

A Brief Report

“The ‘Second Career’ Specific Ministry Pastor”

Introduction

Welcome you to the SMP program! As a “second career” seminarian and vicar you bring experience, skills, and maturity to your congregation, to your District, to your fellow SMP students, and to your faculty. Choosing to reenter the workforce through the SMP program will prove to be a significant next chapter in your ongoing career journey.

The purpose of this Brief Report is to enhance your SMP studies and the performance of your concurrent congregational duties as your God-blessed formation for pastoral ministry continues in earnest. This Brief Report will offer thoughts and insights regarding the numerous blessings of second career ministry and will also engage you in thoughtful reflection regarding the potential challenges you may encounter in your studies and concurrent service as a vicar. As we welcome you, we also eagerly welcome your own insights. We heartily encourage you to generously share these with your numerous learning partners in the SMP program. Welcome aboard!

Support and Guidance from the Lord of the Church

Jesus was certainly no stranger to second career students of the ministry and the challenges such students often encountered. In fact, it was through His direct call that His first disciples came to make the life-changing transition from their respective secular occupations to join the Lord in proclaiming the Word of God. The Gospels carefully record that Jesus called the disciples, taught the disciples, and faithfully cared for His disciples. Furthermore, Jesus equipped His disciples for service in His Kingdom and bestowed on them the gift of His Holy Spirit. The Lord’s words and deeds reflected His compassion for all people and, in the case of His disciples, His compassionate care for “second career” ministers of His Word.

This not only teaches you about the Savior’s care for His disciples of yesteryear; this also teaches you about the Savior’s faithful care for you as you embark upon the next chapter in your life of service as His precious child. As He took care to teach the disciples through His words and actions, so He will be there for you. As He cared for His disciples through His restorative grace and merciful reinstatement when they came up short in their understanding and actions, so the Savior will be there for you with this same restorative grace. As He gave to them the gift of His Holy Spirit, so He has seen fit to bestow upon you through Holy Baptism this same divine gift of comfort, guidance, peace, and fellowship. As He assured them, “I am with you always,” so He brings this same joyful news to you. With joy we echo the words of the beloved hymnwriter, “Jesus has come as the King of all glory! Heaven and earth, O, declare His great pow’r, Capturing hearts with the heavenly story; Welcome Him now in this fast-fleeting hour! Ponder His love! Take the crown He has for you! Jesus has come! He, the King of all glory!”

Scenarios to Ponder

Jim has worked as an executive at a large oil company for many years and retired last December. He has been active in his church for many years and is highly regarded by his fellow parishioners. Jim's pastor recently accepted a call to a larger congregation. Consequently, the congregation, relatively small now in terms of its membership in a transitioning community, has approached Jim about entering the SMP program and upon ordination accepting their call as pastor. Jim's wife is also supportive of this new opportunity of service for Jim. Jim has many years of experience serving as the head of a major department at work and his former position with the oil company has developed work skills such as hiring, firing, budgeting, and overall management. Jim has been zealous throughout his career and has never been timid about executing his authority in order to get the job done correctly. However, Jim wonders if his skills and style of administration will work effectively in the congregation as, first, a vicar, and then, God-willing, as pastor. What do you think?

Chuck has served his congregation as a Sunday School teacher, a trustee, and elder. He is well-loved by the congregation and has served humbly and lovingly, getting along with all members with his quiet and rather unassuming manner. Chuck retired from his job as an assistant manager at a local grocery store and has recently been nominated by his congregation to enter the SMP program. Since Chuck "gets along with everyone" he seems to be a logical choice to be their pastor. However, in love, Chuck's wife has raised one nagging thought: "Chuck, your role is about to change at the church. Some people may not see you as a pastor or even as a vicar, but only as someone who is supposed to please them and do their work for them. Are you concerned in any way about this possibility? I am." What do you think?

Robert has been endorsed by his congregation, recommended by his District, and now has been accepted by the seminary to begin his SMP studies. As a "second career" student who is now retired from his secular career at the shipyard, Robert will simultaneously serve as vicar in the vacant congregation as he begins his coursework. However, as a somewhat older student, Robert is concerned about his ability to take on the student role and successfully meet the demanding course of studies that awaits him. He confides to his wife, Ann, "It's been a few years since I practiced the discipline required of a student. I hope I can blow the dust off my brain and my study skills and get this done. The church is counting on me to succeed. To be honest, Ann, I'm feeling anxious already and a bit overwhelmed." What do you think?

At this time take a few minutes and list some of the key issues in each respective scenario. Ask your pastoral mentor or your spouse what they identify as key issues. Compare and contrast your lists. What counsel would you offer to these three respective SMP students?

Many, Many Opportunities and Blessings

Your SMP studies, your service as a second career vicar, and eventually your service as a second career pastor will be accompanied by challenges and blessings. Before pondering some of the

potential challenges you may face, let's first consider some of the many blessings that await you and the blessings you bring to others.

As a second career SMP student and vicar you bring a wealth of transferable experiences, skills, and knowledge to others. Consider these insights that researchers have noted.

- The second career minister brings a wide range of transferable experiences, skills, and knowledge that have been honed through previous work experiences.
- Depending upon the nature of one's previous career, specific transferrable skills and knowledge could include planning and management skills, financial management skills, and human relations skills such as communication skills and conflict resolution skills.
- The second career minister brings an enhanced sense of personal maturity and self-knowledge.
- The second career minister likely brings such personnel management skills as selection and training of staff.
- The second career minister often has a sense of enhanced financial security and even health care benefits.
- The second career minister brings a sense of family and marriage stability.
- The second career minister has developed clear "work values."
- The second career minister possesses an informed knowledge of his relative interpersonal strengths and weaknesses.
- The second career minister usually has a clear sense of vocational interests and an awareness of those things that bring him a sense of vocational fulfillment.

As you review this list, what items seem especially significant to you? What items would you add to this list?

Potential Challenges

Researchers (as well as anecdotal insights regarding second career pastors) have also raised several potential challenges that the second career minister may encounter. These include:

- difficulties when one's work style does not match the congregational context

- the temptation to view the congregation as merely an extension of previous work settings without recognizing the uniqueness of the congregational setting and the need to adjust one's work habits, work personality, work values, and expectations as needed
- the 24/7 availability to parishioners
- as an older student, efficiently adjusting one's study habits and skills to meet the rigorous demands of seminary level studies
- developing collaborative decision-making practices
- collaboratively formulating realistic expectations for yourself and the congregation
- developing flexibility as a member of a congregational team
- welcoming and accepting criticism without harboring resentments toward other members of the congregation
- feeling comfortable being accountable to the congregation and to its leaders
- developing a sense of "proper timing" in making changes
- a willingness to listen, learn, and make the necessary changes in your conduct
- recognizing and effectively managing any significant health-related issues that may evidence themselves in you as you grow older

This list is by no means all-inclusive, but it does serve to alert you to the variety of challenges that second career pastors have encountered. Take a few minutes now and review this list again. What issues seem to be especially significant for you? Ask your pastoral mentor and your spouse to review this list and to share their own thoughts with you about potential concerns. What concerns would you add to this list?

Helpful Suggestions for the Second Career SMP Vicar

Whew! Given the many prospective challenges you may encounter as you make the transition into your second career studies and roles, you may be feeling somewhat overwhelmed. In this section of the Brief Report, you will become acquainted with several suggestions to help manage many of those challenges. These are suggestions; please add generously to these thought-starters, and, as you do so, please share your thoughts with us.

Build Collaborative Relationships

One prominent theme that stood out in the list of potential challenges was “collaboration.” Lacking strong collaborative relationships with your partners in your SMP studies or with your congregation members could prove to be extremely troublesome and most disheartening - for all. Let’s begin by considering a few practical suggestions for enhancing collaboration.

Share Opportunities, Blessings, and Challenges

In this Brief Report you previously pondered many of the potential opportunities, blessings, and challenges associated with your second career pursuits. The insights from researchers, together with your own insights and those of your pastoral mentor and spouse, likely initiated some thoughts regarding these matters. In addition, the three sample “SMP Second Career” scenarios previously offered in this Brief Report hopefully helped serve to raise potential concerns and to stimulate some initial thoughts and possible strategies about how to successfully navigate many of these concerns.

One initial way to initiate collaborative reflections between yourself and your congregation is to revisit these scenarios and these respective lists. Eagerly invite their thoughts and eagerly share your own reflections. Doing so will help lay the foundation for ongoing collaboration and assist you and your congregation in clarifying expectations, developing meaningful and realistic goals, and helping set the tone to express mutual concerns going forward. Such a winsome and sincere initial sharing of ideas, needs, and perceptions (and the commitment to have ongoing discussions about such essential matters) will be of mutual value to all partners in the Gospel. Taking the time to allow these conversations to occur will set the tone for ongoing mutual conversations, support, understanding, and decision making.

Engage in Collaborative Learning

As previously noted, when we carefully review the list of potential challenges in second career ministry, one dominant theme that emerges is the need for collaboration. Your transition back into the student role and concurrently assuming the vicar role will likely necessitate many collaborative discussions between you and your congregation. These collaborative efforts could focus on such matters as roles, expectations, decision-making, communication, work style, work schedule, your benefits package (including such matters as salary, tuition assistance, vacation time, etc.) and a host of other matters.

Another helpful strategy inherently available to you through the SMP program of studies is collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is the focus of another Brief Report regarding the SMP program, and it is recommended that you consult that Report to learn more about collaborative learning and how to design and manage it in and with your congregation. By way of summarization and for the purposes of this present Brief Report, consider these thoughts:

Collaborative Learning with Your Congregation

- Develop effective ways to include the entire congregation (or a specific subset of the congregation such as your church council, Board of Elders, youth, Bible study groups...) in your studies. Consider strategies such as presenting a concise written or oral summary report at the conclusion of each course (or unit within a given course) regarding class content, insights, and possible applications in the ministry of the congregation, in the lives of your members, and to others in your community.
- Take steps to otherwise creatively and effectively engage your congregation in your studies and the ongoing formation of your knowledge and pastoral skills. For example, prepare a brief study on the basis of each course for members to study and thoughtfully ponder as your partners in the work of the Kingdom. Consider developing a series of brief podcasts that would serve this same purpose.
- Enlist congregational participation in the formation of learning goals they may have for your SMP program of studies and for themselves. Take the effort to revisit these throughout your course of studies and, thereby, further facilitate the active participation of your learning partners. This practice could also sow seeds for others in your congregation to one day pursue seminary studies.

As you can begin to appreciate, collaborative learning strategies can help set the tone for your relationship with your congregation as you work your way through your respective SMP courses. In addition, such collaborative skills and habits can be readily leveraged to help you and your congregation winsomely and constructively address many, many other matters that are of importance in the congregation's ministry and help demonstrate your partnership in the Gospel. Give this matter careful consideration.

Identify and Respect "Work Values"

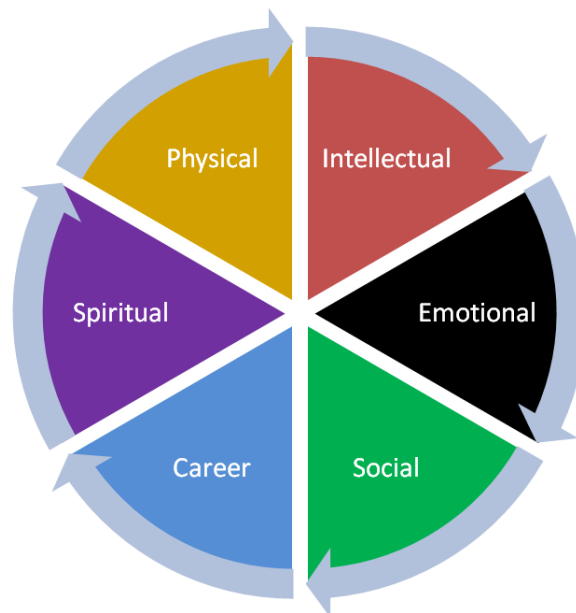
Work values play a very important role in one's work satisfaction. Your work values have been formed through a variety of your work experiences. Through these many experiences you have come to learn what are the most significant variables for your work satisfaction. In the same way, the members of your congregation and its leadership also have a set of work values. Many of these may coincide with your own, although some may be quite different.

Research has shown that identifying your essential work values and communicating these to your fellow workers in the Kingdom (and their sharing of their work values with you and one another) is also a valuable part of building strong collaborative relationships and for developing an appreciation for others with whom they are serving. 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 decisions that fit one's unique pattern of values, interests, and skills.

The assessment tool that is suggested in this Brief Report 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 values. The two-page “Work Values” exercise is appended to this Brief Report. After you and your congregational leaders complete this exercise, compare and contrast your respective lists. Ask, “What insights about yourself and others have you gained? What insights have others in the congregation gained about you as a second career vicar and as an aspiring pastor to them? How can you recognize the respective work values of one another and constructively incorporate these into strengthening your partnership in the Gospel?”

Strive to Maintain Your Wellness

Maintaining your overall “wellness” is also an essential factor in successfully navigating the transitions into your SMP studies, your role as a second career vicar, and eventually your role as a second career pastor. However, one’s wellness can be easily neglected amidst the hustle and the bustle of ministry. The “Wellness Wheel” (in its various iterations) has been formulated by many researchers over the years. This tool can help you gain and maintain an overall perspective of your well-being. As such, this tool deserves our careful attention. Here it is:



The respective parts of the Wellness Wheel 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 attend to your well-being, the “Wellness Wheel” can be a tool to help you monitor and successfully navigate the life change you have now chosen.

Take time now to ponder each section of the Wellness Wheel. Ask yourself, “Why is each section important for my well-being?” “How does each respective section of the Wheel relate to the others?” “Why is ‘balance’ in the Wheel so important to me?”

Develop Your “Resilience Portfolio”

The Wellness Wheel tool works hand-in-hand with another helpful tool called “The Resilience Portfolio.” The principles underlying use of this tool are extremely straightforward. First, identify the resources you presently leverage in each Wellness Domain. For example, in Physical Wellness you could include resources such 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 these resources as you experience the change you have made in your vocational roles.

For example, upon assuming your new role as a student and as a second career vicar 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 move forward in your SMP studies and congregational 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 student and vicar will prepare you with wellness insights and habits well beyond your seminary years.

Closing Thoughts

The Lord is no stranger to “second career” ministers and the many challenges they face in their learning and service. With compassion, wisdom, and faithfulness He served His second career ministers of yesteryear. With these same gifts He is at your side, ready and always eager to serve you as you embark on the next chapter of your vocational journey. Go forth with this precious assurance as you serve the Lord with gladness!

Helpful References

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Appendix: “Work Values Exercise”

Rev. Jan Case, 2026