

A Brief Report

“The Bi-Vocational (Multi-Vocational) Specific Ministry Pastor”

Introduction

When you first announced your intention to pursue seminary studies to become a pastor and to simultaneously work in a current or a new part-time or full-time secular job as you studied, perhaps some looked at you in bewilderment. Perhaps some even commented quite pointedly, “Are you sure you’re making a good decision? Something will have to give somewhere under such a heavy load. You could easily fail.”

As a seminary student who also worked a full-time secular job as I attended the seminary, I recall receiving some of those same sorts of comments and looks. As I continued in bi-vocational ministry for decades thereafter, the challenges did, indeed, come, and, yes, some of those concerns that people once expressed to me did echo in my mind and heart on more than one occasion.

However, of even more significance were the many, many benefits and blessings that came with bi-vocational ministry. To be sure the challenges are plentiful as you begin your SMP studies and cannot be minimized. However, the blessings are also substantial and deserve to be recognized. The purpose of this Brief Report is to raise awareness of both the challenges and the blessings of bi-vocational ministry and to introduce supportive strategies and resources to facilitate your bi-vocational journey as you attend to your SMP studies and prepare for the rewarding years of ministry that await you.

A Misnomer?

Let’s begin by acknowledging that the term “bi-vocational” is really a misnomer. The fact is that by virtue of the various vocational theaters and roles into which God has placed you, you are actually “multi-vocational.” Robert Kolb expressed this truth in this insightful way: “At creation God set in place for us the structure in and through which we are to care for one another. He instituted four situations in which human life takes place: the situations of home, occupation, society, and congregation (the Family Community, the Economic Community, the Civic Community, and the Faith Community)...Within each of these situations God assigns specific responsibilities.”

Given your current multi-vocational roles, the assumption of your SMP studies (including your role as an SMP vicar) together with the continuation of your “secular” job or career, means that your vocational roles are about to be modified. Your SMP studies do not remove you from your other vocational roles or arenas; rather, your new roles can substantially challenge how you will successfully balance your multiple vocational roles. So, you see, it’s not really a strictly “bi-vocational” life you now live; indeed, you are now experiencing a substantial modification to your “multi-vocational” life.

This may at first seem to be a minor technical clarification. However, this insight is much more. It helps us better conceptualize both the challenges and the blessings that are now before you. On the one hand, this means that the Lord will continue to faithfully serve you through these four respective vocational theaters and through the roles others play in your life in the respective theaters. On the other hand, it means that you will be a blessing to others through each of your vocational roles, including your newly expanded vocational roles, and that balancing these roles and responsibilities will likely present you with significant challenges.

However, before digging in deeper into the likely challenges and blessings that await you as a “multi-vocational” SMP student and vicar, let’s eavesdrop further on the Lord’s perspective.

The Lord’s Multiple Vocational Roles

Although God instituted the four vocational situations in which human life takes place, mankind’s fall into sin rendered life in each vocational community fraught with profound imperfections and struggles. These imperfections and struggles continued from generation to generation, and faced with an inevitable and an eternal death separated from God, the helplessness of each person was duly recorded in each conscience and in the annals of history.

God looked with mercy upon our fallen nature and on our resultant helplessness in each vocational theater. His mercy became flesh and dwelt among us as the fulfillment of His salvation promise: “God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” (2 Corinthians 5:19) The Lord saw people in a unique way and acted decisively on our behalf: “When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36)

Jesus’ compassionate victory over sin, death, and the devil on our behalf did not signal the cessation of God’s merciful care for us. Jesus’ “multi-vocational” roles continued and faithfully continue this day: “As our Prophet He sends people to proclaim the saving Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit; as our Priest He pleads and prays for us before the Father; and as our King He rules and protects His church and governs over all the world especially for the benefit of the church.”

Rest assured of our Ascended Lord’s continual service to you, your family, your professors, your fellow students, your pastoral mentor, your congregation, and your employer. As you take comfort in His multiple vocational roles and works, rejoice in the truth and the assurance that your multi-vocational roles are the vehicles through which He brings His precious blessing to others. So fortified, we pray, “Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

Sobering Challenges

You probably don't have to look very far or to think very long to recognize the many challenges of bi-vocational ministry, i.e., when a pastor serves a congregation part-time or full-time and simultaneously works part-time or full-time in a secular job. As if those challenges aren't enough (and these are spoken of in numerous research studies), consider this next situation: enrolled in seminary studies, serving as a part-time or full-time vicar, and simultaneously working part-time or full-time in a secular job. That's a heavy load! Then add to that vocational load the responsibilities of numerous other vocational roles in the family, in the community... You get the point - a very sobering point and with very sobering challenges.

Although there may be only a very few anecdotal reports of the vocational stressors that come with the specific workload you have now chosen for yourself, the formal research does help us better understand the strictly bi-vocational ministry. As described in the previous paragraph, this is the situation where a pastor serves a congregation part-time or full-time and simultaneously has a part-time or full-time secular job. Among the stressors cited in the formal literature are these:

- *limited congregational funding
- *attempting to meet full-time ministry expectations with only part-time hours
- *the endless struggles to get everything done
- *absence from denominational meetings and pastoral supports because there is just not enough time
- *unrealistic expectations by your congregation
- *unrealistic expectations you place on yourself
- *feelings of doubt and inadequacy
- *unpredictable flow of work
- *24/7 availability to parishioners
- *responsibility for mentoring and recruiting
- *required physical presence at the church during certain hours, days
- *sleep deprivation due to working long hours and more often late at night
- *lack of recuperative rest from a busy schedule
- *subtle denominational stigma toward bi-vocational pastors
- *obtaining and retaining meaningful secular employment

*meeting expectations at your secular job

*feelings of guilt for possibly neglecting marriage and family needs and expectations

Stop now in your reading and list the challenges you anticipate during your seminary years. Next, list the challenges you anticipate after your seminary years. Compare and contrast your two lists. What similarities do you see? What differences?

Next, ask your spouse and your pastoral mentor, respectively, to complete this same exercise and to share their lists with you. How do their lists compare or differ from your lists?

Next, ask your congregational leaders to complete this same exercise and to share their lists with you. How do their lists compare or differ from your lists?

Although it's impossible to identify every challenge you will ever encounter, taking stock of your perspectives and comparing your perspectives with those who care for you helps to build an initial awareness. This also helps to establish a foundation for ongoing assessments and essential communication practices.

Genuine Blessings

Although bi-vocational ("multi-vocational") ministry may have its share of challenges, this model of ministry also has a number of genuine blessings. For example, Smith (2014) brings us these pertinent conclusions:

Bi-vocational ministry is a profession of honor, worthy of respect and support by denominations, seminaries, parishioners, and fellow pastors.

The need for bi-vocational pastors will continue to grow.

Bi-vocational pastors need to be efficient in time management to balance their relationship with God, their families, work and people at church, secondary work, and their health.

Bi-vocational pastors need to take care of themselves spiritually, physically, emotionally, and intellectually as they trust in God's faithful care and leading.

Bi-vocational pastors must continue to preach, teach, lead, and train church members as loving and caring shepherds, carefully watching over their spiritual needs.

Being a bi-vocational pastor is hard work. Even though bi-vocational pastors struggle and have feelings of doubt and inadequacy, they are successful in their ministry.

Many bi-vocational pastors have a unique opportunity to be used missiologically to reach people in their second profession or community with the Gospel.

That's a great deal of information to digest, isn't it? However, you can see that in his research Smith has been able to identify both challenges and blessings. Let's take some time to enumerate

further on the many blessings that have been identified through research and through anecdotal sharing. Consider these thoughts regarding bi-vocational ministry. Bi-vocational ministry

- * gives you the opportunity to simultaneously develop two skill sets and two knowledge sets and to creatively apply these respective insights in both settings
- * opens doors for you to meet, socialize with, and develop friendships with people from a variety of religious, ethnic, and political persuasions
- * provides a certain “freshness” in perspective and outlook in moving back and forth from one vocational activity to another
- * allows for the ready transfer of experience between settings
- * provides numerous opportunities to share the Gospel and to learn from those of other faith traditions
- * gives you a pleasant satisfaction from serving effectively in different settings and with a variety of needs
- * helps give you a sense of enhanced financial security, knowing that you don’t depend upon just a single source of income
- * broadens your understanding and appreciation for a variety of vocational roles
- * enhances your sense of empathy for workers, their needs and their struggles
- * provides you with a sense of “mental flexibility”
- * enhances your creativity in problem solving
- * enhances your skills such as listening, use of language, and generally communicating clearly with a variety of people
- * strengthens your time management skills

Stop now in your reading and list the blessings you anticipate during your seminary years. Next, list the blessings you anticipate after your seminary years. Compare and contrast your two lists. What similarities do you see? What differences?

Next, ask your spouse and your pastoral mentor, respectively, to complete this same exercise and to share their lists with you. How do their lists compare or differ from your lists?

Next, ask your congregational leaders to complete this same exercise and to share their lists with you. How do their lists compare or differ from your lists?

Next, ask your supervisor in your secular job to complete this same exercise and to share their lists with you. How do their lists compare or differ from the other lists?

Although it's impossible to identify every blessing you will ever receive as a bi-vocational minister, taking stock of your perspectives and comparing your perspectives with those who care for you helps to build an initial awareness, anticipation, and recognition of blessings. This will help lay the foundation for ongoing reflections.

Strategic Thinking and Acting Going Forward

“Vocational Communities”

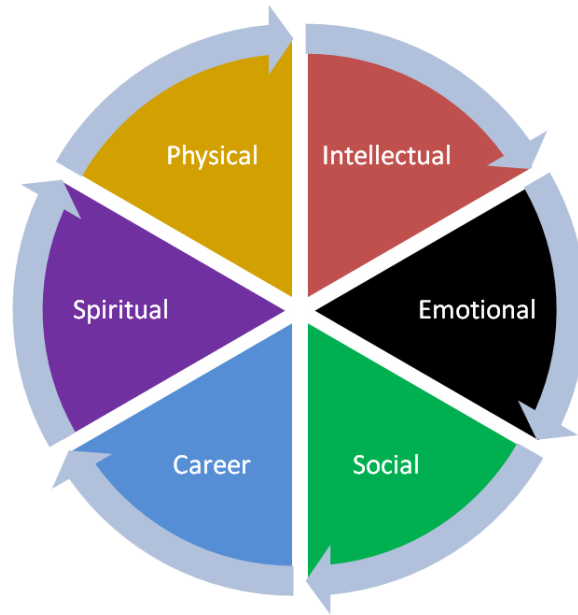
Before we begin to explore some practical insights to facilitate your transition into SMP studies and your ongoing growth as your vocational roles expand, let's revisit Kolb's insightful presentation of our vocational theaters or communities. This fine summary was presented earlier in this Brief Report. Kolb notes that there are four vocational communities (theaters, arenas) into which God has placed us. Through these respective vocational communities the Lord delivers blessings to us and through us to others.

- Consider the Family Community. What roles do you currently have? Husbands? Father? Son? Uncle?
- Next, consider the roles you presently have in the Faith Community. These roles include SMP student and vicar.
- Next, consider the roles you presently have in the Economic Community. These roles now include employee by virtue of your job in your secular service.
- Finally, consider the roles you have in the Civic Community. These roles include citizen, voter, etc.

The numerous vocational roles you have indicate that you are “multi-vocational.” When you begin your SMP studies, your roles in the Faith Community will significantly expand. Simultaneously, your roles in the other vocational communities will likely continue to a significant degree, but perhaps with modest adjustments or curtailments.

“Wellness Wheel”

Just as Kolb's template helps you gain a perspective of your numerous vocational roles, the next significant template helps you gain a perspective of your overall well-being. This “Wellness Wheel” has been formulated by many researchers over the years. It deserves our careful attention. Here it is:



The respective wellness areas do not require any elaboration at this point. Each is clearly named, and each area interacts with the others.

As you transition into your SMP studies and strive to efficiently balance your vocational roles across the vocational communities, it's helpful to use the "Wellness Wheel" as one tool to help you monitor and successfully navigate the life change you have now chosen.

"Resilience Portfolio"

One helpful way to utilize the Wellness Wheel is the "The Resilience Portfolio." The principles underlying the use of this tool are straightforward. First, identify the resources you presently leverage in each Wellness Domain. For example, in Physical Wellness you could include such resources as adequate housing, financial security, adequate sleep, a healthy diet, good medical care, exercise, and any prescribed medications you may take. As another example, in the Emotional Wellness Domain your current resources could include the support you give to and receive from your significant others, perhaps mental health counseling, life coaching, and the like. The Resilience Portfolio can be a simple, yet significantly helpful, way for you to first list the resources and their respective degree of intensity you presently leverage for your wellbeing; and second, to list those resources (including any new resources you may anticipate needing to use) and the likely intensity you anticipate needing from these resources as you experience the changes you have made in your vocational roles.

For example, upon assuming your new role as a student and as a vicar (as you continue your part-time or full-time employment in your secular job) you may see yourself needing to invest

more time and attention to your Social Wellness. In addition, perhaps you anticipate needing more time and attention paid to your Physical Wellness.

Pause now and complete your “Resilience Portfolio” on a separate piece of paper. Step One: List each wellness area and the resources you currently leverage in each respective domain and the extent to which you utilize these respective resources. Step Two: List the resources (including any new resources) you feel you may need to leverage and the extent to which you may need to utilize these respective resources as you begin and continue your SMP duties.

Revisit this exercise periodically. Your insights into your wellness needs, your flexibility, your honesty with yourself, and your success in procuring the pertinent resources that are essential to your wellbeing as an SMP vicar will prepare you with wellness insights and habits well beyond your seminary years.

Other Suggestions

*Know your “Work Values” and those of other people with whom you serve in: a. your congregation; and b. in your secular job. The construct of “Work Values” helps identify a set of standards that help determine a person’s vocational attitudes, choices, and actions. Mapping value priorities can help lay important groundwork for making sound career decisions that fit one’s unique pattern of values, interests, and skills. The assessment tool that is suggested asks you to select (from a list of 75 potential work values) your top 10 work values and then asks you to also briefly define each respective work value. Because your work values may differ by context (e.g., congregational setting vs. employment setting) complete this two-page exercise (appended to this Brief Report) for each of these two settings. After doing so, compare and contrast your lists. What insights about yourself have you gained? How important are your work values to you? Update your results from time to time; work values can change. You may also find it quite helpful to ask your congregational leaders and your pastoral mentor to complete this same two-page tool about themselves and to share their results with you. Take time to consider the insights you have acquired through this tool. This may help establish a good foundation for mutual understanding, good communication, and teamwork.

*Strive to enhance your time management skills. Confer with others, and gain from their own effective practices.

*Ask for additional relief or allowances from one profession to support the other. For example, schedule some time off from work or from your congregational duties to adequately prepare for final exams.

*Revisit your DISC assessment that was administered during your on-campus orientation week. Be aware of your personality preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. Ask yourself: “How compatible are my personality preferences and strengths with my service as a vicar and my work in my secular job?” “What, if any, potential adjustments may be indicated?”

*Know the expectations your congregation has of you. Know the expectations your secular employer has of you. Ask yourself, “Are these expectations realistic? Are my expectations of myself realistic? What changes, if any, are necessary?”

*As you pursue your seminary studies, consult the Brief Report “Collaborative Learning in the SMP Model” and draw on the insights you will find there.

*Remember this adage: “Periodic self-evaluation prevents obsessive self-preoccupation.” Simply put, get into the habit of self-awareness and self-monitoring. Periodically (perhaps with the help of your pastoral mentor) take stock of your overall progress and health as you embrace your vocational roles and responsibilities (e.g., your family obligations, your SMP studies, your vicarage duties, your employment responsibilities...)

These suggestions are simply offered to you as thought starters. Please feel free to expand upon this list as you see fit and please share your insights with us.

Closing Thoughts

As you begin (or continue) to simultaneously take up your SMP studies, your duties as a vicar, your secular employment, and your numerous other vocational roles in the Family Community, the Civic Community, the Faith Community, and the Economic Community you are, in truth, not merely bi-vocational but you are multi-vocational. The numerous challenges in performing such roles can seem overwhelming at times; however, the blessings in doing so also deserve recognition. Of foremost importance, however, is the assurance of your Lord’s multi-vocational status, serving you faithfully as Prophet, Priest, and King. Rejoice in His commitment to you and the many supportive people and resources He will bring to bear on your life and for your well-being as His child. Rev. Jan Case, 2026

Helpful References

Hewlett, S.A. & Luce, C.B., *Extreme Jobs: The Dangerous Allure of the 70-Hour Workweek. Harvard Business Review*, December 2006.

Kolb, R. *Speaking the Gospel Today*. Concordia Publishing House, 1995.

Lundquist, D.J. *Bi-Vocational Ministry: What Works from the Perspective of Bi-Vocational Ministers and Their Congregants*, *Lancaster Theological Seminary*, 2019.

Smith, G.H., *Effective Strategies for Bi-Vocational Ministry*, *Talbot School of Theology*, 2014.

Stephens, D.W. *Preparing to Educate for a Thriving Bi-Vocational Ministry: A Seminary Case Study*, *Religions*, 12, 2021.

Appendix: “Work Values Exercise”