

CHAPTER ONE

UNDERSTANDING BIVOCATIONAL MINISTRY

Many trace bivocational ministry back to the apostle Paul, who supported himself and his ministry as a tentmaker. For many churches, having a bivocational minister was the norm until the 1950s, when denominations began to challenge their churches to support fully-funded pastors. In the United States, bivocational ministers served churches as the people moved west, supporting themselves as farmers, store owners, schoolteachers, and many other occupations while also providing pastoral care to their congregations and leading worship on Sunday mornings.

Starting in the 1950s, more denominations began to move toward professional ministry. Seminary education became more important as some denominations began to require the master of divinity for ordination, which further reduced the numbers of bivocational ministers. Education and ordination became wedges that divided bivocational ministers from their fully-funded counterparts. Many fully-funded ministers and denominational leaders looked down on bivocational ministers and viewed them as something less than real ministers.

As churches began, collectively, to move away from bivocational ministers, denominations and seminaries did little to promote the option. As a Bible school student in the early 1980s, I remember two individuals from the denomination coming into one of our classes and asking if any of us would be interested in helping start some new churches in a large city in another state. I asked if they would be using bivocational persons for that work. One of them quickly replied that new-church planting required more work than a bivocational person could provide. I still remember the disgusted tone in his voice as he dismissed the possibility that bivocational ministers could plant churches. Of course, today, bivocational persons are very involved in new-church planting, and it has proven to be a very effective way to start a new church.

Despite being told by various denominational leaders that their numbers of bivocational ministers were growing and are expected to keep growing, I could find no denomination with a staff person specifically assigned to work with bivocational ministers and their churches. For many years, the Southern Baptist Convention had a bivocational ministry consultant until Leon Wilson retired in 2003, at which time the position was eliminated. Despite the fact that this denomination expects their bivocational ministers to soon surpass the number of fully-funded pastors, they continue to neglect to fill that position.¹ Some mid-level judicatories do have persons assigned to work with bivocational ministers in their districts, but I can't find any denomination with an individual solely assigned to that responsibility.

This lack of support is also seen in the absence of resources that have been developed especially for bivocational ministers. Walk into any Christian bookstore and you can find numerous resources for mid-size and larger churches, but there are few resources for bivocational ministers and their churches.

The resource problem isn't limited to written resources. There are few workshops offered that pertain primarily to bivocational ministers, although that is beginning to change. In recent years I have been privileged to lead workshops for bivocational and small-church ministers for several different denominational organizations. One workshop I led in Canada demonstrated how hungry these small-church leaders are for training when one participant told me he drove nine hours one way to attend.

Many denominations offer regular pastors' gatherings to encourage peer support and fellowship and to provide training and promotion of the denomination's activities. However, many of these are held during the week while bivocational ministers often have to be at their other jobs. This leads to many bivocational ministers feeling like second-class citizens in their own denominations.

It's no wonder so many of them feel isolated and alone. Many bivocational ministers feel a great deal of stress due to the constant demands on their time and energy, and this sense of isolation and the lack of respect they feel from their denominations just add to that stress. We should not be surprised that burnout and depression are known among bivocational ministers. Archibald Hart explains why:

The loneliness of ministry, although essentially positive, can shape the minister toward being cut off from support systems. It can keep him from having close confidants with whom problems of the work can be discussed. It is a psychological fact that one cannot resolve conflicts or clarify issues simply by thinking about them. Self-talk and introspective rumination with no outside input lead inevitably to distortion and irrationality, whereas talking things over with someone else can help clarify issues and remove distortions. Every minister needs close confidants—staff, family, other ministers, trusted laypersons in the congregation—

to help in this clarifying process. If steps are not deliberately taken to develop these trusting and supportive relationships in each pastorate, the loneliness of leadership responsibility will lead to isolation and a distortion of reasoning—and this spells depression for many ministers.²

Unfortunately, my own experience confirms Hart's words. I've written elsewhere about the clinical depression I experienced early in my pastorate. There is no question that a sense of isolation was a contributing factor to that depression. I did not feel that I had anyone to turn to as the stress levels began to increase. When the depression finally overwhelmed me, it took a year of medication and counseling to get well. Perhaps it could have been avoided if I'd had someone to talk to when the pressures began to intensify.

Ministry Challenges in the 21st Century

Bivocational ministers have the same responsibilities as fully-funded ministers. There are sermons to prepare each week, people who seek counsel, conflicts that arise in the church, administrative tasks, meetings to coordinate and attend, congregants who need to be visited, and the various other general expectations people have of ministers, regardless of church size.

There are also challenges associated with living in the 21st century. It's not easy to be a minister today. The way people think and believe is rapidly changing. Expectations are higher today than ever before, and if people can't get their expectations met, they will simply move on to another church. Denominational affiliation matters little in the 21st century. If people have to attend two or three different churches to have their expectations met, they will do so. In the past, it was enough for ministers to be able to exegete the Scriptures in order to preach to people. Today it is just as important to exegete the

culture to understand how best to reach it, but when we do so, we begin to see just how difficult it is to minister to this postmodern, pre-Christian society in which we live.

Rejection of Absolute Truth

We are trying to preach a message of truth to a generation that has rejected absolute truth. While postmodern people are willing to accept that you may believe something to be true, they will not accept that you have the right to proclaim that the belief is true for all people. It seems that the only absolute truth that is acceptable today is that there is no such thing as absolute truth.

Once absolute truth is rejected, it follows that moral absolutes will also be rejected. Persons holding to such views do not accept someone stating that the moral choices people make are wrong, and they reject anyone who claims that some moral choices are superior to others. An obvious example of this today is the debate over same-sex marriage. The person who claims that homosexuality is a sin is immediately branded homophobic and unloving. There is great pressure today for the church to accept the mindset that all moral choices are valid, and the church itself has divided. A number of mainline denominations now ordain homosexuals to the ministry while others debate it (sometimes heatedly) at their national gatherings. Ministers who attempt to address the issue from a biblical perspective are under great pressure.

The pressure intensifies when a homosexual couple begins to attend a church. How does the church address this issue in a way that is consistent with the Bible's teaching yet also in a way that honors all mankind as persons of worth and value due to their being created in the image of God? A similar problem arises when an unmarried couple who live together want to join a church.

Without a belief in absolute truth and morals, it's virtually impossible to say anything is wrong. Everyone is free to make whatever choices they want to make, but this can only lead to chaos and eventual hurt for everyone. The problem becomes even worse when it begins to involve people from within the church family. Christians who loudly attack homosexuality may change their beliefs if their own children suddenly announce they are homosexual. A Christian husband finds himself in a relationship with another woman and divorces his wife to marry the new woman, and he cannot understand why the church wants to remove him from his leadership positions.

It's easy to believe in moral absolutes—until those absolutes personally impact our choices or those of family members; then, issues that were once black and white become various shades of gray. Churches look to their ministers for leadership as they wrestle with social issues, and pastors can quickly get caught in the middle. To take a stand and say that some choices are wrong because they violate clear, biblical teaching will get many pastors in trouble in today's climate of moral relativism.

Generational Differences

Many churches have four or even five generations of people attending services, and it's not easy to develop services and ministries that meet the needs of each generation. This complication is especially noticeable in the smaller churches in which many bivocational ministers serve, and is one reason so many churches struggle with worship wars. How many people enjoy the same music their grandparents enjoyed? Some churches offer blended services that try to provide both traditional and contemporary music, but such attempts are not always successful.

The challenge to church leaders is to provide environments for each generation to worship in meaningful ways. Go into any music store and watch how many people buy music for the pipe organ. You probably won't see many. Churches that only offer that type of worship experience are unlikely to attract a lot of younger people, but on the other hand, it is wrong to discard the traditional worship service in favor of the young, thereby denying a meaningful worship experience to older generations. This is not an easy problem to resolve.

Generational differences are not limited to music preferences. Younger generations are more visual than older generations, which is why many churches have added video-projection systems to their sanctuaries. Unfortunately, this too is not always well received, especially if it conflicts with one of the sacred cows of the church.

One church added a video system, but the older members complained that the screen, for which they paid a good sum of money, blocked the view of the cross behind the pulpit. They wanted to be able to see the cross. The church leaders compromised by raising the screen during the message. People agreed to the compromise, but some from both camps were frustrated by the decision. The pastor cannot use the video system during his actual message, so the church basically paid for a very expensive method to convey announcements. And by the way, many of those announcements are still read from the pulpit at the start of the service because older members insist they won't know what is happening in the church if the announcements are not read. The pastor of this particular church tells me this is an ongoing source of tension.

Membership Issues

Many people today are reluctant to commit to joining any organization, yet many churches require people to be members before they

can participate in ministry or leadership roles. Although people don't want to join a church, they do want to be involved in things that are meaningful to them. How can churches utilize the gifts and passions these people bring when they are hesitant to join the church?

I recently had a call from a pastor who told me an individual had been attending his church for a few months and had expressed interest in becoming a member. The church was a Baptist church, and the prospective individual had a Methodist background. A problem arose because this particular Baptist church had a requirement in its constitution that all members of the church be baptized by immersion, a condition the individual was not willing to meet. He had previously been baptized in the Methodist tradition by sprinkling, and it was a meaningful event in his life. This man felt that being baptized again would lessen the significance of his original experience. The pastor asked me how he could address the problem.

I contacted a number of Baptist pastors and found they have been running into the same issue. Some took a traditional Baptist stance and said that anyone who wanted to be a member of their church would have to be immersed. Others said they did not believe differences in the baptism method should be a consideration for church membership. They were more interested in the individual's personal relationship with Jesus Christ than they were with the way the person had been baptized. A couple of pastors said their constitution required anyone who had not been baptized to be baptized by immersion but that, if someone had previously been baptized, it would be accepted regardless of the method.

As the denominational labels on our churches become less important to persons seeking a church to attend, I expect we will encounter this issue more often, and it is important that churches begin to address some decisions before being confronted with them. Lead

pastors will be expected to facilitate those discussions, and they could be difficult in some churches.

Rapid Cultural Changes

The world is changing at a speed never before seen, and most churches struggle to keep up, if they even try. The smaller churches most often served by bivocational ministers are quite fond of life as it was in the 1950s, and some haven't decided yet whether to enter the twenty-first century. Although these churches may hold the pastor accountable for reaching our postmodern generation, they tend to resist nearly every change that will be required to reach that generation, and then they blame the pastor for not growing the church. As one might imagine, such attitudes place a tremendous strain on pastors.

The number of single-parent homes continues to increase, putting additional pressures on our society and the family, and this pressure invariably finds its way into the church. Virtually every study done on single-parent homes finds that there is a greater likelihood of economic difficulty; lower grades and increased social challenges for children; physical and mental exhaustion for the single parent; and increased chances of drug and/or alcohol abuse. This isn't to say that *every* single-parent home will have these issues, but studies consistently find that such issues are more often found in these homes.

Churches must revisit their children's ministry philosophies to ensure that children from single-parent homes receive the support and ministry they need. This can be a challenge in larger churches, with staff who are specifically hired to focus on children's ministries; it becomes much tougher for a smaller church, with a single minister on staff, working with lay volunteers. It is also likely that the church will only see these children every two weeks because they may be with the other parent the other week.

It is equally important not to forget the needs of the single parent. Does the Young Married Sunday school class really have much to say to a single parent, or does the name itself send a message that the church is focused on married couples to the exclusion of never-married or divorced persons? Even if that is not the *name* of the class, if everyone else in the class is married, the unmarried person may well feel like a fifth wheel, and neglect to participate. The bivocational pastor often struggles trying to find a way to minister both to married couples and single parents in a manner that will be meaningful to each one.

Of course, it can get even more difficult when trying to minister to young people. Again looking at a Young Married class, how will it minister to the needs of the twenty-nine-year-old grandmother? Such scenarios are part of our culture today, and sometimes they find their ways into our churches, praying to find *something* that will inspire hope and encouragement. I do not personally know of a bivocational church that could do that with the current ministries they have to offer.

Young families are the group that many smaller churches want to target. As I have met with pastor search committees in bivocational churches and asked what they were looking for in their next pastor, almost every one of them said the church needed a pastor who could grow their youth group and reach young families. They see youth and young families as their only hope of survival. However, most of them do not know what they are asking for. They do not understand the societal changes that impact the lives of young people and young families. To effectively reach these two groups would require a major shift of ministry priorities for most churches, and few of them would accept such changes.

I recently met with such a church. True to form, when I asked what they needed in their next pastor, they responded that he or she should be able to grow the church. Specifically, they wanted to see the pastor reach out to youth and young families. I then referred them to a survey I had asked them to have the congregation complete before I met with them. Of the top eight ministry specialties the congregation said they wanted in their new pastor, seven of them were inward focused. I pointed out this discrepancy to the committee: They were telling me the church needed a pastor who could grow the church, but the congregation said they wanted a chaplain who would care for their needs. I explained that any pastor who came into a role at that church thinking he or she had a mandate to grow the church would soon run into problems because of unmet expectations the congregation would have. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon problem in many churches, and it has shortened the tenure of many good pastors.

Because of the changes taking place throughout society, ministers need to reinvent themselves fairly often. Futurist Leonard Sweet writes:

No matter what your profession or company, you will need to reinvent yourself at least every seven years... If seminary education is ever to be seen as a system of lifelong learning, not a three-year event, it must break out of the classroom walls and get into the churches and communities where ministry takes place.³

Looking back at my twenty-year pastorate at Hebron Baptist Church, I can recognize a number of changes in my ministry style over that period of time. Some of it was because I learned new skills as I pursued an education, but some of it was a result of societal changes that required new approaches toward leadership. I completely changed my preaching style three times. I changed the way I led meetings, the way I dealt with conflict, how I dealt with difficult

people, and the way I did outreach. During that time, I went from being a pastor who felt burdened to do the work of the church to one who recognized it as my responsibility to equip others to do ministry.

The problem with making changes in the way ministers approach their work is that there will inevitably be people who prefer the old way. A church that wants a chaplain isn't going to be happy with an equipping pastor. Churches that thrive on traditional forms of worship are not going to be happy when the pastors suggest that more contemporary forms of worship might better reach the people the churches claims they wants to reach. Churches that expect their pastors to wear suits and ties may not react well when they step into the pulpit wearing khakis and a polo shirt, even if they explain that formal attire can be a turn-off to some people.

A church that expects its pastor to stand directly behind the pulpit when preaching and always use the King James Version may express displeasure when their pastor does neither. I have been a visiting preacher in a few churches and been criticized after the service because I walk around when I preach. People said it was too distracting. In one church I visited, I was criticized because I used the New King James Version rather than the original KJV. That church's constitution actually required that only the King James Version could be used from the pulpit. (I never returned to that church to preach.)

Unique Challenges of the Bivocational Minister

An entire book could be written on the pressures ministers face due to the changes occurring in our society today, but even those few illustrate the tremendous challenges clergy members encounter. Additionally, bivocational ministers have some unique challenges that fully-funded ministers do not.

Time Constraints

Most ministers wish they had more time to do all the things they need to do, but, due to their other source(s) of employment, bivocational ministers experience obvious time constraints that fully-funded ministers do not. Virtually every bivocational minister I have coached or talked to in a workshop setting has said that time is the number-one challenge in his or her life. A minister who works a forty-hour week—as I did during much of my pastoral ministry—does not have those forty hours available for ministry purposes. That means everything else—whether personal or ministerial—must be condensed into the remaining hours, adding enormous pressure to the ministers and their families.

Bivocational ministers often feel they lack adequate time to prepare their sermons. They frequently go to bed at night knowing there is unfinished work they simply did not have time to do. This can generate feelings that they are not doing the work God has called them to do and cause them to doubt God's call on their lives.

In recent months I have read some blogs that discuss bivocational ministry. Many of the writers question whether bivocational ministry could even be a viable option. They do not believe bivocational ministers are able to give the time to the ministry that is required. Unfortunately, too many bivocational ministers struggle with the same thoughts and often condemn themselves for not having more time to give to the church.

The challenge is to find balance between the things that must happen to maintain one's well-being and the obligatory tasks one must accomplish. In my first book, *The Tentmaking Pastor*, I discussed five primary areas of one's life that must be kept in balance: God, family,

ministry responsibilities, second job, and self-care.⁴ Since that book is now out of print, let's take a brief look at each of these.

God. I found out while attending Bible college and during my pastoral ministry how easy it is to neglect one's personal relationship with God while involved in ministry. We can easily slip into the mindset that doing God's work is the same as developing one's relationship with God. They are two different things, though. We must not allow the busy schedule of ministry to substitute for spending time with God and growing deeper in our walk with him. I like to tell people that God called us to be something before he called us to do something. He called us to be his disciples, and then he called us to serve him as ministers. Our best serving will come out of our development as disciples. Ignoring our personal relationship with God will cause us to dry up and have nothing to offer people except what we read in some book.

Family. I have met many bivocational ministers who struggled with the feeling that they were neglecting their families. Some have told me they felt called to bivocational ministry but were resisting because they were afraid of how it would impact their families. It is never permissible to neglect one's family in order to serve as a minister of any kind. We must find ways to ensure that we spend time with our families and meet their needs. In *The Healthy Pastor*, I devote an entire chapter to the minister's family and recommend that every bivocational pastor read that chapter.⁵

Church Responsibilities. Being bivocational does not mean it is permissible to provide second-rate ministry, and most bivocational ministers recognize that. Admittedly, though, I have met some bivocational ministers who viewed their work as a Sunday job. It was a

way for them to earn extra income, and if they weren't doing that, they might well be working some other job on the weekend. However, most bivocational ministers see their work as a call of God on their lives, and they are as committed to that call as their fully-funded colleagues. They work diligently to provide pastoral care to their congregations, reach out to their communities, prepare quality sermons, and provide leadership to their churches. The biggest danger for most bivocational ministers is that they are more likely sacrifice the other four areas to ensure they provide quality ministry to their churches.

Second Job. I have found that bivocational ministers work in just about every field imaginable. I have met police officers, factory workers, educators (in both public schools and higher education), local politicians, salespeople, business owners, heavy-machine operators, and some even worked jobs that were a little suspect. I once talked to a bivocational pastor whose other employment was dealing cards at a casino in Nevada. Some bivocational ministers work full time at their other jobs; some are part time. Some have to punch a time clock while others enjoy more flexible schedules. The one thing they all have in common is that their jobs require a certain number of hours a week, which means those hours are not available for any other purpose. For most of my bivocational pastorate, I was an hourly factory worker who punched a time card and was required to put in a forty-hour week in the factory. That automatically removed those forty hours from my weekly schedule, plus the commuting time I had.

Self-Care. This fifth area is the one that most ministers, whether bivocational or fully funded, struggle with the most. We are not good at taking care of ourselves. There are so many people with so many different needs and demands that we often sacrifice personal

well-being to meet those other needs. Ignoring our own needs long enough can lead to serious problems with physical, emotional, and spiritual health. I recently talked to a bivocational pastor who had fallen into this trap, and he admitted to me that he was on the verge of burnout and about to leave the ministry. We talked for a long time about his years of neglecting his own needs in order to serve others, and I reminded him that self-care is not selfish; it is stewardship of the resources God has given each of us. After our coaching session, he approached his congregation and shared with them the conversation he'd had with me, and they entered a discussion about increasing his vacation time and giving him a three-month sabbatical so he could recharge his emotional batteries.

Self-Esteem Issues

In 2004 I conducted a survey among the bivocational pastors serving in my denomination. A few ministers expressed bitterness at being bivocational. Some were angry they had spent time in seminary and were unable to find a church position that could pay a salary that would support their families. Others were frustrated at the lack of respect they experienced from fully-funded ministers and their denominational leaders.

Perhaps the biggest self-esteem issue comes from the size of the churches many bivocational ministers serve. In the United States, we tend to measure success by numbers. Larger churches represent greater success in ministry. A bivocational pastor serving a church of fifty people may well wonder what is wrong with him when a fellow seminary classmate is already serving a multi-staff church with thousands of attenders. Such comparisons can be hard on one's ego. We can speak all the standard rhetoric about the importance of being faithful where we are, but we are still human beings, and seeing

such contrasts can play games with one's self-esteem. Before long, the bivocational minister may begin to question why God doesn't seem to bless his ministry when his classmate's church is growing so fast.

It is important for bivocational ministers to remember that they may not be full-time pastors, but they are full-time ministers. There is never a time when the bivocational minister is not a minister, even if he or she is at the second job. One time our church clerk was filling out the annual reports for our denomination, and she came to the section on the form that asked if I was part time or full time. She wasn't sure how to answer, so she came to ask me what to put down. I responded that I was a full-time bivocational minister. She complained that the form didn't offer that as an option. I told her to mark whichever category she wanted to because I knew what I was. It didn't bother me that I was bivocational or that our denomination did not know how to recognize or capture that information. My self-worth was not connected to the size of the church I served or whether I served as a bivocational minister or a fully-funded minister. Unfortunately, this is an issue for some bivocational ministers.

Lack of Support

It did bother me that during my pastorate there were few resources developed especially for the bivocational church and its leadership. That is why I wrote my first book and why I continue to write today, focusing on issues related to small-church and bivocational ministry. There are also few workshops offered that specifically address the issues and challenges of bivocational and small-church ministry. I am happy to say that some judicatories and denominations are now beginning to address this, but it remains a problem in many others.

A few years ago I was asked to speak about bivocational ministry at a national gathering of pastors. In the two-day event, I was sched-

uled to present one ninety-minute workshop. Two participants came from several states away and announced during the Q&A time that they only attended because of that workshop. It was the first time they could remember their denomination ever offering something directly related to bivocational ministry. Bivocational pastors are hungry for encouragement and material they can use.

Unique Challenges of Small-Church Ministry

Bivocational ministers often serve in small churches; and, as every minister knows, the challenges of the church become the challenges of the pastor. Small churches are not simply miniature versions of large churches. Everything taught at a church conference cannot always be downsized and made to fit in small-church contexts. People who think that simply do not understand small or bivocational churches, and bivocational ministers who attend such events often find themselves frustrated when they are unable to implement the great ideas they heard when they return to their churches. Bivocational churches have a culture that is very much their own, and not everyone can serve in such churches.

A good number of seminary students today come from large, suburban churches, and they expect to serve in similar settings when they graduate from seminary.⁶ Unfortunately, many find that their first ministry after seminary is in a small-church setting, often in places that make becoming bivocational necessary. Making matters worse for the ministers (and the churches), they often find that their seminary educations did not prepare them for the small-church setting.⁷

Poor Self-Esteem

Small churches often do not feel good about themselves. They commonly experience rapid pastoral turnover, causing them to wonder what is so bad about them that no minister wants to stay. They are usually churches with aging members who struggle to attract new and younger members. In many cases, even what children they have in the church do not remain there when they marry. Due to limited finances, the building may not be in good repair and may be dated in appearance. All these issues can cause a small church to feel like it is failing God.

Small churches that used to be much larger can also feel like they have failed. How often do you see congregations of forty people sitting in a church sanctuary built to hold a couple hundred people? It's a common problem today, and such churches often struggle with their sense of self-worth.

The church I pastored had a sanctuary that would hold approximately 100 people. At one time it probably would have held 150, but years earlier the back of the sanctuary had been portioned off to add some Sunday school classes. I was told by longtime members that they could remember when the church was full for Sunday services, and in the summertime, the windows were propped open, and people sat around the sides of the church to listen to the sermon and to sing. When I began my ministry there, the church was down to about thirty people. A number of years earlier the U.S. Army purchased thousands of acres of land near the church for a munitions testing facility. Everyone who lived on that property had to move, and the Army erected a fence around the property. Many of the church members who were forced to move never returned to that church, and attendance immediately plummeted. It was nothing the church had done,

but the morale in that church was quite low when I began my pastorate there.

Family Dynamics

Small churches are often referred to as family churches because they may be made up of only a few families—and sometimes only one. Any problem in one of the families often spills over into the church, creating additional problems for the bivocational minister. I know of two churches that had significant problems when family members took different sides on some family-related issues. The pastors of these churches each found themselves in the middle of a family fight that threatened to disrupt the church. Such dynamics can occur in large churches with little impact on the church, but when it happens in the bivocational church, it can often lead to serious issues.

Resistance to Change

I know of few churches that are excited about change, but smaller churches are often especially resistant to any efforts to change them or any aspect of their church life. A minister who presents change is considered by some to be saying that something is wrong with the way the church functions. Longtime members may feel their important traditions are being threatened. Others have been in their churches for many years and have settled into their roles there. Change threatens to take away their established roles or positions in the church, so any change will be strongly resisted. Any pastor who has a vision for the church to be something other than it is in its current state will either have to settle for a long, slow process of gradual changes, or spend the short time he or she is likely to be at the church as a frustrated human being.

It would be a mistake to view bivocational ministers as less talented, less gifted individuals. It would also be a mistake to think that God's call on their lives is less than the call a fully-funded minister experiences. These dedicated ministers are doing kingdom work in their churches, and their numbers are going to continue to increase in most, if not all, denominations over the next several years.

If you are a judicatory minister, I challenge you to embrace your bivocational ministers. Get to know them and their families. Spend some time listening to their hearts. Visit their churches, even those that don't support your denomination very well. There may be a good reason for their poor support, but you won't know it if you don't spend some time with them.

If you are a bivocational minister yourself, seek out an advocate—whether someone higher in your denominational or church structure, or a fully-funded ministerial mentor, or even another bivocational minister—whom you can talk to, learn with and from, and share your needs with.

Coaching is one option that provides a context to help ministers address the challenges they face. Bivocational ministers need encouragement and acceptance. They need someone to come alongside them who appreciates what they do and the sacrifices they make. They need someone who will listen to their needs and offer practical suggestions for self-development tactics they can use to meet those needs. Many of them need a coach.