harris, *Reaching a Nation Through Church Planting* (North American Mission Board, 2005), 199-200.

² Doran C. McCarty, *Meeting the Challenge of Bivocational Ministry: A Bivocational Reader*, (Seminary Extension of the Southern Baptist Seminaries, 1996), 26-27.

³ McCarty, 26-27.

Roger Williams founded the first Baptist Congregation in Providence, R.I., as a result of the Obadiah Holmes incident.

Obadiah Holmes, who most students of Baptist history will recognize, supported himself by farming, glassmaking, and weaving. Holmes is noted for his 1651 public whipping for conducting a public worship service in Lynn, Mass. The following are excerpts from “Baptist Piety: The Last Will and Testament of Obadiah Holmes,” as recorded in McCarty’s Bivocational Reader.

Speaking of Obadiah’s working for a living while preaching, he states, “This situation was not atypical for early Baptist ministers. Because of the size of the congregation they served, the attitudes toward a paid ministry (it was associated with the state church) and the frontier conditions which they served, most early Baptist ministers made their living at something other than preaching. For the most part they were not considered leaders either in their community or country. While there were notable exceptions, most were of modest means.”⁴ *For a good reading of bivocational history, we recommend Meeting the Challenge of the Bivocational Ministry by Doran McCarty.*

Frontier expansion and the Great Awakening really pushed Baptist churches into the American heartland and westward. Paid preachers were few and far between, because there was little money during the expansion of America. Denominations, such as Baptist, were desired simply because they had established that a pastor did not have to be over-educated and/or paid. Farmers, cattlemen, and businessmen all brought the gospel to the West as they had received it, making a living and faithfully serving as lay or bivocational pastors. To understand this, one must realize the Bible was as much a major part of American life as it was in European life at that time. In recent years, we see church members who have spent years in the congregation, and yet, do not know the Bible or basic theology very well. This will pose an interesting dilemma as bivocational church planting progresses in the days ahead.

The Year 1982:

A young preacher boy goes to Hazleton, Pa. He is given a stipend of \$550 per month from the Home Mission Board to start a new church. He has never done this before, and is told he must work full-time with the new church plant to receive his money. The fact is, he is not allowed to work in a secular job outside the new church plant or his funding will be taken away. So with a core of 10 (five were he and his family), he plugs away and finally succeeds. Being bivocational had been taken out of the equation. It was not allowed!

The Year 2005:

The trustees of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention voted to allow seminary-trained church planters to become bivocational for the first time. Thus, the policy of no bivocational work for the church planter is reversed.

⁴ McCarty, 74-75.

Bivocationalism is now seen as a strategy in building the core of a new church, as well as a financial consideration!

Looking to 2010 and Beyond

A new day for the bivocational church planter is upon us. People are grasping the idea of bivocational church planting as a strategy and not just a necessity. Even if it is a necessity, it is now an accepted necessity. It is estimated that more than one-half of all church starts today are bivocational in some form. Many planters/pastors come right out and state they want to be bivocational in order to meet people during the core building process. This is a major part of their strategy.

Many denominational leaders are looking at policies to include these bivocational men. Those who are not will likely do so in the near future, because they know the growth of America's population demands it.

Who are these guys and what do they look like? The intention of this book is to awaken the fires of church planting in those who are uniquely equipped to do bivocational church planting by their profession and passion. The book should also give them the "green light" to pursue church planting with their Associational Director of Missions, church planting missionary, or pastor. These are the people, along with the North American Mission Board, who can help them begin their journey into purpose.

Some would ask, "Why call it a journey into purpose?" Well, let us look at the average church member who fits the mold of being evangelistic--one of the 20 percent doing 80 percent of the work. This person has held every job in the church and is ready for something new. Many of our current disciples are losing their sense of purpose within the church walls. This unsettledness is what God is using to help them consider shepherding a group of people. This unsettledness is prompting the consideration of beginning an outreach Bible study in another small town, or ethnic neighborhood. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:1 (NIV), "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." It is in this context that Paul talks about some who "were given to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for the works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:11-12, NIV).

On the other hand, God is saving some who will immediately sense a calling to reach out to people who have not heard the good news. They know they have a passionate heart for the unreached. They wake up everyday with a passion that can only be fulfilled in answering this divine calling. They might have a family, good job, secure way of life. They may not be "called" to pack up, go to college, then seminary, and then into a church. They may be called to step out right where they are and start a church. This is the future of church planting. In his book, *Indigenous Church Planting*, Charles Brock quotes Winston Crawley, a noted missiologist.

"We have to get away from the feeling that the preacher must do it all, and that we can't carry on a worthy program unless he has been to seminary. How subtle it is – this

idea that everything centers in a building and a seminary trained leader, and unless you have those two, evangelism can't go forward. . . . I doubt that you will find that subtle idea in the New Testament. Some way we must break away from this pattern."⁵

Brock goes on to say, "As long as we are bound by the tradition that only those who have been to seminary or Bible school can effectively plant churches, the world doesn't have a chance. Biblical history and current experience reveal that more people can be effective in planting churches than many would dare believe."⁶

Just realize that God is calling people daily to reach out to those who have not yet been touched with the gospel. This book is an attempt to open one door. Bivocationalism is that church planting door. It has been around since the early church. It is a door that must swing wider if we are to reach North America. It is a door that must be seen as acceptable and worthy of the calling.

So What is a Bivocational Church Planter?

By most definitions, a bivocational church planter is someone who starts a church and gains a part, if not all, of his personal income from an outside source other than the church. This outside income could be from work, investments, retirement, or any other source. The income from the church could be as little, or as great, as plausible. It could include salary, housing allowance, travel allowance, annuity, or any other form of income. Usually, these agreements can be seen in one of the following arrangements:

1. The church planter desires to have some time in the workforce to meet people. This is an intentional part of his church planting strategy.
2. The church planter has a very adequate profession and only accepts a token of his worth to the church, such as travel or annuity.
3. The church plant cannot pay a livable wage so the church planter accepts another ministry position, such as a part-time staff member in another church or a consultant for an association or state convention.
4. The church can pay a livable salary, but the pastor is gifted to help other parts of God's kingdom. Thus, the church releases him to hold another ministry job such as minister of missions, church planting strategist, or contract worker for a few days a week.
5. The church plant cannot pay a livable wage at first and the pastor works anywhere from 20-40 hours to support his family in a secular job.
6. Sometimes a church planter just does not want to be in financial bondage to a church body, such as the apostle Paul. Therefore, he desires to stay bivocational.
7. Finally, this could be a retired person who sees the need for a new church plant and "steps up to the plate." Using his retirement as his primary source of income, he takes a small stipend from the church, such as a housing allowance, which can be a tax advantage.

⁵ Charles Brock, *Indigenous Church Planting*, (Church Growth International, 1994), 43.

⁶ Brock, 43-44.

8. As you can see, there can be many possibilities as God would lead.⁷

Note* It must be pointed out that the person who is considered a “lay church planter” takes no money at all from the church body, and has no certificate of ordination. Many men will begin their journey as a “layman,” staying with the church body as a Bible study leader without ever being given money or ordination. Others, however, are redirected when the Bible study grows and turns into a church. He may then take the path of becoming a “called” bivocational pastor. He would then take some money from the church and usually become licensed or ordained. Do not be afraid of taking the first step and leading a Bible study. God is the only One who can call someone to continue as pastor. We know that whom He calls He also equips. Do not be afraid to start the journey. “If anyone sets in his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1, NIV).

Why the Need for Bivocational Church Planters in North America?

At the time of this writing, there are approximately 300 million people in North America.⁸ It is estimated that at least 211 million of them are without Christ as their personal Savior.⁹ The easiest solution to this lostness is to train and require the 100 million saved people to lead two people to Christ this year. Then, almost all of North America will be saved. Sounds too good to be true, but the math works. The method however, is flawed by humanity.

God desires the church to be salt and light among the nations. We all pretty much agree that healthy church plants are the most effective method of evangelism and discipleship. So how do we start enough churches to reach 200 million people?

It will not be done if we continue using the most common method available today. Training people for three years in seminary, though valid, and then sending them out, will not be sufficient because of people, resources, and time. This method only allows us to begin a certain number of churches each year.

We are not against seminary and we believe that every pastor should be trained to the best of his life and church planting circumstances. However, to reach North America with gospel-preaching churches, we must use more bivocational church planters. These men can use their talents and gifts for making money in order to free a church to start without all of the costs involved. Our “one seminary trained man-one church start” model, which usually costs the new church 50 percent or more of its budget, is too financially taxing. God has blessed men with abilities to make money and the humility to work bivocationally, as he did the Apostle. To do this, Paul would not burden down the churches to care for him. Today, there are men available to do the same thing if they will consider it and humbly accept the challenge.

⁷ Harris, 201.

⁸ www.internetworldstats.com

⁹ www.barna.org

This is the future of church planting if we are to reach the peoples of North America. Men of every people group and population segment are called by God to start churches. These are men who have different cultures, languages, and jobs, but the same calling as fully funded pastors.

Must a Pastor be “Full-time” to be a Pastor? What Does the New Testament Say?”

In the beginning of this book, it is noted that the apostle Paul was a bivocational tentmaker. He made money making tents. In the book of Acts, Paul states that while at Ephesus the people saw him working to supply for his needs and for the needs of those who were with him. Thus, teaching them “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:34-35, NIV). Paul wrote to the people of Thessalonica, “Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you” (1 Thess. 2:9, NIV). Again, in 2 Thessalonians Paul writes, “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you. Nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow” (2 Thess. 3:7-9, NIV). Here Paul tells us that if he took money for ministry it would be okay, but he chose not to. He felt compelled to minister bivocationally.

It is interesting to note that Paul was not against receiving money. In 2 Corinthians 11:7-9 he tells those at Corinth, “Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed.” You see, Paul worked, he received, and he also ministered free. What a blessed combination. Today, we make a trichotomy of pastors: fully funded = pastor; partially funded = bivocational pastor; no funding= lay minister or pastor. This is okay for conversing and writing; however, we find it interesting that the apostle Paul was just interested in doing whatever it took to plant churches and disciple people—and he was in all three! I think there is a bigger lesson to learn here. Let us celebrate all facets of pastoral ministry. Let us bring each expression of pastor as equals. When we do, churches will be started indigenously by all peoples in all communities, and pastors will feel like one “band of brothers,” facing a common enemy for the souls of men.

NOTE* For the record, when Paul and his entourage either appointed elders or were sent back to appoint elders, these were not men who had suddenly gone to seminary. These were probably not men who quit their jobs in order to shepherd since they probably had families. They were simply recognized as spiritual leaders and took the responsibility of leading. Sounds like bivocational church planting to us.

Living Out the Call

It appears that beginning around the 1880's, American churches totally embraced seminary-trained pastors, continuing this practice today. This is evidenced in a report to an association in Texas in 1880, which states, "No man can engage in two occupations which are opposite in thought and labor and be expected to succeed in both. Some of you farmers can hardly divide time out of your crops to attend church once a month on Saturday."¹⁰ In effect, it was saying that a person (farmer) could barely keep up with his life and livelihood. It would be impossible to think that they could pastor as well. However, as we have seen, if we only use seminary-trained people to start churches, we will never make an impact in North America. So, who is to start all these needed churches? This answer is quite simple.

Every Christian is called to affirm and convey the Great Commission as given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20. This commission was also followed up with Jesus' final words as the disciples were told to "go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even the uttermost parts of the world" telling the story of Jesus after they "received power from the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:8, NIV). All believers are affected by this mandate. A majority of bivocational pastors will be chosen by God from this pool. These believers are men who are actively sharing Christ with the world around them and participating in the vision of their local church. They are young, old, and older, who in their general service of God through His church, will be "tapped" in their Spirit to go it alone; to reach out where no man is going at this time; to start a new Bible study or church. They will face the need to start a church or churches for specific people groups, towns, or villages. Like Isaiah, they will answer, "Here am I. Send me" (Isa. 6:8, NIV)!

Questions like the ones Moses asked will be the first course of action. "But Lord I cannot talk well." Sorry! God will have an affirming answer--no one is ever ready to do God's will. It must be done in dependence on God.

Let us face it, we are not going to be overwhelmed with people who feel they are called to start a bivocational church or even a Bible study. Statistically, only five percent of people in the Southern Baptist Convention ever lead anyone to Christ. I am sure that you have heard that only 20 percent of the people in the church do 80 percent of the work. Therefore, the pool in which God is fishing for bivocational pastors is small. That is why it is so important for you, if you are one of these active Christians, to continue reading this book. See if God could use you in a greater way--to become a Peter who is willing to leave the boat to follow Jesus. Oh, you will get wet, but at least you did not stay in the boat being afraid.

Please, do not misunderstand. God has a unique calling for pastors. We are not trying to diminish that. However, this calling is not just for seminary-trained men. That is a North American mistake created by the arrogance of humankind with the prestige of a human-made education. As men are confronted with the lostness of North America, they must be

¹⁰ McCarty, 42.

set free to explore lay participation that can, and often does, lead to bivocational ministries in church planting.

Lack of training can be a complex challenge to someone thinking of starting a new church. It is often difficult for a person to imagine talking to people from all walks of life about our Lord. They cannot conceive of being the “answer man.” Often, someone whom God is calling to a place of service will only think of his current position, failing to see how much God can do to make him His effective instrument.

It must be remembered that gaining respect as a spiritual leader is not so much by what you say and do, but rather, who you are. If a person is walking with God, he or she will be recognized no matter what line of work they do. A bivocational pastor can gain training in many ways:

1. Formal training:
 - a. By attending a nearby college or seminary.
 - b. By correspondence or Internet through a college or seminary.
2. Denominational training opportunities. Contact your associational director of missions or state convention to see what is available.
3. Classes offered to the public, i.e., language and computers.
4. Classes offered at your place of employment.
5. Self taught. Read, study, explore, experiment on your own or with others who are like-minded in ministry.
6. Teams: Join a church planting team and learn, learn, learn. Then, when you are ready, reach out on your own.
7. Coaches: The new word in town is “coaching.” Connect with someone who has already has experience. They will walk with you as you step out in faith. A current bivocational pastor would be ideal.
8. Find a church planter network in your area or on the Internet. Jump in, ask questions, and learn.

We live in an information age, and that is the key here. If you want to learn about anything, there is a way to do it. We at the North American Mission Board, are continually searching for ways to equip pastors for their task, whether they are bivocational or fully funded. Our Web site www.churchplantingvillage.net is filled with practical helps for church planters and sponsors. Just remember one thing--church planting is relational, not informational. Make sure part of your education is learning how to relate to people.

The next section of this book features stories of men and their families who have walked the way of the bivocational church planter. Some of them have even sponsored other churches planted by bivocational church planters. These are their stories. You will not find the stories “sugar-coated.” We have tried to express the joy and hardships of bivocational church planting. It is our prayer that you might relate to one of the stories and picture yourself and your family walking such a path. Perhaps you are a pastor of an

existing church that has never started a new church. Maybe a story will remind you of someone in your very own congregation who might be encouraged to read and think about becoming a bivocational church planter in a church sponsored by your church. Only God knows what He will do with these precious stories of life on the edge. To Him be the glory.

Assignment: While reading the following stories, identify the one or two stories that speak to you in the greatest way. You will refer to that story or stories for some questions in the final chapter.

Real Stories--Real Planters—Real World

Joseph Cheung
Pastor, Chinese Baptist Church

Las Vegas, Nevada
Electrical engineer, Nevada Power

Advice: If God made you to be a fully-funded pastor, behave like one. However, if God made you bivocational, just be like that. Be a tentmaker.

After leading Chinese Baptist Church in Las Vegas for the past 13 years, Joseph Cheung readily identifies himself as a pastor. Coming to terms with that role, however, required more than self-support. Only after an arduous decade-long journey of self-discovery did Cheung finally accept that he is what he is: a bivocational church planter and pastor because God designed it that way.

Cheung instigated the Chinese Baptist church plant, an idea that swept him down a path of life he had not dreamed or imagined. He was serving as a deacon at College Park Baptist Church in Las Vegas and acting as interpreter for the church's initial Chinese mission, First Chinese Baptist Church, when he envisioned a new congregation.

First Chinese, like every other Chinese church in Las Vegas, was a Mandarin-speaking congregation, and Cheung was aware that most Chinese people in Las Vegas spoke Cantonese rather than Mandarin. Although the languages are similar—it is like a New Yorker trying to talk to a Texan, according to Cheung—and he could easily switch between the dialects, Cheung requested that College Park consider establishing a Cantonese-speaking congregation.

The church agreed—on the condition that a pastor must already be recruited, and Cheung was targeted as a candidate. Born in Hong Kong, Cheung had spent most of his life in the U.S., which makes him by his own description something of an ethnic anomaly. “I look Chinese,” he said, “but the Chinese think of me as American. Americans, they think of me as Chinese.”

That ethnic identity struggle was a fitting precursor for the spiritual identity crisis that he would grapple with as a bivocational church planter. Accepting the position of pastor and being dubbed such did not immediately make Cheung feel like one. “There were years I never felt like, ‘I’m the pastor.’” Yet Cheung, who has worked full-time as an electrical engineer at Nevada Power for the past 28 years, felt keenly the weight of responsibility that comes with leading a church.

“The toughest thing is the challenge of trying to preach,” he said. “For years I didn’t feel adequate.” Without the seminary training that equips many pastors and the time to delve into Scripture as he desired, preaching was a week-to-week burden.

Finding resources in Chinese was a challenge, too. Cheung spent years translating his messages into Chinese before he discovered a Chinese Bible translation. That translation sounded formal and archaic, but it saved Cheung time. Cheung also discovered computer programs and commentaries that dissected the Scriptures word by word. “That’s how I learn.”

Cheung’s diligent concern for his congregation constantly forced him to ask hard questions: “How do you tell if a church is doing a good job?” Merely accepting the assignment and plodding along, calling his management pastoring, was not good enough. “I struggled for many, many years.”

Although his wife Cindy had told Joseph when they were dating that she would marry him as long as he never became a pastor, she accepted her husband's new role and supported him, taking on the role of church secretary. With two children, J.J. and Daniel, they stayed busy. Meanwhile, Cheung was trying to balance the passion of an all-consuming mission with the hard edges of time limits.

"I had to learn from Moses," he said. "He had elders to strive for him." In time, Cheung ferreted out seven care group leaders to help him manage ministry needs of the congregation of some 80 people.

He also found a mentor for himself, another pastor, and took Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Church* to heart. Eventually he formulated some answers to that driving question of how to gauge a church's effectiveness: "One, we must see people get baptized," he said. "Two, we must see people change." He measures that by the strength of the outreach that results from their conversion. "They must show that they love God."

It took a decade, but just as he learned to accept that he does not quite fit the pattern of either American or Chinese, Cheung came to terms with his position as bivocational church planter and pastor. It was not something that he fell into or earned by default; God shaped his life to serve that role.

"Now I accept that God gave me the job, and I behave like a pastor." Preaching, which was once a burden, became a joy.

At age 52, he still recognizes the challenges for what they are. Study is vital, he said, and any pastor, bivocational or by any other name, must push himself to keep learning while devoting himself fully to the church. Because of that, it is not a task that Cheung lightly recommends to others. "First of all, it has to be very honest to God. Do not be influenced by other people."

Yet being bivocational liberates, too, Cheung said, because pay is never a factor. "Being a bivocational pastor changed my life to be much better," he said. "I would not have been who I am right now."

James Hogan
Pastor, Faithbridge Community Church
McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania
Starbucks manager

Advice:

- *Stop hoping desperately to be in full-time ministry. If the apostle Paul can make tents, we cannot be too proud.*
- *Have joy in what you are doing [your second job]. Your ministry is not only in your neighborhood and on Sunday. It is every day, all the time, if you are truly serving God.*
- *Give your all, knowing that He gave His all for you. Keep that in the front of your mind.*

Although every bivocational pastor bridges two worlds, the dichotomy that defines James Hogan's life could be a constant temptation to choose one over the other. As the manager of a Starbucks situated in an upscale section of Pittsburgh, Hogan serves the upper echelon of Pittsburgh society, the likes of which include Pittsburgh Steelers football players, doctors, lawyers, and millionaires. As a pastor, however, Hogan serves in Pittsburgh's inner city and ministers to a congregation peopled largely by African-American single mothers and their children.

Whether it is his world of poverty or affluence, Hogan has learned to walk gracefully between the two, slipping in and out of them with apparent ease, and sometimes—as God smiles—even managing to make them mesh.

Hogan moved from San Diego to Pittsburgh for the specific purpose of planting a church in McKees Rocks in March 2005 after ministry with Calvary Baptist Church and Set Free Ministries, which deals with drug addicts in California. A Starbucks manager in San Diego, he requested a transfer to Pittsburgh, one of a handful of spots where he would contemplate starting a church.

Hogan set up residence in his church field, despite its inner city trappings, a lesson learned from ministering with Set Free. “If I learned anything from working with them, if you don't eat the same food and drink from the same cup, they don't want to hear anything you have to say.” The Hogans conduct many of the church's several Bible studies in their home.

The ability to cross cultural barriers is an important part of Hogan's ministry, a step made easier by the fact that his wife Teresa is African-American. They have three children, Jonathan, 9, Timothy, 5, and Samuel, 3.

When Hogan and his associate, David Christopher, who also moved with his wife from California to Pittsburgh to help with the church plant, first went door-to-door, the two Caucasian men seemed out of place to most people in the community. “They looked at us like we're crazy,” said Hogan—until they met his wife and kids.

The church now averages 12-20 adults and about three times as many children. “It goes in waves,” said Hogan. “We see people show up and leave.” The attendant problems that beleaguer the inner city—drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and poverty—are constant. Yet, said Hogan, “it's fun, and it's exciting because God is moving. You see lives changing.”

Although initially there was widespread community distrust for the fledgling church because of prior negative experiences with a health and wealth gospel and

ministries that folded with fatigue, people now see the church as a place of refuge, “a place where they can find hope.”

Hogan’s wife Teresa also is finding contentment raising her family in the inner city, a place where she feels secure enough to send her kids to play outdoors in the yard. “I don’t have a problem with it because my desire is to do what the Lord wants me to.” Their current environment is not so different from where they lived in California, but the McKees Rocks community is far more family oriented, according to Teresa. That means as she gets to know a person, she will also soon meet their many relatives who live in the neighborhood. “We’re more interactive with our community.”

Although she enjoys this contact, she also discovered it could have a down side. When they moved there, Teresa, 38, initially relished the idea of “being 24/7” in their neighborhood. The reality of it, however, was daunting. “We found out people were coming (to their home) as often as we were available.” She realized they needed some space, time for her to homeschool their children and to eat a family dinner together. The family set parameters accordingly.

Teresa also got involved in a choir and Bible study that take her out of the inner city. “It’s a nice break from the regular routine of ministry.”

Hogan does not aspire to change his bivocational status. “I’m open to God doing that if He desires to, but I’m just as open to God doing this the rest of my life.”

Nor does he attempt to escape ministry when he leaves the inner city behind each day. “One of the blessings is I really do love both my jobs.” He has discovered ample opportunity to minister at Starbucks. For example, one regular customer, a physician, habitually walked through the door with a chip on his shoulder. Nevertheless, Hogan remained friendly. One day when he inquired how the doctor was doing, the physician started talking about the patient who died on his table. “He really just opened up, and it spilled out.” Now the doctor calls Hogan whenever he needs to talk. “He saw that we’re all human with our passions and concern for the world.”

Because his church and his store are worlds apart, Hogan does not go out of his way to make them meet. “I see the counter at my store as good as an opportunity as being at church on Sunday morning.” Therefore, when someone he meets at Starbucks desires to go to church, Hogan directs them to one of the nearby megachurches in the area.

That, however, has not stopped some of his employees or customers from showing up at Hogan’s church—even without an invitation. “So you’ve got people who live in half a million dollar homes driving down into the inner city to sit beside people on welfare. To me that’s God.”

Tim Olsen
Pastor, First Baptist Church
Deer Lodge, Montana
Pastor, Frontier Baptist Church

Car salesman
Rancher

Advice: I would encourage them (bivocational church planters) not to hide from it, not to be afraid.

He is not just bi-vocational, he's tri-vocational or—by some counts, more than that. Yet Tim Olsen, church planter, pastor, car salesman, rancher, and former teacher, rejects the suggestion that he is busier than most people.

“Everyone has a lot of irons in the fire as we serve the Lord,” he said, “because the Great Commission says as we go about our lives we are to teach and baptize.” In other words, holding down a bevy of jobs, including pastoring two churches and helping start another is all in a day's work for Tim Olsen.

Olsen is a former schoolteacher with a masters in education who taught elementary school and middle school physical education for 29 years. During that time, he accepted his first pastorate in Butte, Mont., after he was licensed in 1982.

Six years ago he became one of the pastors of First Baptist Church, Deer Lodge, becoming part of a three-person pastoral lead team that includes his son, also a teacher, and the owner of a car lot where Olsen works as a salesman.

Olsen also pastors Frontier Baptist Church, a congregation he helped plant in Gold Creek. He gets some help from another licensed pastor, rancher, firefighter, and fitness trainer who takes over his preaching duties when Olsen is busy at Deer Lodge.

Olsen lives on a small ranch that he operates with his brother. His son and grandchildren also live on the ranch, meaning the land has been populated by seven generations, including four who live there at present.

He rotates Sundays as preacher at the church at Deer Lodge, a ranching community with a population of 4,500. As part of the pastoral team, his main responsibilities are missions and church planting. Deer Lodge, a congregation of some 70 members with an average attendance of about 50, was the sponsoring church for Frontier Baptist Church at Gold Creek (pronounced by Olsen in true Western style as *CRICK*), a rural town some 20 miles away. The tiny community of about 100 people boasts a small school attended by a handful of students and a 4-H center.

“God is blessing,” Olsen said of the Gold Creek church. “We're never going to reach the high numbers because it's a small community, but spiritual growth is taking place. That's exciting.”

Olsen also is involved in another church plant sponsored by the association at rural Drummond, population 2,000, which is still in the prayer stages. “We're looking for that person of peace.”

To foster church growth in these rural ranching communities, Olsen established an evangelistic program called Christian Outdoor Recreation and Evangelism—or CORE—, which includes a home Bible study and outdoor activity like riding horses or fishing. “It's a get-out-of-the-walls kind of thing.”

Olsen himself is the Christian by-product of a home Bible study as was his wife Janet before him. After committing herself to Christ, his wife came home and asked if she could pray for her husband. “I thought she was going way overboard,” Olsen said, but

the change in her was noticeable—and appealing. After attending a home Bible study with her for several months, “I found a relationship with Jesus Christ.”

His evolution from novice Christian to pastor and church planter came about not by meandering down the road not taken but by God forging the path at every turn. “God just moved. He just kind of opened doors. I don’t know that we sat down and planned that we’d be bivocational . . .”

Janet, who was working full-time as director for a Head Start center in Deer Lodge found the progression natural yet divinely ordered. As soon as they became Christians, they started serving in the church with youth. “The next step was to move into the pastorate.” Yet there was a definite calling to church planting, and Janet felt hers as both as a partner in the gospel and an individual. “I’ve always felt that ministry is a partnership and that a husband and wife need to be called together.” As much as possible, she goes where Tim goes to serve their churches.

Spreading himself far and wide means that Olsen tries to make every minute count. For example, he started a typical day recently by meeting a young man, a new Christian he was trying to encourage, to work out together. Then he headed to the car lot for a full day. After he left there he planned to check on fences before moving cows to new pasture that weekend—and he hoped to squeeze in some visitation for Frontier. Olsen shrugs off the suggestion that all this activity means he is overworked. “I don’t know that I’m any different than a pastor in Texas,” he said. “He’s got 24 hours in his day, too.”

Yet, no doubt about it, time management is a critical part of making his life work. “You fit in what needs to be done. It is kind of hard to plan your day when you have so many irons in the fire. You kind of look and see what’s priority.”

As Olsen counseled his son, however, some priorities are already set in place. “God is number one in our lives. God gave us our families, and that’s our first responsibility here.”

Janet ensures that she and Tim get to relax by going out of town once a month. “It seems like if we want some free time we have to get out of town.” A dinner out entails an 80-mile drive to the nearest big city. Interestingly, Janet, 50, also sees illness as God’s way of ensuring they get the rest they need. “I think the Lord will make you take some time off—even if it means getting a little sick so you can stay in bed.”

Yet Olsen also is confident that every God-given responsibility can be managed. “It sounds like bivocational work would be something that’s real hard and difficult, but God empowers us—and He’s not going to lead us to do something He hasn’t equipped us to do.”

Moreover, the church planter who is willing to engage in secular work can make important and unique inroads for the gospel. “There are some communities, some areas, where people respect that—someone to get out there and rub elbows with them.”

It, however, does not leave a lot of time for meaningless play. Olsen has come to terms with that. “It’s not like we come home and just sit and watch TV.”

Larry Orange
Pastor, His House
Mayfield, Kentucky

Professor, Mid-Continent University

Advice:

- *Be yourself. Beware of stereotypes. God intended for you to be different.*
- *Get a job. Develop all gifts and abilities. You are to use them in ministry. You are not to give them up to “go into ministry.”*
- *Take available training. Legitimate training is available in most fields of study over the Internet.*
- *Be community minded. Get involved in other people’s projects, and they will become involved in yours.*
- *Read widely. Current events are very important. You should be able to talk about things other than church.*
- *Practice the spiritual disciplines. They will keep you grounded in a busy and complex world.*
- *Enjoy the journey. Jesus came that we might have more abundant life.*

For Larry Orange, being bivocational is not the pastoral and church planting method of last resort but first option. It has nothing to do with size, but everything to do with significance. “I think every preacher ought to have another job.”

Orange is so convinced that tent making is the correct strategy for church planting that when he agreed to help start the church he now pastors, he insisted his two co-pastors follow that model as well. “I think that’s the biblical way to start churches.”

Orange speaks from the experience of one who has tried it both ways. He was bivocational for the first nine years of his ministry, and then became fully funded for the next 17. Thirteen years ago he chose to become bivocational again, working as a public school teacher. He now teaches in the College of the Bible at Mid-Continent University in Mayfield, Kentucky.

Orange, who teaches courses in church planting, is a firm advocate for bivocational pastorates because it forces churches to be hands-on with the ministry that they may be tempted to pass off to a hireling. “When the people understand that you have a job like everybody else, they step up and assume responsibility for the ministry.”

Receiving support from a church also changes the dynamics of the pastor-church relationship and may cause pastors to spend too much time on church politics rather than ministry, according to Orange. “A lot of times the stuff you have to deal with has nothing to do with ministry,” Orange pointed out. “You spend more time trying to pacify the people than build the kingdom of God.”

The liberties that go along with bivocationalism are key bonuses that pastors forfeit to be fully funded, he said. “You’re pretty much owned by the church,” he noted. “A lot of times they tell you where to live. They limit what you can make.”

Contributing to Orange’s ability to embrace the bivocational lifestyle was his wife Janet. “We were about four years into being fully funded when we had to come to grips with the fact that she was not happy just being Mrs. Preacher.” Janet went back to school and became a nurse. Her work and earning power eventually allowed Orange to take a \$20,000 cut in pay to become bivocational again.

Three years ago Orange, who has planted other churches, was approached by a former student and asked to help found His House. The church formed through a core group of new Christians converted during a sweeping 15-week crusade in Mayfield in 2000. Encountering discomfort at established churches or outright rejection, the group became the nucleus of His House, a casual-dress congregation with strong emphasis on music worship headed by three pastors: Orange's former student Chad Lamb, 28, Tim Allred, 46, and Orange, 63.

After a mass mailing, the first worship service was conducted in the cafeteria of a local factory. Two hundred people showed up. The church quickly outgrew that space and moved to the commons area in the local high school. After they outgrew that, they rented a theater. A year later, His House purchased a 30-acre farm. Owners of an adjacent horse farm soon approached them about purchasing their property, too. His House now owns 50 acres with a metal horse barn located on site where they conduct their worship services. Eventually they plan to build and use the barn as a youth facility. At last count His House had grown to a typical attendance of 400.

Yet, "not everyone who attends is a member at His House," Orange pointed out. That is because the expectations for membership are high, according to Orange, and they are integral to the model of a bivocational church plant. There is no full-time paid pastor or staff able—or willing—to shoulder the lion's-share of ministry. "We feel the ministry belongs to the church. It does not belong to the clergy. The minister's responsibility is to train the members to do the work of ministry."

Therefore, before anyone becomes a member of His House, he is required to go through a membership class in which the responsibilities, especially the every-member-is-a-minister aspect, are detailed. Members also must sign a covenant agreement indicating they understand and will cooperate with this strategy.

The church's three pastors do not function according to traditional models of leadership either. They each preach, although Orange does less than the other two pastors. His main responsibilities are leadership and membership classes. Lamb handles administrative duties. Allred is responsible for major events. Eventually Orange expects their job descriptions to become more clearly defined according to strengths and weaknesses.

Although many church plants initiate as a bivocational pastorate, His House was built to remain a tent-making model of ministry regardless of how large it grows. Before planting His House, Lamb had been an associate pastor at a church averaging more than a 1,000 in attendance, and Allred was pastoring another church. Yet, both men traded their fully-funded jobs to embrace the rewards of bivocational pastoring. Lamb works for Modern Woodmen of America, and Allred does entrepreneurial projects.

A profession like teaching is ideally suited for bivocational church planting because summers are free, according to Orange. He recommended, however, any kind of job as long as it is marketable and portable to make his bivocational model of church planting function.

Orange is the self-confessed driving force keeping His House leadership bivocational. "I think I'm passionate about it. It is just a three-year experience for the others guys. Bivocational was a foreign term to them." However, Orange thinks he has won some converts. "I think they're taking to it quite well."

Thomas Bester
Pastor, Forerunner Baptist Church
Ripley, Tennessee

Chief Parole Hearing Officer for the State of Tennessee

Advice: Be open to be led by the Spirit of God rather than your own desires or your own goals. Be patient.

For Thomas Bester, becoming a bivocational church planter was not a straight sprint to his destiny but a roundabout journey. Although by 1989 Bester was a college graduate, a husband, and father and had been a Christian since age 11, he remained a self-described biblical illiterate.

“I prayed to God and said, ‘God, I really want to understand your Word.’ And He said, ‘Preach it.’”

It seemed backward, but Bester did what he was told. “I like to tell people God had to send me on the scenic route in order to find my place in His kingdom.”

Bester heard God’s call to ministry and became pastor of Victory Baptist Church in Rutherford, Tenn. He soon led the congregation to become the first African-American Southern Baptist Church in Gibson County. Through that affiliation he was exposed to Southern Baptists’ church planting strategy. It would eventually become apparent that this was something else he was born to do. “I believe every man of God has a particular assignment.”

His secular work, presiding over parole hearings, also seemed to fit his ministry assignment. “It gives me a perspective that a lot of pastors may not have. This job sort of keeps me in the loop in what’s going on in the world, what the enemy is doing to our people and our children.”

Eventually sensing God pushing him into a different role, Bester took another bold—and backward—step and resigned the church he’d pastored for almost 10 years—with nowhere to go and no plan in mind.

After taking a month-long sabbatical to pray and mediate, Bester turned his attention to a church facility abandoned by an Anglo congregation and focused on “the hip-hop generation.” With people ages 13-35 in mind, he started a Tuesday night Bible study, including his wife Shirley and son, T.D., age 16. Hearing God’s specific instruction to invite her, Bester also asked his granddaughter Takesha to become one of the core members in a new church plant. “She’s 19 and full of the world,” said Bester. She also was a symbol of the population Bester hoped to reach—“the sagging-pants and the bling-bling generation.”

It was a church that Bester initially tried not to plant. When he learned that a church building would become available as the Anglo congregation relocated, he talked up the possibilities with other young pastors. “I really tried to give the ministry away,” he recalled. “No one would touch it.” He talked to God about it, too. “I asked the Lord, ‘Lord, why won’t anybody take this opportunity?’”

The answer eventually became clear. After spending years driving 60 miles to his church field, Bester had been praying for two years to live among the people he pastored. “The reason won’t anybody else take it,” Bester quotes God’s response to him, “is it’s an answer to your prayer.”

The seeds of Forerunner Baptist Church actually began in Bester’s heart through a mission trip he took to the Philippines. While on the plane, he was reading the Bible and

was stirred by Luke 1:17: “And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (NIV).

“Before God does something He sends somebody,” Bester said, “and we feel like God has sent us to make a way for the people in our area.”

Forerunner is atypical, as Bester characterized it, because “we’ll do anything necessary to meet you at your point of need except change the gospel.” To that point, Forerunner avoids rituals. “We don’t want people to wake up thinking they know what’s going to happen during our worship services.” To that end, Bester also hopes not to be preaching to the same congregation a few years from now. “I’m not hung up on members,” he said. “I want disciples. I think God’s calling us to a higher level of discipleship.”

He takes responsibility for his own discipleship, scheduling study “just as I would any appointment on my calendar. I make time.” Only in extreme emergencies does he alter that schedule.

Interestingly, Forerunner not only has members of the congregation who have been on parole, some have come before Bester or dealt with his wife Shirley, who also works for the state in the same agency, although in a different capacity. Bester actually declined parole for one man—forcing him to serve another two years in prison—who would later become one of his most faithful church members. “When people see him leading in prayer they realize God can change lives.”

At 52, Bester marvels at the changes God has made in his life. “It’s kind of weird, God using an old man to draw young people. It’s only by His grace.”

Now that he has accepted his new assignment as church planter, Bester also has embraced the big picture. His vision is for Forerunner to become an incubator church, giving birth to a string of other churches in Tennessee. He envisions himself training other church planters. Forerunner is already the process of initiating its first church plant in Covington.

Bester balances the demands of work and church “by placing the ministry in the people’s hands. I see myself at Forerunner as the main trainer.” To aid with that, the church conducts spiritual inventories and helps members develop gifts. Although Bester characterized it as a small church, it offers 20 different ministries. “It’s not a situation where you’ve got the same faithful few that are serving in every ministry.” Instead, people once considered “outcasts,” according to Bester, are finding a service niche. “Once they find out ‘God can use me,’ they go at it.”

Meanwhile, this father of seven, grandfather of seven and great-grandfather of one, having discovered his own ministry assignment, is hard at work himself. “I started late, so I had to run faster.”

Jack Lee

Pastor, Salt Lake Chinese Baptist

Salt Lake City, Utah

Computer lab coordinator, Salt Lake Community College

Advice:

- *Time could become our worst enemy. However, time is very important and valuable. A planter/pastor must have good time management for planning, organizing, setting priority, such as time with God, time with family, time for ourselves, time to serve (see Col. 4:5).*
- *Take good care of yourself so you can take care of others (see 3 John 2).*
- *Ministry never was/will be a one-man show. Try to work with others—churches, coworkers, staff, and church members (see 1 Cor. 3:9; 1 Cor. 16:16; 2 Cor: 6:1).*
- *Use your resources wisely in any way you can (see 1 Cor. 3:10).*
- *Do all you can with what you have, wherever you are. Always give your best as if there is no tomorrow. Be faithful, be loyal, be passionate, and be patient (see Jude 20-21; Rev. 22:20).*

Despite the fact that he works a full-time job, which means he can give limited hours to church, Jack Lee readily defines his ministry as full time. “When God called me full time,” he recalled, “I tried to hold back.”

That was 10 years ago, but Lee had already identified some of the challenges that would earmark his ministry to Salt Lake City’s Chinese population: gangs, drugs, alcohol, and prostitution.

Lee also understood what it would take to make inroads into that community with the gospel—his total commitment. Nevertheless, while holding down a full-time job as computer lab coordinator at Salt Lake Community College, Lee plowed into church planting, founding Salt Lake Chinese Baptist. It was not the actual time Lee gave to it that made it full time as much as the heart he put in it. Right from the beginning, it was a whole-hearted endeavor.

Lee’s acknowledgement of the obstacles he would face was not unfounded. Salt Lake Chinese Baptist took root amid the decay of another church plant that did not make it. The sponsoring church also closed its doors. Lee rolled up his sleeves, however, and went to work. Today Salt Lake Chinese Baptist is a steady congregation of some 60-70 people and conducts worship services in Cantonese.

Lee immigrated to Salt Lake City from Hong Kong in 1969 as a 15-year-old teenager with his family and later became a citizen. He was already a Christian when he arrived in Utah. In Hong Kong he had attended a private Baptist school, which introduced him to Christ. He immediately started walking to Beautiful Gates Baptist Church, where he would become involved in ethnic ministry.

Lee met his wife Shirley, a high school science and math teacher, on Christmas day in 1977 on a return visit to Hong Kong as he shared his testimony at church. “Her English is a lot better than mine.” Shirley works for the gas company in Salt Lake City. The Lees have two sons, Simon, 22, and Joshua, 19.

By then Lee thought he might end up ministering somewhere else, back in Hong Kong or, perhaps, Australia. “But God led me to the people right here,” he said. “God let me see the needs of the people and gave me the opportunity, and I took it.” Since arriving in Salt Lake City, Lee had been attending Chinese Baptist Mission. When the pastor retired, there was no one to lead the congregation. “God called me to be His servant.”

Over the years Lee has honed his skills as a pastor through seminary courses through Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and yearly seminars. Pastoring a particular people group with inherent cultural and language barriers, as well as dividing his focus with another job, means that Lee makes extra efforts to prevent isolation, something he considers detrimental and dangerous to the cause.

Therefore, he has involved himself in his local association and the state as well as other mission endeavors. For example, when Salt Lake City hosted the winter Olympics, he played a part in ministering to the visitors. He also keeps close ties with pastor mentors, including one in Hong Kong and the executive-director of the Chinese Baptist Fellowship of the U.S. and Canada.

“If I don’t get the support of someone else and be part of a team, I’d be a sitting duck.”

Radu Stir
Pastor, Emmanuel Romanian Baptist Church
Glendale, California
Music teacher

Advice: You have to be tough. You have to keep working. You have to depend on God with everything every day, and God will provide everything.

Radu Stir is something of an irony among bivocational church planters—an out-of-work bivocationalist. Instead of hoping and praying to escape the grind of a second job, Stir seeks it. He is qualified by education and experience to both teach music and pastor, but while he has forged ahead with church planting, a music career has eluded him since he moved to the United States. “I pray for it,” he said. In the meantime, his wife Sonia’s work as a hairstylist is the vocation that provides their living.

Stir came to the U.S. six years ago, emigrating from Romania, where he pastored and taught music. Educated in his home county, he has degrees in theology and music and taught music theory, vocal music, and piano. Raised in a Christian family, Stir entered the ministry and accepted the pastorate of a church in Romania that was only three years old at that time. Planted in a new part of the city, the church had a congregation of 150 members.

Yet Stir left Romania with his wife and daughter after a soul-searching two years of prayer to come to America at the invitation of a Romanian church in Anaheim, Calif. He spent three years working with Romanian youth as their youth pastor before starting Emmanuel Romanian Baptist Church in Glendale, Calif., with only seven people.

Now age 34, Stir has amassed a wealth of experience working with Romanians in two different countries and two cultures. “American culture is different,” Stir observed. “It has many, many surprises.” Although everyone in his church hails from Romania, they come from different parts of that country, creating a unique set of challenges.

“It’s a new experience for me to plant a new church,” said Stir. “Everything is different. Everything is going well. God surprises.” Emmanuel is a Romanian-speaking church, which meets in an American Baptist church building and now averages 50-60 in weekly attendance. “We are so impressed about this church.”

Although church planting is new for Stir, he embraced it without hesitation. “God asked me to go to Glendale,” he said, “and God provided.” The church, which was established in October 2004, is sponsored by Bethany Romanian and funded by Southern Baptists.

While Stir expects this church to take a few more years of his time to get established, and there already are some 80 Romanian churches in the U.S., his newly found church planting work has just begun. “The dream is to plant many, many churches.”

Although Stir finds the pastoral work fulfilling and the dream of church planting invigorating, the only piece missing from the puzzle of his life in the states is music. He admits his motivation is practical but makes no excuses for it. “Life is expensive here,” he said. “The church pays me but not too much.”

It is not more support from the church he seeks. He and Sonia jointly decided that her income would be their primary means of support while Stir invested his time getting the church established. Like other bivocational church planters, he fully expects to earn his keep in other ways—when that second job becomes available. Meanwhile, Sonia’s work is providing the family’s support, and because it makes Stir available to the congregation, the church’s.

Bill Stevenson
Pastor, First Baptist Church
Mesquite, Nevada
Business Consultant

Advice: Do not try to do it on your own. Build a core team of people to help you take that step. Have a clearly defined vision that you can share that people will buy into.

By the time you read this, bivocational pastor Bill Stevenson may have phased out a lot of his practice as a business consultant—if he has not eliminated it altogether. At the time of this writing, Stevenson, who is 61 and planted First Baptist Church in Mesquite, Nev., five years prior, retained only one major business client, Nevada Development Authority, after a business career that spanned 22 years.

Yet bivocational pastors employ a dynamic that Stevenson the businessman does not intend to give up. “I don’t want to get to the point where I’m dependent on a church for support.”

Stevenson used what would have been his salary the first couple of years of his pastorate to purchase a van for the church and state-of-the-art sound equipment. Although he now accepts a salary package, he does it for the benefit of the church upon counsel from others. If he ever leaves—something he does not anticipate—the church will have grown accustomed to providing for a pastor and will be able to absorb the costs of replacing him.

Meanwhile, however, Stevenson is phasing out his business clients because of the demands of a growing church. The first Sunday he and his wife joined the congregation, which met in a mortuary. There were six people. After transitioning to a storefront and then a 10,000 square-foot building, they average about 175 in attendance.

Stevenson’s wife Vicki, 51, whom Stevenson called “my best team player,” has played a huge role in the church plant. Not only does the couple comprise the praise team, Vicki also provides a great portion of the family income.

Around the time Stevenson took on the role of church planter, he and his wife formulated a 10-year life plan to build financial stability through outside efforts. His wife, who had not been working, decided to go back to work, looking for and accepting not just work for work’s sake but a job with Embark, a division of Sprint, that fit the criteria they set to accommodate that plan. Then, as Stevenson phased out his consulting business, hers took off. They plan for her to retire in four more years.

Even though Stevenson has reduced his outside workload, ministering at First Baptist Mesquite is not a walk in the park. In fact, it is a 100-mile commute that they make twice a week to the church field from Henderson to Mesquite, where they purchased a townhouse. They make a round trip each Wednesday, and on Friday head to Mesquite to spend the weekend.

Stevenson got his first church planting experience by planning a church plant for the kind of people he met in his work “up and outers,” older people who had amassed a lot of wealth, expensive toys like boats and cabins, and were often on their second marriage but had “holes in their hearts.” He had even gone so far as to arrange to use Legacy Golf Club facilities and naming the proposed church, Turning Point, when God intervened.

Instead, “God just really put on my heart and my wife’s heart to be pastor of this little group of people in Mesquite.”

Meanwhile, First Baptist Mesquite has gotten involved in church planting, too. The church has started a congregation in St. George, Utah, another at an assisted-care facility, and a Hispanic congregation.

Becoming a church planter and pastor was not a role that Stevenson had envisioned for himself. He got involved in church leadership as a layman at Green Valley Baptist Church in Henderson, where he taught Sunday School and became chairman of an administrative council in the absence of a pastor. Despite that, the church continued to grow, and Stevenson “learned a lot about running a church. I learned church was not so different from business. That experience was great for me.” He helped the church borrow \$1.6 million to build a new sanctuary—without a senior pastor—and stayed on in his administrative role an extra eight months after the senior pastor was on the field.

Wondering how God would use him next, he started taking seminary classes through his association. His professor encouraged him to preach and steered him to opportunities at nursing homes and rescue missions.

Although Stevenson no longer sees business consulting in his financial future, he does intend to put his business acumen and experience to good use. He often offers his services to other churches and pastors for free.

“I’ve lost my passion for the business end of it,” Stevenson says of his bivocational status. Although he plans to continue to employ the bivocational dynamic, sitting in a boardroom discussing strategic plans and marketing strategies just does not compare to investing himself in kingdom work. “I’ve got things a lot more important than how to build this business.”

Jamal Bishara
Pastor, First Arabic Baptist Church
Phoenix, Arizona
Biomedical technician

Advice:

- *If you are going to go into church planting, there has to be a determination to sacrifice. If a person is not going to sacrifice, they need to step aside. There is going to have to be a lot of sacrifices going into it. It is not money, but time and family.*
- *Moreover, get ready to get your hands dirty. It means you have to serve. You are not there to be served.*

Jamal Bishara's life is lived in slices of time, often compartmentalized and only sometimes overlapping.

Building relationships represents the greatest challenge for this bivocational church planter. He is doomed to do it in snatches—"a few minutes here and there," Bishara noted. It has been enough to get the job—in fact, two jobs—done.

Bishara is the founding pastor of First Arabic Baptist Church in Phoenix, Ariz., a congregation he helped establish in 1988 on the west side of the city. The Arabic-speaking church averages an attendance of about 50, but it is a church in which relationships must be established quickly. "It's transient," Bishara said, "just like any other church in Phoenix."

Bishara, age 48, is a native of Israel who came to the states in 1978 to study. He made a profession of faith in Israel at age 16 due the efforts of the then Foreign Mission Board and immediately became involved in the mission work there.

A physician at the Baptist Hospital in Gaza, with whom Bishara ministered as they planted a church in Ramah, took an interest in Bishara and arranged for him and his brother to study in the states at his expense.

He attended Grand Canyon University and majored in biology. "I knew I had a calling to do mission work," he said, "but I didn't know exactly where." He considered becoming a missionary doctor. "But I didn't make it to medical school."

Since 1982 he has worked as a biomedical technician, primarily dealing with dialysis patients, eventually becoming one of the "most highly educated persons in the field" as training for the position switched to an electronics specialty.

Juggling his two professions is, admittedly, "very, very tough," according to Bishara. Yet he has found secular work that works around his ministry schedule and not the other way around. For example, he is able to take needed time off for special events, like weddings and funerals. "They're accommodating to me because I'm a good worker, and they know I'll get it [the job] done."

His parenting of his four daughters, ages 13 to 23, with his wife Yvonne, an American he met at Grand Canyon University, has been contained to snatches of time, too. "They've suffered through that as missionary kids," he said, "but they've turned out to be very good kids." Yvonne works for Maricopa County in environmental services.

Bishara is transparent about the fact that he sacrificed his family to ministry. Nor does he try to minimize the sacrifices his family has made.

Of mixed race, his kids were English-only speaking children attending an Arabic-only speaking church. "That was a sacrifice."

At the end of the day when everyone else went home, his family stayed—sometimes until midnight—to clean the church or facility in use. “Nobody’s going to come say thank you to them,” Bishara noted. “Nobody’s looking, but we kept going on and on and on and on with it.”

As pastor’s kids they also got more than their fair share of criticism and some resentment over their privileged status in the church, too.

Yet Bishara willingly sacrificed his kids because “Jesus said, ‘If you do not love me more than these, you cannot be my disciple,’” Bishara noted. “What is our sacrifice compared to the cross?”

He believes God honored his desire to put Christ first by blessing them. “My kids were the Lord’s before they were born,” he said. “God protected them.” His daughters have avoided typical teenage traps of rebellion, drugs, and alcohol. “They love the Lord tremendously,” he said, noting that their own commitments to Christ made their efforts their own sacrifices.

Although Bishara is unequivocally a church planter—his earlier ministry experience was helping start a church in Israel—he considers himself a missionary, too. As such, he is not only bivocational but dual in his approach. “I consider myself a missionary from both [Israel and the United States].”

That missionary zeal has lately prompted Bishara to take steps to go to Iraq to work as a military translator. If that assignment goes through, it will take him away from his church for a year or so, and he will leave the church in the care of another pastor who is helping him—but he plans to return.

It has been reported that there are some 100,000 Arabics in the Phoenix area but only one established Arabic church, and that is the one Bishara pastors. The mission field is here, too, and Bishara will work it in snatches of time.

Benjamín Borrero
Pastor, Iglesia Nueva Visión
Goose Creek, South Carolina
Safety manager, Department of Defense

Advice:

- *Out of 24 hours the least time you should spend with God is two hours and 40 minutes. That is a good example. But if you give Him 20 percent, you will not suffer. Teach the Bible the way it is written. Do not change anything. Do not preach your personal opinions or beliefs.*
- *To me it has been very productive to accept people the way they are.*

Despite his busy schedule, you are not likely to catch Benjamín Borrero complaining about the time he spends in ministry. “You need to take time for your family,” said Borrero, who is married and has two grown children. “You need to take time for your kids. But one of the first messages I preached in the church was on time [spent] for God.”

If Borrero’s earliest messages instead had emphasized the importance of family life that might have been understandable. Borrero grew up hard and poor in Puerto Rico, one of four children raised by parents who claimed to be Catholic but never practiced faith. Borrero’s younger brother died of a drug overdose, and his youngest brother died of AIDS. His father was, he admitted, a poor role model. “I was in the worst time of my life.”

Borrero was 17 when he heard the gospel preached on the street during a revival sponsored by the Assemblies of God. It changed his life. “I made a decision that night.”

A nearby Assemblies of God church followed up on his commitment and came to visit, and Borrero started attending the church. As he learned to study the Bible for himself, however, he soon found himself at doctrinal odds with the pastor and church based upon what he was learning. He made his way to a Baptist fellowship.

By then he also had learned to play the guitar and was singing and writing his own music. As he networked with Baptist pastors, he was invited to help lead worship and got involved in several church plants in Puerto Rico.

Borrero, who first studied psychology at a university in Puerto Rico, joined the army when an illness threatened the life of his newborn son, Jonnathan. Borrero was working as a police officer in Puerto Rico, making a mere \$300 a month, and did not have enough money to buy the desperately needed medicine. A doctor gave him the money, but on the way to the pharmacy Borrero decided to enlist in the army as a means to provide for his family. “It wasn’t my first choice.”

He served a six-year stint, working as a record clerk and chaplain’s assistant. This also provided him an opportunity for more education, and he went back to school to earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees in criminal justice from Turabo University in Puerto Rico. Following his army service he worked as a police officer in the Atlanta area but then returned to Puerto Rico to work for a private company when his father was ill. After his father’s death, he came back to the U.S. and went to work for the Department of Defense eight years ago.

New Vision, or Iglesia Nueva Visión, was a dying church when Borrero, 47, took leadership. Upon moving to Goose Creek for his job, Borrero recognized the scope of the Hispanic population and approached several pastors about starting a new work for them. His concern was met with indifference—until he met Jose, who was just as concerned that his own church was in danger of losing its building because of its inability to pay its

bills. Jose invited Borrero to preach to the congregation—a mere four people—and afterward Borrero offered them his services. The defeated congregation, all elderly, did not hold out much hope for revitalization, but Borrero encouraged them: “Let’s go forward with this. Just pray for me.”

To communicate his mission and vision, Borrero distributed music CDs he had recorded in Puerto Rico, networked with local pastors who invited him to speak at their churches, and performed concerts. In just two years, the church has mushroomed to 65 people from 13 Spanish-speaking countries.

Although spending so much time at church while working full-time is admittedly “difficult,” Borrero maintains high expectations for the rest of the congregation, too. “I need a better commitment from some of the people,” he said, noting his concern with American church culture. “In Puerto Rico you would never go to the beach on Sunday morning . . . To me it is unacceptable. The day of the Lord is the day of the Lord. I’m preaching a very jealous God. Being absent every Sunday because you want to go to the beach, that’s not right.”

It is nothing less than what he demands of himself. In two years of pastoring he has missed only twice, both times for illness, including once when he was suffering chest pains, a symptom of acid reflux disease.

Although Borrero works full-time, he does not allow New Vision to feel the pinch of his limited time. “I like to have a good program,” he noted. The church conducts three worship services each week, including Sunday mornings, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

Although Wednesday services are youth-led and Borrero is developing other leaders to help him, he is present for each of the services. Days off from his secular work are given to message preparation, and Borrero starts a new book for study every other week. Despite working as much as 50 hours a week at his job, he still tries to spend leisure time outside of the church building with his congregation, often organizing outings and picnics.

While he does not resent the time he gives to church and God, he is wistful about the time he can not, especially when he considers how much the church has grown, even with a pastor whose attention must often be elsewhere. “Sometimes I think about how it would go if I were a full-time pastor.”

Calvin MacMullen
Pastor, Community Life Baptist Church
Milledgeville, Georgia
Lawyer

Advice:

- *Make sure you are absolutely positive God called you and you are not doing it just because it is a good thing to do.*
- *Lower your expectations. Make sure you do not have unreasonable and glorified expectations.*
- *Start with a good seed group. Surround yourself with people who have complementary skills. Do not be impatient. Wait for God to send you those people to launch.*
- *Never, never, never do it independently. Be part of a larger group like the Southern Baptist Convention. You can burn out very quickly out here.*
- *Do not move too fast. It takes time to build people.*

After working some 20 years as a lawyer, Calvin MacMullen would give up that career without hesitation if it meant he could invest himself fully in his church, Community Life Baptist Church, an African-American congregation he planted in Milledgeville, Ga.

Although the church averages a solid 50-60 people, it is not a large congregation by any stretch of the imagination. Yet in the last year MacMullen has been curtailing his law career to spend more time with the church. He is getting out of litigation, criminal and civil, altogether because he does not want to forego being at the hospital when needed because he is also scheduled for court. Instead, he is concentrating on estate and document preparation while continuing his work with the City of Milledgeville representing indigents, legal work that can be adjusted to accommodate a pastor's schedule and not the other way around.

"There's no question my vocation was my law, and my calling was my ministry," MacMullen explained. "That was the greater pull of the two. It still is."

Therefore, MacMullen is honest about his desires to be fully supported by his church. "I'm doing it (law practice) just to keep the bread on the table." He does not intend, however, to waste his education and experience. He is developing another kind of ministry out of his legal expertise, teaching seminars and educating churches on legalities affecting them. "That's kind of been a little bit of a niche," he noted, "but even that still takes me away from ministry. Would I feel a loss if God never has me practice law again? No."

His family might—at least once upon a time. When MacMullen discerned that God was calling him to plant a church in Milledgeville, not 20 miles from where he had grown up, it was something of a shock—and a blow—to his family. His wife Becky, a professor at Georgia College and State University, was still grappling with the idea of ministry, reminding her husband that she married a lawyer, not a pastor. At least his earlier ventures into ministry and church planting had been in settings that appealed, Augusta and Atlanta. However, Milledgeville was a small town, and not only would MacMullen's wife miss the city lights, but his oldest daughter, then 16, was aghast at the prospect, too. The MacMullens have three children, a married daughter and a son in college as well as an 8-year-old daughter.

Moreover, as MacMullen curtailed his law practice, his income scaled back, too. His firm decision that they would not buy a home in Milledgeville based upon his legal income but the "blessings that come through ministry" meant settling at first into less-

than-desirable housing. Although his son, a ninth grader at the time, took the transition in stride—even flourished through the move—MacMullen’s older daughter keenly missed not only big city life but the benefits of big church life. “We went from a big church that’s got everything to a church plant that’s got nothing.”

That was seven years ago, however, and the family made the adjustment. “God has done a work in her,” MacMullen said of his wife. “She has had to give up a lot of financial rewards that come with the law, but we’ve been able to manage relatively well.” Acceptance, however, took a while. “Half the time she wanted to live in the city, embrace the upper income lifestyle,” MacMullen admitted, but that gradually changed “once she began to see God’s blessing upon the ministry.” Recently the family was able to move into a nicer home, MacMullen said.

The church has been blessed, too, with resources, according to MacMullen. The congregation has purchased a school building for its use and is developing a church and ministry center.

While he considers law a distraction from ministry, MacMullen credits it with helping him providing him the kind of disciplined study habits he needs to be a bivocational church planter. MacMullen sets aside his earliest office hours to study. “I’m locked down.” He refuses phone calls to focus on his laptop, using software to study Scripture, and spend time in prayer.

Because he is not willing to use that earned law degree as much, MacMullen hopes to get more education. Although he has taken advantage of all the extension programs and conferences available to him over the years—“when God saved me I always had a thirst and hunger for the Word”—he has been exploring a program to get his master’s and doctorate through New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. “And that’s a challenge,” he said. “What do you do? In order to make enough money to pay for seminary you’ve got to work. When you work, you don’t have time for seminary.” Meanwhile, his wife’s income is allowing them to make ends meet, a kind of “salvation,” according to MacMullen.

“Would I do it again? I don’t wish it on anybody, but if God called me, I wouldn’t have a choice.”

Jimmy Kenner
Pastor, Otoe Baptist Church
Red Rock, Oklahoma

Advice: With all the discouragement, you cannot give up. You just have to endure the lean times.

Jimmy Kenner is something of an anomaly among bivocational church planters: he is fully funded—at least for the time being.

Two years ago Kenner left behind an established bivocational church pastorate to live and minister among the Otoe tribe in Red Rock, Okla. Kenner sensed God's call to minister among Native Americans while on a mission trip to work with an Indian church in El Reno, Okla., near Oklahoma City. The last Sunday his team was in El Reno, a friend asked him if he would consider pastoring such a church. "That's all I'd been thinking about all week."

It was God making His appeal, and Kenner responded. It was a move that required making some changes, not the least of which was garnering full-time support so he could be a full-time, living, breathing presence among the Otoe.

Kenner pastored bivocationally eight years in Kentucky, working jobs as a cattle farmer, assistant high school baseball coach, and at a lumberyard and agricultural supply business. "I'm just an old country boy," Kenner noted. "I never did make it to seminary." He depends on conferences "to glean off other people" and reads a lot.

Acting upon the counsel of the Oklahoma Baptist Convention, Kenner gave up his bivocational status and put together funding from sources in Kentucky to minister among the Otoe. Previous ministers had invested time and effort in Otoe Baptist Church, but the church had dwindled to a handful, presumably because it lacked the presence and permanence of a wholly devoted pastor whose concern right then was not provision.

Although it was not a new church plant as such, it was a rebirth. As Kenner planted himself firmly in the Red Rock community of about 300, attendance at Otoe Baptist Church has increased to an average attendance of 50.

The church also is operating a youth center, called The Rock, in the town. It took over city hall to establish the ministry center, which also houses a thrift store, offers concessions for the youth, and feeds senior adults. Two-thirds of Red Rock population is Native American with another 150 in the village that houses Otoe tribal government.

The response to the youth center has been overwhelming, too. The church's Wednesday youth ministry averages 70 in weekly attendance, topping even Sunday attendance. Worship services populated by young people are "a good thing," according to Kenner, "but with the lack of workers it gets challenging."

The sacrifices have been personal, too. When Kenner made the move to Red Rock from Kentucky two years ago, it was a year before his wife Penny was able to join him. Employed by the state of Kentucky as a social worker, Penny needed to work that last year before she could retire from the state at age 46. Since joining her husband in Red Rock, she has thrown herself into the work of the youth center. "She is a big asset on that side," Kenner said. "She's been so busy here she hasn't been able to go back to work."

The Kenners also left their two adult sons to take over his farm. "It seems backward to me," Kenner admitted. "I left them instead of them leaving me." The boys have been supportive of their parents' move, however, and have participated in mission efforts there.

Kenner expects that he will become bivocational again, although he is hesitant to commit to that, not knowing what a day may bring.

After all, he never, not for one minute, envisioned his life among the Otoe in Oklahoma before that fateful trip to El Reno. “I never dreamed I’d be here. I used to say the Lord would have to write it in the sky before I left Kentucky.” Instead, He wrote it on Kenner’s heart.

Heath Carlton
Pastor, New Beginnings Baptist Church
Eddyville, Kentucky
Network manager, BellSouth Telecommunications

Advice:

- *When the burden becomes more than you think you can bear, pray for God's perspective because you are likely carrying the load all by yourself.*
- *Get out of the box and do some things to help those left in the church see their church from the eyes of a visitor or lost person. This will help them understand why things need to change and hopefully help them buy into the vision God has given the church re-planter.*

After pastoring only six months, Heath Carlton's life as a bivocational church planter is a study in paradox: To do the ministry God ordained for him, he relies on his secular job. To balance his family life with ministry, he needs the church. He has also discovered that it is possible to plant a new church right in the midst of an old one.

Carlton began a relationship with Victory Baptist Church in Eddyville, Ky., as a supply preacher. He would arrive on Sundays to preach to the 20-25 people who showed up. In the process, he learned about the church's problems. They struggled financially. Sometimes they took up special offerings just to cover the gas bill. Because of previous conflict, the church's reputation had been tarnished in the community.

"God began to burden me with Victory Baptist." He called and offered his services to the church.

Carlton had surrendered to the ministry only a couple of years before and then maintained what he called "a holding pattern" as he tried to discern God's leadership. He took courses at Mid-Continent University. When he and his wife Christi attended a NAMB church planting seminar offered through the Kentucky Baptist Convention "we kind of knew we would be starting a church sometime."

What Carlton proposed to Victory Baptist Church, however, was not taking leadership of a failing congregation. "I talked to them about a church re-start."

That meant doing some things differently, right from the re-start. For example, the congregation would have to forfeit their King James Version-only preference in favor of a more easily understood translation. Contemporary music would be introduced into the praise and worship.

Beyond that, Carlton employed the strategy of a new church plant. He talked to his pastor, Tim Purdue, of the church where he had served as deacon and Sunday School director, First Baptist Eddyville, and sought that congregation's support. The church committed to send two missionary couples to work with him for the first six months of his tenure.

Meanwhile, Victory Baptist approved him as pastor with a 100 percent vote—by 19 people.

"We went through hardships," Carlton admitted. His first Sunday there a Sunday School teacher vacated his post, and Carlton found himself teaching the men's Sunday School class before he preached. It would be another six weeks before he could hand off that responsibility to one of the missionaries, who arrived to take on roles as Bible study leaders, children's workers, and media technician. "Once they got there, that was immediate relief." Christi's parents joined, too, and went to work.

Carlton focused on reaching men and their families. Instead of 25 in attendance at Sunday worship, they counted 60. The number of children mushroomed from two or three to an average attendance of 19, including coaches, for TeamKid. Employing the church planting training he had received through NAMB, Carlton started leadership training on Wednesday nights, and they emerged from the six-week sessions with a vision statement and core values. The church that once struggled to pay its gas bill started giving two percent to the Cooperative Program and two percent to the association.

In a short period of time, it really did seem like a church re-born, and the congregation voted to change its name to New Beginnings and officially launched itself as such on Easter 2006.

Carlton, who recently preached a series of messages through Nehemiah called Project Nehemiah, named after the NAMB church-planting initiative at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, realized, just like Nehemiah, that building up may require tearing down first.

It is not the only paradox Carlton uncovered. Although ministry ate away at his leisure time, the church afforded him quality family time. He worried about how he would balance family time with his daughters, Courtney, 14; Sierra, 11, and Abbie, 8, but soon discovered that they thrived on ministry. “It has been a family project so I can be a good father at the same time.”

He admitted that he deliberately plans some church activities to bring families together. “Some of the stuff we’ve done at the church has been for us, too.” His wife, a homemaker who homeschools two of their daughters, also stepped in to do a lot of the “busy work” that he could not. “That’s a big help, too.”

During the series of interviews for this book, Carlton made another significant change at church to help him accommodate the demands on his time. “I hit the wall,” he said. “I did some serious soul searching. The Lord just revealed to me that if you do all kinds of church, but you’re burning out, you’re not accomplishing much.” The church dropped their Sunday night worship service and moved other activities to Wednesday so he could get more rest.

Carlton had already discovered the demands of a full-time job—he manages 16 offices—with a growing pastorate required a delicate balance. For example, he forces himself not to think about church when he is at work. As a manager, however, he is able to be somewhat flexible with his day, an advantage for the church.

“If it weren’t for the job, I wouldn’t be able to help the church.” His family’s tithe in itself makes a significant difference in the church’s income. Because he has that income, Carlton also has been able to give back the salary he receives.

He uses his 90-minute round-trip commute to listen to the Bible on CD. He also speaks into a handheld microphone as Scripture stimulates thoughts. “On my drive time I very rarely listen to music.”

Although he tried to take another seminary class, he quickly dropped that because of the time demands. Meanwhile, he did a time-management self-analysis to determine how to best spend his resource of time.

No birth takes place without some labor pains, and Carlton has felt them. He gives over entire Saturdays to message preparation and is often up early on Sunday to finish. He sleeps less. He spends the vacation time he has accumulated from his secular job to work at the church. He does not golf or fly planes any more.

Yet the signs of new life make it easy to forget what he has sacrificed. “We’ve seen such growth it’s amazing,” said Carlton, pointing to lives changed and marriages saved.

While the paradoxes might perplex, Carlton accepts them for what they are. “This is part of His design to make this a success.”

Samuel Hernandez
Pastor, Iglesia España Dios es Amor
Columbia, South Carolina
Insurance claims examiner

Advice: You have to trust Christ. You cannot make your church grow, so it is up to the Lord.

Although church planter Samuel Hernandez entered the ranks of the bivocational only recently—and reluctantly—it is caused something of a spiritual and personal revival in his life. “I’m not in control of the church anymore, which is wonderful.”

No longer able to spend his time solely on the pastorate after being full funded for years, Hernandez realized he had to relinquish responsibility for the church’s growth. “I have had to learn to trust Christ more and more,” he said. “So being bivocational has been a blessing.”

Hernandez realized as he made the switch to bivocationalism, a move prompted by financial need as full funding for his church planter position has been phased out, that he had probably depended less on the Holy Spirit than himself at times, a luxury he can no longer afford. “Before I was in control of the church, doing all my plans, making my goals, writing down the vision.”

Although Hernandez had prayed and asked God that circumstances would not force him to become bivocational—a scenario he “hated”—when financial support did not materialize, he understood God had another plan for his life. “He’s teaching me that the church can’t be in better hands. He’s doing it.”

It has been a lesson that took Hernandez something by surprise. He accepted Christ as a child in a Southern Baptist church in his native Cuba. His family later moved to Spain and eventually to Puerto Rico, where Hernandez heard God’s call to church planting/pastoring. After planting one church in Puerto Rico, he was called to pastor an existing church there that was on the verge of dying. It grew from 15 to more than 100 in Hernandez’ 12 years as its pastor with some 97 percent of the growth through salvations. He was fully funded in these pastorates.

While vacationing in the states, Hernandez was visiting some Puerto Rican friends in South Carolina when they described their experience with Spanish-speaking Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses who were making contacts with the Hispanic community. Hernandez questioned whether there were Spanish-speaking Southern Baptists doing the same.

“My whole mind changed,” he recalled. “I was not in Puerto Rico any more even though I was physically there. Every morning I woke up and got excited about here.”

The decision to move to the U.S. took a soul-searching two years, but in 2002 Hernandez and his family made the transition to South Carolina. “It’s been amazing in four and one-half years how this place has been filled with Hispanics,” said Hernandez, who estimates the Hispanic population in northeast Columbia to be as much as 14,000 people.

Hernandez accepted the position of pastor/church planter for the Hispanic congregation meeting in west Columbia in June 2004. He was not in leadership long before he realized that the handful of people attending, including him, did not live in that area of the city but were driving 35-40 minutes to meet in an area whose Hispanic population consisted largely of transient migrant workers. “We were not growing there.”

Hernandez led the church to relocate to northeast Columbia, using the facilities of Killian Baptist Church. “They saw the vision that we had a chance to do something in our community.” At the time of the move, March 2006, the church averaged about 25 in attendance. Since then they have had as many as 67. Growth has not been only in attendance. Just last month the church saw 17 professions of faith.

This has been a relief—and perhaps something of a surprise—to the 52-year-old Hernandez, who described being asked to visit an ailing friend of a church member. Feeling weary and helpless, he offered the family the only help he could. “I said, ‘I don’t know what I can do for you except share my personal relationship with Jesus Christ.’” Thirteen people in the house accepted Christ.

“Who does that?” said Hernandez. “I didn’t even have my Bible. It was God’s purpose for me to be there.”

The church has responded to Hernandez’ bivocational status, too. They recently organized WMU and children’s ministry, not at Hernandez’ initiative but their own. “It allows other people to become leaders.” Although he is still supervising activities, Hernandez now concentrates on preaching, teaching, and training—the “real job” of the church planter/pastor, according to Hernandez.

This change to bivocationalism also has changed the way he preaches. “I’m putting a lot of emphasis on our relationship with God,” he said. “I’m telling the church to come because they want to, not because they have to.”

Becoming bivocational was not without its pains, however, and Hernandez is candid about those. For example, he has served as associate chaplain at Lexington Medical Center, a volunteer position that he is considering quitting. “There is no time.”

Fatigue is a factor in ministry after he has worked a full day elsewhere. “Sometimes I have no energy.” In addition to preparing Sunday messages, Hernandez writes and teaches each week’s Sunday school lesson and Wednesday Bible studies that are supposed to last until 8 p.m. “It’s 8:30, and they don’t want to leave,” Hernandez said. “I’m telling them I’m tired, and I’ve got to go.”

After earning a master’s degree in Christian counseling from Luther Rice Seminary, taking a second job entailed training for a new one. Meanwhile, Hernandez has depended on his wife Lillian’s salary as a pharmacist. “That’s how I’ve been able to survive financially.” The couple has three daughters, including a 15-year-old still at home.

Despite the positive benefits, Hernandez cannot fully stem concern that his dual focus may have a negative impact. “I see a secular job as going away from my real job, which is being a church planter or a pastor.” Because he no longer has time to spend doing the personal evangelism he once did, he still wonders if that will eventually impact the church. “I think it will slow down the pace of the growth of the church.”

Yet his concerns have been diminished by the positive. “What I thought is if I go bivocational, maybe nothing is going to happen [with the church],” Hernandez said. “Sometimes we depend on self more than the Holy Spirit or maybe the books we’ve read or the training we had.

“I find it’s okay,” he said. “It’s not the same thing as being full-time, but it’s not the end of the world.” Another bonus is that bivocationalism has relieved the financial pressure of ministry. “On a personal level it’s been wonderful because I’m making more

money.” Even when Hernandez was fully funded, finances limited ministry. “I couldn’t get in the car and spend a lot of money on gas.”

Feeling relieved of the pressure of ministry performance, he has discovered personal spiritual blessings, too. “All I’m doing is having a great time of fellowship with the Lord.”

David Storey
Pastor, Miramichi Valley Baptist Church
Doaktown, New Brunswick

Guitar teacher

Advice: You need to pray about it [becoming a bivocational church planter] a lot. It may take two or three times [to make the transition] because it is a heavy thing. I do not think it's for everyone to do ... I think if a person is not willing to spend a lot of time praying, they should not do it. The other thing that is amazing is when you feel like you can do the least, it is when you are going to be the most effective.

It took David Storey, 41, three attempts to gather the courage to move back to his hometown of Doaktown, New Brunswick, for the purpose of planting a church there.

“The first time I cowarded out and backed out,” Storey said. It did not matter that he had already sold his house in preparation to making the transition, the risks of what he was poised to do coupled with a nagging uncertainty that this was what God really wanted, overwhelmed him.

He reconsidered—then backed out again. Each time he changed his mind he initially felt great relief at having escaped the assignment—until conviction and a “sick” feeling took over that he had let the Lord down. “I just kept feeling like Jonah all the time.”

Finally, he made a firm commitment. He was going back to the place where he was raised, a small country town with a population of about 1,000 in the city limits and 5,000 in an area that had been on his heart. “For about five years I’ve had a burden for this area where I grew up,” a place where drug use is rampant, and a typical family consists of mother with children fathered by different men.

In eight months time, Miramichi Valley Baptist Church, which started with a core group of nine people, has grown to more than 120. In that time the church has witnessed 36 conversions and baptized 33. “That’s definitely been really powerful around here.” As a move of God, it has been earmarked by “great repentance and brokenness,” according to Storey.

The congregation meets in an old church building donated to them and is adding to the facility. In the meantime, the existing building has required several major repairs, including electrical re-wiring, new fueling systems, and roofing; needs the church prayed about as each came up. “God’s hand was so evidently upon it because everything we needed was provided.”

Storey accepted Christ in the fall of 1989 driving home from Massachusetts to New Brunswick. Although he knew his father had been praying for him for years, he had been living what he described as an “immoral” life when he heard the gospel message that day on the radio. “The Spirit of God came right in my car, and my heart was crushed.” Storey received Christ on the spot.

“Not plugged into any fellowship,” however, he immediately struggled as a Christian for a few years until a friend encouraged him to read the Bible every day. That Bible study grew into a group that witnessed several salvations.

Storey, a guitar teacher, later helped his brother plant a church in Riverview that saw about 60 baptisms in two and one-half years. He served as worship leader and ministered in evangelism and discipleship. “That church is still going strong.”

Leaders at the Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists sparked his interest in church planting, and Storey sensed God calling him to Doaktown. It was a sputtering move punctuated by false starts until he finally made the whole-hearted commitment that was destined to drain him. Instead of feeling buoyed by his decision, Storey felt darkness overtake him. “Once I made my mind up that I was going, it was a nightmare for four weeks. I didn’t feel God’s presence for a month.”

Looking back he realized it was “God’s way of stripping me down,” according to Storey. “He was letting me feel what other people feel so I could have compassion on them.”

Coming to the “end of himself, ” feeling “like an apostate condemned to hell” forced him to get back in touch with what it means to be lost and to realize that what he was about to undertake only God could do. “Sometimes you trust in your own abilities,” Storey noted. “It’s all about what He’s doing.” He is now convinced that pride, albeit often unconscious, is an insidious stumbling block that creeps unnoticed into a pastor’s path and hinders the gospel. “I think if He’s not getting the glory, He’s not going to move.”

During that period of darkness that overtook him, Storey prayed “non-stop around the clock.” He clung to 1 Corinthians 1:8-9, Scripture that reassured him that it is God alone who raises people from death through salvation.

He emerged from that bitter period changed. He found himself weeping over people and their lost condition. “It’s a painful, hellish experience to go through, but if that’s what it takes to bring a person to compassion,” he would not trade it, he said.

Because of that experience, Storey now tries to pray continually that God will not allow him to become apathetic, stop depending on Him, or lead a church on autopilot. As a music teacher, his work day routinely begins in late afternoon, and for years he has tried to spend eight to 10 hours a day studying and praying. Although he did not have the “luxury” of going to seminary, Storey has systematically studied books on theology and church history.

His wife Lisa, who is of Lebanese descent, homeschools their four children, ages 8 to 14, and has proved to be a valuable asset to the ministry. “She’s got a generous, hospitable spirit,” Storey said, a gift to the church because they often invite people to their home. “She can get food together in a quick hurry, and she’s very inviting, very loving.” The children are involved in ministry, too, playing drums, bass guitar, and singing. The church offers a Saturday night concert once a month as an outreach to the community.

“Every time we have one of those as least one person comes the following Sunday,” Storey said. Usually within a month, that person then receives Christ. “I find it’s been good to be culturally relevant in that way.”

Yet Storey does not point to concerts or programs to explain the church’s growth. “I think it’s because of all of the prayer. We pray a lot.”

Beyond that, Storey acknowledges that it is not about anything he or the church has done—and marvels. “I’ve never seen God move like He’s moved here.”

So What About You?

As you have seen, there are some challenges to blending “bivocational” and “church planting.” However, those who are truly called to plant churches bivocationally consistently testify to the rewards. It does take a truly gifted person to successfully manage family, ministry, and another vocation. Ironically, “bivocational ministry” has historically been considered by some as “second-class” or a less than fully legitimate expression of ministry leadership. It is hoped that this mindset is quickly becoming something of the past. As you have read, bivocational ministry is both practical and effective--moreover, it is biblical.

Below are some unhealthy myths which have been communicated--whether intentionally or unintentionally--for too long:

1. *If a young man or woman is called to ministry, it is best that they go to a Bible college or Christian university and get a degree in biblical studies or ministry.* This is not necessarily so. While God leads some to go to college, he does not lead everyone. Moreover, just because someone is called to ministry and is led of God to go to college, one should not automatically make the assumption that God is leading them to get a degree in theology or ministry. God--as He has led so many--may very well lead someone to get a different degree in the sciences, arts, or one of the trade degrees. Bottom line--follow God.
2. *If a person is called to ministry later in life, their first step of obedience is to abandon their occupation or career and enroll in seminary.* While this may be so for some, it is NOT true for all. The apostle Paul did tell Timothy to “study to show [himself] approved unto God,” but, this is not a command to abandon all and go to seminary. Southern Baptists have historically recognized that the call and service of a pastor or church planter is not dependant upon proper educational credentials; but, rather, the affirmation of one’s call to ministry by the local church. This is biblical. And for this reason (among others), Southern Baptist pastors and church planters are not licensed or ordained by the denomination or an agency, but by the local church. And very practically, God may intend to use that person’s professional or occupational influence or skills in starting a new church and in reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Bottom line--follow God.
3. *The goal of every bivocational church planter or pastor should eventually be fully funded by the church he serves.* You have read examples and testimonies from several who never intend to be fully funded by a church. From the New Testament to the present day, countless people have been called to serve God bivocationally--and, no doubt, countless more will be called.

The church must affirm the call of God in the lives of people without imposing expectations that may or may not be part of God’s plan for that particular individual. Christians should be encouraged to seek God’s direction for themselves, then those whom God has placed around them should encourage and cheer them on toward that calling.

Imagine the Possibilities

Today, there are a few places in the world witnessing an explosion of new churches, and an exponential increase of new believers. Missionaries and missiologists are identifying these phenomenons as “church planting movements.” One of the common denominators of each of these movements is the bivocational, or non-funded, church planter. Imagine what could happen in America if all of those whom God is calling to serve in this capacity obeyed and served as He called them to serve. We might see a movement of God across our continent like never before.

There are currently more than 45,000 pastors serving churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. Imagine what might happen if each of these pastors caught a vision for what we have been talking about and began affirming God’s call in the lives of church members whom God is calling and sending out to plant churches. Below is a simple but effective process that could be followed by virtually any pastor:

1. Calling Out the Called

In every church there are leaders whom people follow. They are deacons, Sunday School teachers, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, skilled and unskilled laborers, and even staff members. Each leads in their own way. God just may be calling some of these to serve as bivocational church planters. Many of these have even approached their pastor on occasion and said something like, “I just feel that God is leading me to do something more...” It is the role of the pastor to “call out” those whom God is calling. For some, all they need is a nudge and a word of affirmation.

Consider this: If you are a pastor or denominational leader, what can you do to “call out” those whom God is calling?

2. Providing Training

In the first chapter, we discuss options for training. Training can come in one of many ways. Both training events and ongoing training opportunities can be available in the local church, association, or state convention. Places like the Dakotas and Western Nebraska are holding training sessions via the Internet in addition to classroom settings. If a person is not in a place where this can happen, then the internet is a great place to begin.

Think on this. If you are a pastor or denominational leader, what can you do to provide necessary training for those whom God is calling?

3. Sending Them Out

Charles Spurgeon regularly sent men to start new churches in areas surrounding London. Each of these individuals responded to God’s call to ministry, and had been mentored by Spurgeon. However, the mentoring process did not end after they were

sent out—it was just the beginning. Bivocational church planters can continue to benefit from an ongoing relationship to a pastor or denominational leader they can trust. Suppose that every pastor and every church reached out to another people group in their community or neighboring town. Perhaps the best candidates for sending out these planters are bivocational pastors and the churches they currently serve. Every great leader should have a plan for reproducing himself, and every healthy church should have a plan for reproducing itself. Sending out bivocational planters is an excellent way to expand the kingdom of God, reach the unreached, and glorify God by mentoring new leaders who will go and do likewise.

Think on this. If you are a denominational leader, how can you lead pastors to catch a vision for this type of multiplication? If you are a pastor, what is stopping you from multiplying yourself and your church in this way?

Some Challenges and Benefits of Bivocational Church Planting:

Benefits:

1. If a church planter works in the right secular job, he can meet and reach out to many people in his community. For example, if a person takes a job at a school, he would have contact with many people. It would be even better if this was the school in which his new church met. What if a person worked in a grocery market within his target area or people group? He would meet all the customers, as well as the employees. These examples are just a token of what is available if we place in the term bivocational.
2. Many church planters either makes his wife work or lives in a substandard financial condition to start a church. However, many of our church planters come on the field initially just to develop a core group or work with a small group of people. He does not need 60 hours a week to do what he has been given. Working bivocationally will lighten the load of finances, while at the same time help him meet people and understand the community.
3. If a church planter works bivocationally, he will stay in touch with lost humanity in his community. Quite often, and quite quickly, church planters get caught up in just dealing with “saved” people and their difficulties. This can come at the expense of meeting people who need Jesus as their Savior. Working in the “world” allows a mission pastor to continue to experience life as his community does.
4. With a bivocational pastor, the people of the church membership are usually more willing to step up, help, and not allow the pastor to do it all. This usually allows the church to grow spiritually faster than a fully funded church plant.

Challenges:

1. It is not easy to focus your mind on two distinct jobs and job descriptions. Whether a person works 20 or 40 hours outside the church, his brain will

continue to view them as two full-time responsibilities. This can be difficult for most people.

2. Time is always an issue. How do you divide your time between family, church, job, self, and others? This must be constantly worked at and evaluated as the church grows, taking more and more time. Remember some church plants may remain bivocational forever, while others are bivocational only for a given period.
3. Education is always a challenge if someone is called to follow God. However, just as sure as you say yes to God's call to become a bivocational church planter, He will show you areas of weakness that you will need to seek training in some manner.
4. Attitude adjustments are often needed to keep yourself focused. You will ask questions like, "Is this really worth it?" "Can I really keep doing this?" and "What is this doing to my family." You will have to continue to allow God to reaffirm your call to a ministry that many will not enter. You have said yes. Continue in this course of ministry.

Finding the Right Fit

These are case studies, not real people. They reflect selected models we see consistently expressed in North America.

Pastor 1:

Joe lives in rural America. He attends a county seat church in the largest town within 200 miles. For years, Joe has worked in the church, teaching and helping wherever he is needed. In fact, some say that if Joe were not a member of this church they wonder how things would be done. One day a missionary came and spoke to Joe's church about the surrounding towns and villages that had no gospel witness. Joe heard the words and felt as if he could make a difference. He went to his pastor and told him of his feelings. The pastor told Joe to go with his heart and Joe certainly did. He began driving 75 miles one way to start a Bible study in a town that had no vibrant evangelical witness. It started slowly, but began to take off as the people in this town of 150 realized Joe cared about them. Today, Joe is considered the pastor of this band of 27 that meet in the community hall each Sunday. His old church continues on without his presence on Sundays. Joe continues his job as an auto mechanic. He was ordained three years ago. Five other men and their families followed Joe's lead and now six towns have gospel witnesses that never before had any. By the way, Joe's pastor now spends Thursday evenings, discipling six men on how to lead and develop people. Essentially they are learning how to be a shepherd. Joe and the others never intended to make a living through the church. Joe receives assistance for his travel and is fine with that. God has supplied his every need. Joe is pleased to be a bivocational church planter and would think of nothing else.

Pastor 2:

Aslam lives in the large city. He moved to the United States from Pakistan. He understands Muslims and attends a large church. He was a pastor in Pakistan before he came to the U.S. He desires to continue in his God-appointed task. There are currently no churches reaching out to Muslims in his city. Aslam talks to his friend and pastor, explaining what he is thinking. The pastor agrees that something must be done and that it is possible God sent Aslam to the church for this reason. There is such a large Muslim population that it is decided they will hold a few Bible studies, a couple of block parties, and in three months launch the First Muslim Baptist Church. Plans are made, budgets are formed, people are reached, and in three months, a church is born. Pastor Aslam leads the way. They meet in a storefront with 35 people each Sunday. Pastor Aslam is also an orderly in the hospital. He works 40 hours in the emergency room to put food on his table. Pastor Aslam is the same as he was in Pakistan, only now he has less people and must earn part of his living working in a hospital. Pastor Aslam intends to quit his hospital job when the church can afford to pay him a full salary. Right now, Aslam is a bivocational church planter.

Pastor 3:

Jim is a church planter who is also a drug counselor. He started a church to reach those trying to beat the bondage of drugs. He receives his salary from counseling, and some from the church of 100 that meets in a warehouse. Jim always intended to do drug counseling, as well as pastoring. He has chosen to remain bivocational for the good of his family and the good of the church. Jim has some college education. He is taking correspondence courses in pastoral leadership over the Internet and through a local college. Jim is a bivocational church planter.

Pastor 4:

Barry is an accountant for a large firm in the suburbs. He is very active in his church and has held almost every position the church could offer. He recently became involved in the missions committee. Suddenly, he found his heart yearning to do missions, and not just sitting around a table each month making decisions. After talking to his pastor, he was challenged to reach out to the next town with a Bible study. Barry began the Bible study by faith and it grew. Soon he had to start another one on a different night. This too grew. Finally, it was decided they needed to come together on Sundays and start serving God in the capacity of a church. Barry was asked to become the pastor, which was a role he held by default as the Bible study teacher for the last two years. Barry once again counseled with his pastor and within three months was ordained, becoming the pastor of a new church. He never stopped his accountant work. He just added on bivocational church planting. In five years, Barry had a decision to make. Should he quit being bivocational and become fully funded by the church? He decided against it. The church hired a fully funded pastor, and Barry went on to start the whole process again in another surrounding town. He knows he was a catalyst, and there are more churches to start. He also realizes that by being bivocational, he can do work that no one else can do.

Personal Questions:

If God asks you to become a bivocational church planter, what would be your next step?

Occupational Possibilities for Bivocational Church Planting:

- School teaching. This is an excellent job. You will have most evenings and weekends off. Pay is usually adequate. You usually have a generous amount of days off in case ministry emergencies occur. You are able to have summers off, which is usually a great time to use volunteers to help grow your church. You get to meet a cross-section of your community: students, their parents, and colleagues.
- Substitute school teaching. Same as above, but you do not work every weekday. You usually just need a college degree to substitute in most places. Many school districts are looking for good substitutes.
- Insurance or sales. You set your own hours. You are available to do ministry during the day as emergencies arise. Pay can be pretty good after a while.
- Start up a new business. There are franchises, such as replacing auto glass in cars or opening a coffee house, where you can set your hours. Church starters are often entrepreneurial. Use this to start something to bring in needed finances.
- Work in a grocery market. This would be a good opportunity to meet most people in your target area. One person works in the deli and talks to people all day. To date, he still has all his fingers!
- Work anywhere that the local people access. Stores, laundry mats, and so on.
- Use whatever profession God has given you to this point. With this prearranged vocation, such as doctor, lawyer, business owner, or skilled laborer. Just use what you have and give the rest of your time to church planting. It may not be the ideal profession for church planting, but it can work if you make the church plant a priority.

- Retired workers who are starting a new church would do well to think about getting a small job in the community as a strategy of reaching people. Watch these older fellows bagging groceries--they talk to the people about everything as they pack and bring the groceries to the car. Sounds demeaning, but it is not if the Lord is using it. My wife knows those people by name and even goes to the line in the market that has her favorite “bagger.”
- Work as a manual laborer, especially if you are reaching out to others who work with their hands for a living. You will immediately gain respect for what you are doing.
- Try not to get a job doing something behind a desk, unless it is already your profession. There is not enough people contact. It will only be useful for paying your bills, which is great as long as you are not using it as a strategy for reaching people.
- It is our belief that any job can be adjusted to having a bivocational ministry. So please do not look at this list as all-inclusive. Whatever God has given you, simply use it to His glory.

Do I Have What it Takes?

We have a great advantage as Southern Baptists. Many dollars and hours have been put into helping people discern whether they should become church planters. If you will go to www.churchplantingvillage.net, and click on church planting, you will find all kinds of resources to help you discover your capacity for church planting. You can also go to www.discoverchurchplanting.net.

The Future of Church Planting

The future looks encouraging for church planting in North America. We sense a small breath of wind from God, leading us to a place where we have never been before. Years ago, a young church planter was not allowed to work outside of the church if he were given any type of financial funds. Today, more and more state conventions and associations are realizing that allowing church planters the opportunity to work outside of the church frees him financially, as well as assists him with great opportunities within the community. Bivocationalism is becoming a viable strategy of church planting. We have learned in the past 25 years how to start churches in the North American context. We use one seminary-trained person to do one church start, using volunteers and assistance. We do not want to throw out this model, but now is the time to go the next level of church planting, using indigenous people who start churches where they live.

An even brighter star is shining. Bivocational leaders and pastors are beginning to see why God has allowed them to operate like the apostle Paul. Where being a bivocational pastor was looked at as “second rate,” great needs in North America and ethnic diversity now cause us to look at the bivocational pastor with new eyes. So we should!

All across North America, God has strategically placed bivocational pastors in churches where they thought their only mission was to keep the church from dying. In the near future, we see a day when the small spark of these men becomes a fanning flame, stretching to every people group, town, and village in North America.

The future of North American church planting just might lie in the hands of farmers, salesmen, and teachers. Men called to work hard at making a living and at the same time starting churches. The precious gospel will be placed in the hand who answers the call to bivocational ministry. These men say, “I must bring the gospel to the people who live around me.” We can help them. That is why we are here at this present time. Let us raise the banner of the bivocational church planter.

So what about you, the reader of this chapter? This book is certainly not a “how to,” but a “need to.” Has God specially prepared you to become a bivocational church planter, maybe even without your knowing it yet? Does your heart burn with excitement and challenge as you think of this next step of leadership and responsibility? If so, just do it. Talk to your local church leader or pastor. Or give us a call at the North American Mission Board, (770) 410-6000. Tell them your thoughts and heart. Let God work out the rest. It probably will not be easy, but in the end it will be well worth the ride. Remember, right where you live, there is probably a group of people waiting to hear from God. All God needs is a messenger. Will you be the one? The prayers of Luke 10:2 are praying that you say YES!

To God be the glory on earth as it is in heaven!

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