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for Tom DuBois, the difficult work of planting a church in New England—one of the nation's most irreligious areas—requires him to stay focused on the Great Commission not only at his church, Western Mountains Baptist Church in the ski mountain community of Kingfield, Maine, but at the land development company where he works throughout the week as a civil engineer.

"It's very tough to be initially accepted," DuBois relates. "Maine is quite independent with kind of a pick-me-up-by-the-bootstraps mentality. People want genuine. The fact that I work at a 'real' job, rubbing shoulders with the people, is critical for me as a church planter and pastor. They see I live in the real world."

DuBois is part of a growing group of leaders who are walking in two worlds and, in the process, have discovered that their bivocational status gives them connection points to ministry and people who need God—people they'd never meet working as full-time pastors.

Pastoring the Community—Not Just the Church

At first blush, bivocational ministry may not seem like a wise idea. After all, how can a pastor—who needs to be about the business of the church and the church members—do effective ministry when limited by a job (even a part-time job) outside the church?

But the pastors we talked to say it's that very limitation, that paradox, which often becomes a big advantage for bivocational leaders. Mark LeHew, connections pastor at The Journey Church in Crofton, Md., says being bivocational gives him an open door for conversation with people who need God.

"You have a chance to get to know people," says LeHew, 35, who has held a number of part-time jobs while in ministry over the years—from slinging java at Starbucks to his current outside-income source, substitute teaching.

"It helps people relate to me better," he explains. "Often they don't see pastors as being one of them—but I am. [Fully funded] pastors are often in that bubble and can't really get out and meet people they're trying to reach because they're at the church office. They can lose touch."

Mike Jones, pastor of Jackson Baptist Church and a salesman at Twin City Auto Parts, both in Sandersville, Ga., adds that working within the community your church is serving lets you see the needs firsthand.

"That's a strong point many fully funded ministers can't see because they're focused more on their church," Jones, 54, observes. "In the public business I'm in, there are always opportunities walking through your door rather than me going out and knocking on doors. I'm a community pastor—not just a church pastor."

pastor

More Advantages

In addition to providing greater community connections, bivocational ministry has proved to be a plus for pastors and their churches in several other areas as well.

Financial and spiritual freedom. Employment outside their churches gives bivocational pastors monetary cushion and stability should their churches ever need to cut or eliminate pastoral compensation—if the churches pay them in the first place. Some bivocational pastors don't take even partial salaries from their congregations. "A lot of church planters reliant on outside support become more desperate," says San Diego church planter and physical trainer Matt Smith, who launched Barabbas Road Church in February 2008. "I've had no financial help. And I wasn't that concerned. I knew I was working."

And with less (or no) church money going to bivocational pastors, churches can benefit as well. "My church on numerous occasions wanted to increase my salary so I'd be fully funded, but I always said 'no,'" says Larry Lehr, 69, pastor of Council Valley Baptist Church in Yale, Okla. "Instead, that money was put back into the ministries of the church, and as a result our little church has been able to do ministries only bigger churches usually do."

Ministerial longevity. With the added stress of outside-the-church jobs, one might believe bivocational pastors can't possibly last long in ministry—but the consensus indicates quite the opposite.

Lehr—who worked for 23 years as a marketing director for a vocational-technical school district—says bivocational ministers are "immune from the tyranny of the church" and, therefore, last much longer in the pulpit. "The average pastor serves fewer than five years in a church," he notes. "But it's not uncommon for bivocational pastors to serve 10 to 20 years."

For 20 years, Dennis Bickers, author of four

books on bivocational ministry, pastored Hebron Baptist Church in Madison, Ind., all while employed outside church walls putting together motors for diesel trucks. But six months into his first gig in 1981—a lay preaching ministry with Hebron Baptist—he soon realized the church wasn't confident he would stay.

"Dennis will soon be leaving us for a better church," a deacon said during a Sunday school class. Bickers, a recent high school graduate, was stunned. Turns out this deacon simply assumed Bickers would move on to "bigger and better" churches when the opportunity arose, just like the pastors Hebron

Baptist had before him.

"That's the mindset many bivocational ministers encounter," Bickers, 60, says today. "They [didn't believe they were] even good enough to keep someone with no experience and no education."

Empowering the church for ministry. In addition to providing DuBois income and credibility in Maine, working two jobs forces him to write his mission statement differently: The church's ministry not only should, but must rest on the shoulders of volunteers.

"The real benefit of working two jobs," DuBois says, "is that there is no grand expectation that the pastor is going to take care of everything. People step up to do the job because they know they are needed." The fact that DuBois works another job encourages others that they can do the same in ministry work.

Because the laypeople, deacons and other leaders know

that their pastor doesn't have eight to 10 hours a day for them, they get more involved in the church, Lehr says. "What fully funded pastors often hear is 'That's what we pay a pastor to do.'"

Bivocational Challenges

Notwithstanding the advantages bivocational ministry offers, the pastors holding down second jobs outside church walls experience their share of struggles too.

"In the public business I'm in, there are always opportunities walking through your door rather than me going out and knocking on doors."

—Mike Jones, Jackson Baptist Church, Sandersville, Ga.

Mike Jones: 'Every Chance I Get'

The slow, measured pace of Mike Jones' speaking voice is the calling card of a man intent on maintaining a calm demeanor while the stresses of life, others' needs and the rigors of bivocational ministry swirl around him.

"Sometimes I do visitations during my lunch hour or when I knock off from work," explains Jones, who has lived the bivocational life for the last 15 years. "Really, every chance I get."

And in addition to pastoring Jackson Baptist Church in Sandersville, Ga., ministry opportunities also come Jones' way at a local auto parts store, where he works about 46 hours a week.

"At my job, I get to interact with people every day who might not be in church," Jones says. "I get a better feel for relating with the needs of others who may be in or outside the church, and that makes sharing the Gospel easier. Dealing with them on a more personal, one-on-one basis is vital to my ministry in the workplace and in church."

Depending on the needs of his church, Jones does ministry work anywhere from 18 to 30 hours that same week.

"It's a lot of time away from home," he admits, "but I'm blessed with a wife who's very understanding and gives me more than 100 percent support in my ministry."

One way Jones squeezes more juice out of his available hours is by taking a change of clothes with him to work so that he doesn't have to go home first before ministering on weekday afternoons and evenings. "Sometimes I'll drive 45 miles to speak at another church or to troubled people in need," he says, adding that his boss, a Gideon, is understanding about Jones needing to leave work early for hospital visits out of town.

And while the needs and crises never seem to diminish, Jones remembers when his mobile dressing-room methods were cause for a huge, hysterical misunderstanding. "Someone came up and asked me, 'Is there a problem at home? We see you with clothes in your car all the time,'" he recalls with a wry laugh. "I explained everything. I'm thankful for everywhere I have to go."

Matt Smith: 'I Just Started Witnessing...'

Matt Smith makes no bones about the perks of working for one of the nicest gyms in San Diego. "I wish I could tell you that being a personal trainer was a noble cause, but the fact is that it's a luxurious gym, and I make \$90 an hour," he notes with a chuckle. "But being there has given me a platform for ministry."

In fact, The Sporting Club, where Smith trains others, has served as an incubator for his congregation, Barabbas Road Church in San Diego.

"I just started witnessing at my work," Smith, 30, recalls. "One of my co-workers accepted the Lord, went on a mission trip to Uganda and led people to Christ. Others came to Christ at the club, too. Isn't that what flipped Ephesus upside down? People getting saved and getting disciplined?" For the next year and a half, Smith says, more Christians were populating the club—the very people who'd come to Barabbas Road's first service in February 2008.

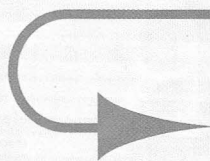
For Smith, bivocational ministry has been rewarding—and challenging. "I schedule my appointments back to back, and you have to really run to do that," he says.

After his gym duties, Smith works out himself for an hour (he's training for a triathlon), then sometimes attends a seminary class (he's pursuing his Master of Divinity degree), then it's home by 7 p.m., time with his family, mining through e-mails, quiet time with God and in bed by 1 or 2 a.m.

"I struggle with bivocational ministry," Smith admits. "It's very hard. I'm torn."

He'd love, for example, to spend more time discipling his best-known church member, Mosab Hassan Yousef—the son of a Hamas leader. On a trip to Jerusalem, Barabbas Road members shared their faith with Yousef. That brief encounter eventually led him to Christ—and to San Diego to live and worship with the friends who introduced him to Jesus.

"Joseph [Yousef's nickname] was the most significant conversion from Islam to Christianity in the last 1,400 years," Smith says. "I'd love to be able to give more of my time to discipling him."



Time management. For most pastors walking in

two worlds, time management ranks at the top of their "challenges" list. And with hours clearly split between two jobs, it's not hard to understand why it's such a universal concern.

Bickers identifies five areas of a bivocational pastor's life that always must remain in balance: relationship with God; relationship with family; relationship with the church; relationship with the secular job; and self-care.

"If any area's out of balance with the others, the pastor suffers, the pastor's family suffers, and the church suffers," Bickers emphasizes. "It's a balancing act that can be hard to manage, but it has to be."

Even though Matt Smith puts CEO's through their workout paces at The Sporting Club only two days a week, he struggles on those days to keep ministry-related duties at bay—and vice versa.

"It's like today, Friday, is one of my big sermon days where I go away and wrestle with God. Yet I have to go back to the gym and fill out my payroll," he explains.

LeHew adds: "You wish you had more time to do things you think are more important. It's hard to have a job outside the church and have a family. . . . There are a lot of late nights. Even if you're officially a part-time paid minister, you're really full-time in your psyche."

Lack of respect. In other words, the "you're not a real pastor" stigma. Much like the unseemly named rent-a-cops who slap badges on their shirts and patrol concert halls and sporting events for a few hours a night, bivocational pastors are often viewed as rent-a-pastors who do little more than fill pulpits for a few hours on Sundays.

"People look at you and wonder if you were 'really called' because you're something 'less than' a 'real' minister," Bickers says. "Even bivocational pastors themselves can begin to think that way."

Lack of models and training. As part of Bickers' current occupation—area minister with the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky—he once contacted leaders of various denominations around the country and asked them two questions: "What does bivocational ministry look like for you?" and "What are you doing about it?"

"They all said that bivocational ministry is increasing," Bickers recalls, "and they all said they really don't know what to do about it. They have no systematic way of identifying the problems, issues and challenges bivocational ministers are fac-

ing. Some offered training, but that depended on geographic area."

Bickers adds that many churches with bivocational ministers are locked into a maintenance mindset rather than a missional mindset."

"We need to help them begin to feel good about who they are. The key is them identifying the purpose in their communities and figuring out how to fulfill that, which is a challenge."

The Bivocational Leader of the Future

If the Church is going to plant the number of churches it needs to reach the world, the bivocational element will be an essential part of fulfilling the Great Commission, says Todd Wilson, director of Exponential Network, an alliance of church-planting networks.

"We're not going to get where we need to go in terms of an actual church-planting movement in the West without the bivocational piece," he explains.

But the current model of bivocational ministry will have to be different, Wilson says, as he relates an emerging idea among church leaders that megachurches would become the distribution system for incarnational church planting in America.

"When we talk about bivocational ministry, there are so many dimensions to it," Wilson says. "The bivocational of the future is not going to be about pay; it will be about role and releasing people to do ministry where they are. For example, I live 40 minutes from the church I attend. I'm not going to convince my neighbors to drive 40 minutes to church with me. What if my church equips, coaches and supports me to start a church in my living room? I don't quit my current paying job, but my church releases and sends me to minister to my neighbors and essentially be a campus pastor.

"There is no way to start talking about all models of faster church reproduction without talking about the bivocational piece because there's no way we can reproduce the pastors we need using the paid staff model. We're definitely looking at the future. With that kind of mindset changing among these leaders of high-impact churches and the incarnational community—there's no way this is not a God thing." ✕

ONLINE: WesternMountainsChurch.com; JourneyChurchMd.com; WholsBarabbas.com; CouncilValleyBaptist.org; BivocationalMinistries.com; ExponentialNetwork.com

*A freelance writer based in Princeton, N.J., Dave Urbanski also serves as senior developmental editor for *Youth Specialties* and is the author of *The Man Comes Around: The Spiritual Journey of Johnny Cash* (Relevant).*