

Executive Summary of the Study of Bivocationality Task Force Report

I. Background and mandate

Following work by the Council of Delegates with regard to bivocational pastors, Synod 2019 appointed a task force with a mandate to create a definition of bivocationality; give biblical support to bivocationality; address financial implications and responsibilities relative to church, classis, pastor, and the like; and consider classical oversight, cultural differences, and Church Order implications.

II. Stories from the CRC

Five stories of bivocational and other nontraditional ministry arrangements involving six pastors are shared. These stories show some of the varied experiences in the CRCNA today.

III. Biblical, theological, and historical support

A brief survey of the ministries God's people are called to support through their tithing shows three purposes: festive celebrations in God's presence, provision for the material needs of the priests and Levites, and assistance for the vulnerable and needy. Thus churches are called to support their ministers along with worship and care for the needy. The New Testament upholds the practice of providing for ministers through the generosity of God's people. The apostle Paul, however, chose to work at times in bivocational ministry as a tentmaker, even though it was his right to have his needs provided for. In doing so, Paul was able to embrace missional opportunities while not being a financial burden to the congregations he was planting. In this way Paul distinguished himself from traveling teachers and philosophers who taught for fees, and he modeled the godliness and dignity of work, especially physical labor. These same purposes support bivocational ministry today.

Church history reveals unity and diversity in applying these biblical principles. The CRC has historically been able to use its tithes to support its pastors, noting that "laborers are worthy of their hire" (see Luke 10:7 [KJV]; Matt. 10:10). The task force does not believe that we ought to change this value but adapt it to make room for churches and ministers to live out new, diverse arrangements of ministerial vocation.

IV. Definitions

In order to define *bivocationality*, one needs to account for multiple callings from God, financial dynamics, accountability dynamics, and use of time and energy in multiple settings. The task force suggests the following definition: "*Bivocationality* is the arrangement in which a pastor spends time and energy working for compensation and is accountable to another in addition to the setting in which s/he has been called to minister."

We note that there are multiple nontraditional pastoral arrangements that do not fit the above definition. The report outlines various types of nontraditional arrangements and mentions them at various points in the report. We also note that there is no such thing as a *part-time pastor*, only part-time arrangements. Every pastor is fully and at all times the pastor of the community they have been called to serve.

V. Cultural and contextual considerations: what is, what will be, and why it matters

Although bivocational ministry is relatively rare within churches of the CRCNA that are monoethnic and middle class, the same is not true among our churches that reach ethnic minorities and economically challenged communities. Congregational ethnicity, the newness of a church, and the level of economic challenges facing the supporting community are key indicators of increased levels of bivocational leadership within the CRCNA today. The percentage of pastors working bivocationally in the CRCNA will likely radically increase in the coming years for various reasons.

The current experience of bivocational ministry and its expected increase present us with the challenges and opportunities of proper care for bivocational and other nontraditional pastors, including financial care, quality of life, and call satisfaction. The CRC can help confront these challenges by helping pastors discern their calling for bivocational ministry, balance ongoing bivocational ministry, prevent breakdown, and learn from breakdowns that occur.

Bivocationality provides a transformational and creative opportunity for the CRC. Bivocational pastors can have greater incarnational witness, help create organic flourishing for congregations, help to provide “ecclesiological toughness” for small and underfunded congregations as they weather stormy times, and provide missiological flexibility required for particular contexts.

VI. Council and classis oversight

The report includes recommendations that encourage supervising councils to plan for proper support in the calling process and to review bivocational and other nontraditional ministry arrangements on an annual basis to see if any changes need to be made. Church visitors are urged to ensure the health and welfare of the church’s ministry and all of its pastors, including bivocational and commissioned pastors (i.e., that they have “proper support”).

VII. Financial considerations

It is the responsibility of the calling church and classis to ensure that all pastors have “proper support” through a support plan. This includes financial matters such as a living salary, health insurance, disability insurance, pension and other retirement considerations, classis student aid fund loans, and other benefits.

VIII. Church Order considerations

Sections of the Church Order treat bivocational ministers and pastors in other nontraditional ministerial situations as exceptions to the rule rather than as normal. The task force recommends various changes to the Church Order to normalize and support nontraditional ministry arrangements. Changes are proposed for Church Order Article 14-d and Article 15 and its supplement. Also proposed are a new Article 23-d and its supplement.

IX. Postscript, recommendations, and appendix

After expressing gratitude for pastors serving in bivocational or other nontraditional arrangements, the task force submits to synod a number of recommendations. An appendix of online resources is also included.