



EQUIPPER

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Dear church leader:

In this issue of *Equipper*, we continue our focus on the life and ministry of a bivocational pastor. As noted last month, nearly 70% of GCI's U.S. senior pastors are bivocational (not employed full-time by the church). Some are retired from paid employment, while many work full-time jobs in addition to pastoral ministry. Such arrangements present both limitations and advantages, which we will address in this ongoing series of articles. If you have suggested topics for the series, please email them to Ted.Johnston@gci.org.

God bless,
Ted Johnston, *Equipper* editor

Resources for bivocational pastors

Following are links to books, articles and other resources of particular interest to bivocational pastors. If you know of others, please email Ted.Johnston@gci.org.

- Book: *The Tentmaking Pastor (the joy of bivocational ministry)* by Dennis Bickers (see the June *Equipper* and the review on page two of this issue). Copies of this book are given to bivocational pastors at GCI's New Pastor Training.
- Book: *The Small Church is Different* by Lyle Schaller (helpful and practical—addressing various relevant issues)
- Article: *The Bi-vocational Pastor* at www.gci.org/church/ministry/bivocational
- Article: *Should I become a bi-vocational pastor?*—online at *Thriving Pastor*—go to www.thrivingpastor.org/articles/ministry/A000000319.cfm
- Links to several articles related to being a bivocational pastor—go to <http://mennoniteusa.org/resources/leadership-development-packets/bivocational-pastors/>
- Biblical Seminary blog post: *The Strengths of the Bi-vocational Pastorate* by Dr. Kyuboem Lee—go to www.biblical.edu/index.php/faculty-blog/96-regular-content/415-the-strengths-of-the-bi-vocational-pastorate
- *Sermon Series*, a free weekly email publication that provides in-depth material to help with sermon preparation. It's produced by GCI ministry developer Ted Johnston. For details, go to <http://mindev.gci.org/equipper.htm> and look under *related media*.

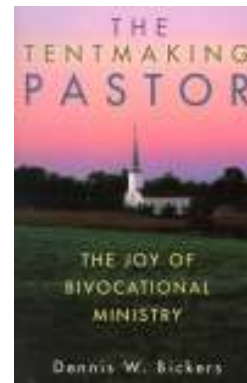


The Tentmaking Pastor

A review by Ted Johnston

In the last *Equipper*, we recommended the book, *The Tentmaking Pastor* by Dennis W. Bickers (Baker Books, 2000). In this follow-up article, I want to share some additional insights from this short (136 page) though helpful book. Here is a comment from the author about the book's purpose:

Bivocational ministry provides unique challenges for the church and the minister. Those challenges are discussed in this book. For the past eighteen years, our church and I have experienced most of them and found ways to overcome them. This book is written out of our experiences and is meant to be an encouragement to those who serve as bivocational pastors and to those who are members of bivocational churches (p. 11).



Bickers helps the reader understand that, rather than being second-rate, bivocational ministry is “real ministry.” A corollary is that small congregations (which typically have bivocational pastors) are “real churches.” Contrary to popular opinion in our size-fixated world, size of salary does not define a pastor’s effectiveness and size of membership (or income or building) does not define a church’s effectiveness.

For Bickers (and for GCI), a church’s effectiveness has to do with active participation in what Jesus is now doing in our world through the church to multiply and then mature his disciples (the Great Commission). From that perspective, an effective church is one where people are becoming disciples, growing (maturing) as disciples, and participating meaningfully in what the church is doing to help others become and then grow as *disciples who make disciples, who make disciples...* In GCI, we refer to this as *living and sharing the gospel*. That is our mission, and small churches are more than able to take part.

Bickers is realistic, noting that bivocational pastors face *limitations* in leading disciplemaking churches, including limits on their time. However, Bickers also notes that bivocational pastors have *advantages*:

- They often are able to remain as pastor in the one congregation for a long time. This is an advantage because it typically takes a long time to get to know and build relationships with members and with nonmembers. Nonmembers who are not already Christians, often are wary of Christianity as a faith and suspicious of Christian churches as institutions. Breaking through this mindset takes time.
- They are often more successful in recruiting lay-members to take leadership roles in the congregation’s ministries. Their members tend not to buy into the false idea that “ministry is what the pastor does.”
- They often have more credibility with members and nonmembers, because lay-people tend to see a bivocational pastor as “one of us.”

The book delves into all sorts of issues like these, emphasizing the importance of a person’s calling to bivocational ministry; the constant challenge of balancing work, family, church and self-care; the challenge of preaching (how to focus on this vital issue when time is limited); and the like.

Here is an excerpt from the book’s concluding paragraph, which is addressing congregations:

The disadvantages of having a bivocational pastor can be real, but many of them can be overcome. For a small church, the advantages of having a bivocational pastor will often far outweigh the disadvantages (page 129).

I hope you will read the whole book. I think you will find it helpful.