

**Dear Reader:**

**This report from the Study of Bivocationality Task Force is made available to the CRC congregations and classes for discussion and careful review. Due to the cancellation of Synod 2021, the deadline for responses to this report, in the form of an Overture or Communication, has been extended to be considered by Synod 2022. Such documents must be processed through a church council and then through classis and then be received by the Synodical Services Office by March 15, 2022, in order to be included on synod's agenda in 2022.**

**If you have any questions regarding proper procedures, please refer to the Rules for Synodical Procedure (pp. 9-11) available at [crcna.org/SynodResources](http://crcna.org/SynodResources), or you may contact the Synodical Services Office or the executive director of the CRCNA. Thank you!**

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### I. Background and mandate

In January 2017 the CRC received a grant from the Lilly Endowment's National Initiative to address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders. The Financial Shalom Advisory Team was established in 2018 and gathered information. On April 24-25, 2018, a group of bivocational pastors, church planters, and other church leaders gathered to discuss "What Is the Future of Bivocational Ministry in the CRCNA?" "One surprise discovery during the gathering and in the report was that many pastors find that bivocational arrangements fit in well with their ministry design and their Reformed perspective. They are bivocational by choice rather than by need" (Council of Delegates Bivocational Task Force Report, May 2019).

Following this initial conversation, the Council of Delegates (COD) in the fall of 2018 put together a task force with the following mandate:

to explore the challenges and opportunities for bivocational pastors in the CRC by listening to those within and beyond the CRC in bivocational situations (both pastors and congregational leaders), identifying the opportunities of such situations, and by addressing the challenges (to preparation, to the individual, to the congregation, to the denomination). Areas of specific focus could include reconsideration of items in our Church Order to facilitate normalization of bivocational ministry, improvements in denominational databases related to ministerial status, and the like. As a result, a series of recommendations would be provided to the Council of Delegates.

—Council of Delegates Supplement, *Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 545

In May 2019 the task force presented their report identifying six areas with suggestions for the COD to consider: Church Order requirements, theological basis for bivocational ministry, practices of the denomination, contextualization between the United States and Canada, educational matters, and supporting a cultural change.

The COD concluded that a more in-depth study should be done on the topic and asked synod to appoint a synodical task force to continue the work of the Bivocational Task Force (see *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 552-53).

### II. Mandate

Synod adopted the following mandate for our task force:

[To continue] the work of the Bivocational Task Force as reported in the Council of Delegates Supplement, Appendix A [pp. 558-77], to examine what it means to be a bivocational pastor today and report to Synod 2021. The new task force will be mandated to give consideration to matters such as the following:

- Create a definition of bivocationality
- Give biblical support to bivocationality
- Address financial implications and responsibilities (clearly defined "proper support"; see Church Order Supplement, Art. 15) relative to church, classis, pastor, and the like
- Classical oversight
- Cultural differences
- Church Order implications

#### *Grounds:*

- a. A compelling biblical, theological, and historical case supporting bivocational ministry is needed.

- b. The report provides sufficient examples of issues needing review and of possible options for remedies.
- c. Addressing this issue will provide care for pastors in varying cultures and contexts.

*(Acts of Synod 2019, p. 780)*

The task force also received the following note from the executive director at the time of appointment:

In addition, the officers of synod and the advisory committee chair and reporter suggest that the task force feel free to consider other key matters that may impact a bivocational pastor, including spouses serving the same church/ministry when both are part-time, and benefit plans (e.g., retirement and insurance).

The task force is made up of the following members: Rev. Bernard Bakker (chair), Rev. John Bouwers, Pastor Beth Fellingner, Rev. Ernesto Hernandez, Ms. Sharon Jim, Rev. Michael Vander Laan (reporter), Rev. Phillip Westra (secretary), Pastor Robert Zoerman, Rev. David Koll (staff).

### **III. Stories from the CRC**

What do bivocational and other nontraditional ministry arrangements look like in the CRC? Before we get into the details of our mandate, the task force thought it would be helpful to hear some stories of the varied experiences of our pastors. This small sampling gives us a glimpse of the much broader and varied ministry arrangements present in the CRC today.

*Rev. Jose Rayas – Socorro, Texas*

“Prior to serving in ordained ministry, I studied engineering and worked on defense contracts until 1997, when I retired from that work. In 1997 I attended Westminster Seminary in California. I came to work for the CRC in 2002.

“I am a bivocational pastor with the CRC. [Jose continues to do engineering consulting.] I originally came as a church planter to El Paso, Texas. At the present time, the church is working toward moving from emerging status to organized status. However, El Paso is an economically depressed area. Because of this, the church does not pay my salary. The Borderplex is a local organization that does the fundraising for my position. Samuel Estala, on the other hand, is being paid by the church (Samuel was called from Monterey, Mexico, to come to El Paso to help the church back in 2008, and he was ordained associate pastor in 2014.) What I had done early on was to build a ministry house where the pastor could stay. This would mean a one-time investment, but the pastor would receive a smaller salary, considering that all utilities and housing are provided for him. In my personal case, I built my own home with my funds, but the Borderplex helped to find the lot and the builder. Part of my call was to raise leaders. We have several other leaders in training. But as Samuel moves up to a stronger leadership position, he will eventually become the lead pastor, and I will step away to continue efforts in raising leaders—and possibly starting new church plants with these leaders.”

*Rev. Scott Van Voorst – Sergeant Bluff, Iowa*

“I have been at an emerging church for nearly three years. While the church is just under average size for a church in the U.S., it is small for a CRC. The church has received outside support for many years. In addition to needing outside financial support, the church has a shortage of individuals

who are qualified to lead. Making a switch to an intentional bivocational team was seen as a way to increase our leadership while also getting us closer to financial sustainability without outside help. I have taken on a role as a reserve chaplain to make this possible. I want to be clear that I felt called, not pressured, to add this second role. I am only just getting into the role and haven't worked out all the kinks. That said, by the end of the year I will have my family's insurance and a retirement plan secured through a part-time job that increases my ministry connections. Getting off of RBA insurance and onto military insurance will save my family and my church enough money to cover most of the cost of bringing on a ministry intern or a bivocational second pastor. There are challenges. It doesn't appear that our structures help us find bivocational candidates, and it seems like being bivocational is seen exclusively as a negative in our denomination. I see it as a positive that increases community impact, increases pastoral relational capacity, and increases the gifts being leveraged for the ministry when it is done specifically to build a team."

*Rev. Rick Abma – Lacombe, Alberta*

"Having served as an associate pastor in four different churches, the need to address discipleship on mission seemed to be hard to do. Basically, the 'come and see' had always seemed to trump or hijack the 'go and be.' So in 2015 I resigned from my pastoral position and embarked on a missionary journey that primarily works through neighborhoods. Essentially the model is to find people to train and disciple in hopes of reaching and loving their neighbors. At the same time this started, my love for roasting coffee created a direct relationship with CRC missionaries and farmers in Central Honduras through a group called Carpenteros and Friends. This allowed for the coffee roasting to become a business, which in turn started to create funds for the missionary journey and also became a platform for the ministry. We use the retail packages to publish true stories from local neighborhoods, and we purchased an espresso bicycle (complete with umbrella), which serves a full coffee-bar drink menu at no cost when the neighborhood has a leader who has taken our training. Neighbors gather around the coffeebike with a mug in hand as we tell them why it is important to hear the message of loving one's neighbors. We do not talk about the coffee roasting business, and we remove all monetary transactions, which sets the stage for unique conversations. The training begins with a one-hour introduction and is followed by a three-hour training course, which I lead via material published in book form (*Neighbouring for Life*). We host 30 neighborhood initiatives per year, and with each neighborhood having anywhere from 10 to 80 people, those events can last a few hours. We are not trying to be literal about the term *neighbors*, but we know that we have missed many opportunities by not 'blooming where we are planted.'"

*Jennifer Burnett, Commissioned Pastor – Kelowna, British Columbia*

"I am pastoring a small church plant where I am currently employed for 20 hours a week. I began with an arrangement of 15 hours a week with an administrator working 5-10 hours a week. After she left, my hours increased because of the extra duties, which are not among my strengths. This leaves me as the only staff person for the church. We have no building for ourselves, so we rent a space for Sunday morning, and I do most of my

church work from my kitchen table. Along with this I am working toward a doctorate and parenting four children ages 4-15. The positives include having the flexibility to balance these roles, and my study and parenting both give me resources from which to teach and lead the church. The church receives fresh learning and deep reflection on the current moment—whether that be political or health-related or otherwise. The difficulty is of course that some weeks happen to be demanding in all three areas. Boundaries are constantly being blurred, and it can be difficult to feel ‘successful’ on any front.”

*Rev. Andrea Baas and Rev. Nicholas Baas – Truro, Nova Scotia*

“I (Nick) and my wife, Andrea Baas, are copastors at John Calvin CRC. Together we fill one full-time role. We both preach and do pastoral care. We both came into this position new to pastoring. That presented some challenges, as we each had to figure out our pastoral identity/role while at the same time working at half-speed (part-time). Sharing everything in life, including work, really requires a strong and healthy marital relationship. Council has sometimes found the logistics of having two employees challenging. Having come through the challenges of starting in ministry together, we now have the benefit of a partner who knows us and our ministry life deeply. We have had to grow up quickly in our marriage and have a very deep understanding of how to encourage and empower one another. The church has been blessed by our unique gifts and personalities and by having both sexes in leadership.”

*Regarding issues and concerns:* “Our classis has tended to treat us as two pastors when it comes to classical roles/tasks. For instance, they have struggled with understanding that when they assign me, a male, to do classical supply at a church that does not affirm women in office, they are requiring me to spend even less time preaching at my own church than a full-time pastor would in the same circumstance. Governing bodies struggle to understand what it means for two people to split one role. Sometimes this is understandable. At other times – like when your wife is the first female minister in a classis – it comes off as hurtful.

“On a more practical note, we have found that the way disability insurance works for copastors is less than satisfactory. Disability insurance requires more than part-time work, so technically neither of us qualify.”

#### **IV. Biblical, theological, and historical support**

##### *A. Biblical support*

As we begin exploring the topic of bivocational ministry, we should first listen for God’s guidance through Scripture. Our biblical analysis starts with a brief survey of the ministries that God’s covenant people are called to support through their tithing. Three categories of ministry are introduced in the Old Testament and carried into the New Testament. We begin here because it has direct relevance to the resource constraints causing some to engage in bivocational ministry out of necessity as well as the strategic embrace of bivocationality as a choice. After the topic of tithing, this section of the report explores the apostle Paul’s tentmaking in the New Testament. Here we find not only the clearest example of bivocational practice but also principles to guide us today.

## 1. Three purposes of tithing

A survey of the main passages about tithing from the Pentateuch reveals that Israel's tithes were to be used for three purposes. First, tithes were used for festive celebrations in God's presence (Deut. 12:17-18; 14:22-29). Second, tithes provided for the material needs of the priests and Levites (Num. 18:8-24; Deut. 12:19; 14:27-29). Third, tithes generously assisted the vulnerable and needy, mainly foreigners, orphans, and widows among the people (Deut. 14:29; 26:12-13). In other words, the firstfruits of the products and revenues of God's people were to be set aside to facilitate worship and fellowship, to support those who were ministers, and to provide tangible goods to the needy. The Lord placed the priests in charge of administering these resources (Num. 18:8; 2 Chron. 31:11-13; Neh. 13:5) and required that they also tithe the best tenth of all they received (Num. 18:25-32).

Leviticus 27:30 says the tithe "belongs to the LORD" and calls it holy. Devoting one's best to the Lord entailed providing for those whom God had designated to receive those resources. The practice of tithing was integral to carrying out the divine commands Israel had received for its religious practices and social morality. Micah 3:6-10 states on behalf of the Lord that neglecting tithes and offerings is robbing God of what rightfully belongs to him.

Two examples of how tithes were used for festive celebrations in God's presence are the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles, described in Deuteronomy 16:9-17. In both cases, joy-filled worship was funded by offerings from God's people as they were called to give "in proportion to the blessings the LORD has given you" (vv. 10, 17). These celebrations welcomed not only whole families to participate but also Levites, foreigners in the land, orphans, and widows (vv. 11, 14).

As noted above, Israel's tithe gave tangible provisions for people whose vocation it was to minister in the Lord's temple. Commenting on Numbers 18, Peter J. Naylor writes that tithing was "practical in that it ensured priests were able to serve full-time in their office, since they would not be anxious about their food" ("*Numbers*," *New Bible Commentary*, p. 186). When the promised land was divided up among the twelve tribes of Israel, the Levites were only given cities to live in and pastures for their flocks, as they relied on God's provisions in the form of tithes from the people (Josh. 14:3-4; 18:7). The great reforms enacted by Hezekiah included the reconstitution of the priests and Levites, and the restoration of tithes to support them, according to 2 Chronicles 31:3-21. In the account given in Nehemiah 13:4-5, the tithes of the people supported several people who served in the house of God, including priests, Levites, singers, and gatekeepers.

The three most common categories of people described as poor and disadvantaged in the Old Testament were widows, orphans, and foreigners. These categories of people, along with the Levites, were to receive the tithe of food, according to Deuteronomy 14:28-29. The Old Testament also made provisions for landowners to leave a portion of their harvest for people who needed to glean (Lev. 19:9-10), as illustrated in the story of Ruth gleaning the fields of Boaz (Ruth 2:2-3). Tithing for the sake of the poor and vulnerable is a dimension of God's call to love such neighbors and should be taken alongside the imperatives to defend them



from injustices (Ps. 82:3; Prov. 31:9; Isa. 10:5; Amos 2:7). While the wisdom literature of the Old Testament acknowledges that personal irresponsibility can also lead to poverty (Prov. 10:4; 13:18; 21:17), Scripture consistently calls God's people to use tithes to care for the poor and vulnerable in our communities.

Our focus is on how the gifts of God's people support those who are ordained to gospel ministry. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the other needs the Lord ordained tithing to serve. While churches are called to support their ministers, they are also called to allocate resources needed to hold meaningful worship as well as to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable. These imperatives are carried over into the New Testament and have guided the Christian church throughout its history. It is important to factor these into our discussion about bivocational ministry today.

The New Testament emphasizes voluntary generosity among followers of Christ. Christians are to give with joy and confidence, knowing that the Lord will use such gifts for their own blessings, to provide for others, and to bring glory to God (2 Cor. 9:6-11). Being generous with the blessings the Lord has given us is a dimension of Christian discipleship, because "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21; Luke 12:34). Believers are instructed to give generously through church leaders for proper distribution (Acts 4:34-37; 1 Cor. 16:1-3) and encouraged to help people in need directly (Matt. 5:42; Luke 12:33; James 2:15-17). Jesus criticizes tithing Pharisees and teachers of the law in Matthew 23:23 for neglecting "the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness."

The New Testament upholds the practice of providing for ministers through the generosity of God's people. When Jesus sent his twelve disciples throughout Judea to proclaim the kingdom of heaven, he said, "the worker is worth his keep" (Matt. 10:10). When he sent out the seventy-two, he included the following instructions: "Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7). The apostle Paul echoes this same conviction in 1 Corinthians 9:1-12; Galatians 6:6; and 1 Timothy 5:17-18. The most pointed passage is 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, which states, "Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel." In speaking to this issue in 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 2 Timothy 5:18, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25:4: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." As oxen trampled on the grain, they were to eat some of it for sustenance as they worked. This is used as a metaphor for those who devote their lives to ministry. The church should provide for the needs of their pastors and teachers so that they can continue working for the Lord.

## 2. Paul the tentmaker

The apostle Paul is our best biblical case study for bivocational ministry. While he asserted his right to material support for his work as an apostle, he also worked as a tentmaker and did not always receive

financial gifts from churches. For example, in 1 Corinthians, immediately after Paul mentions his right to compensation, he states, “But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me” (9:15). Elsewhere in this letter he mentions working with his own hands (4:12), which enabled him to preach the gospel “free of charge” (9:18). In 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8, Paul states that he and his companions worked very hard to “not be a burden to anyone.” Paul expressed his gratitude for financial support from the church in Philippi (Phil. 4:10-20) and urged churches to take up offerings for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-15).

Acts 18:3 mentions that Paul was a “tentmaker.” Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, who worked in this trade. Paul likely worked in this trade in the cities of Corinth, Thessalonica, and Ephesus, all urban centers of trade where the opportunity for such work was available. In 1 Thessalonians 2:9, Paul says, “We worked night and day . . . while we preached the gospel of God to you.” Commenting on this passage in his article on “Tentmaking,” Paul Barnett states, “This probably means that Paul talked to people while he worked and also, almost certainly, that on some days, or during part of the day, he laid aside his apron and tools and taught the gospel. His lifestyle was characterized by both work and preaching” (*Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, p. 926).

Why did Paul lay aside his right to earn a living from his gospel ministry and engage in tentmaking? A survey of the relevant passages reveals three strategies behind the apostle’s decisions. Paul engaged in tentmaking as a form of bivocational ministry to embrace missional opportunities, to distinguish himself from other traveling philosophers, and to model godliness and dignity of work. We will explore each of these strategies and apply them to our contemporary situations.

a. Embrace missional opportunities

First, tentmaking allowed Paul to strategically embrace missional opportunities. On his missionary journeys throughout Asia Minor, where he set out to establish new churches, Paul engaged in tentmaking because there was not yet a local body of disciples who could support him. Paul was blessed with financial support from established churches in Macedonia while laboring for the gospel in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:9), and he received financial gifts from the church in Philippi while he labored in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16). But Paul could not expect support from the community where he ministered before a Christian community was formed there. In this way, his tentmaking enabled him to bring the gospel to new places.

In telling the Thessalonians he did not want to be a financial burden to them (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8), Paul engaged in tentmaking to embrace the opportunity to proclaim the gospel among people who were not financially well off. Tentmaking allowed Paul to establish a church among people who would find it difficult to support him financially.

We follow this same principle today when we fund a pastor, missionary, or church planter to serve a financially disadvantaged community with resources from other churches and donors. A bivocational



ministry arrangement is another way to apply Paul's tentmaking to contemporary missional endeavors. There is a biblical warrant for some church planters to both lean on funding from established churches and find work in the community to make ends meet financially. Bivocational ministry arrangements should not diminish the importance of support from other churches; nor should the availability of funds preclude pastors from pursuing bivocational opportunities.

Bivocational pastors serving small or financially challenged churches do so to not be a burden to those they serve. Such men and women inhabit the spirit of the apostle Paul. They ought to be honored for their sacrificial service rather than sidelined because their model of pastoral ministry does not fit denominational norms or historic practices in the Western church. Such pastors are embracing a missional opportunity that would not be available if they were not engaging in bivocational ministry.

b. Distinguish himself from other traveling philosophers

The second reason the apostle Paul purposefully engaged in tentmaking was to distinguish himself from other itinerant teachers and philosophers of his day. This comes through clearly in 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6, where Paul contrasts himself with greedy people pleasers who speak with flattery. He also draws a contrast between himself and others who took advantage of the church as he defends his apostleship throughout 2 Corinthians. Paul identifies his adversaries as those who "peddle the word of God for profit" (2 Cor. 2:17) and who "use deception" and "distort the word of God" (2 Cor. 4:2). A false teacher is one who "exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face," according to 2 Corinthians 11:20.

J.M. Everts summarizes the complicated historical background in Greek culture to traveling philosophers and how they supported themselves.

In contemporary Greek society there was much debate about how philosophers and teachers should support themselves. Most philosophers either charged fees or accepted the patronage of a wealthy individual. The major criticism of this method of support was that it placed a philosopher under obligation to a patron and therefore jeopardized the philosopher's freedom to teach the truth. In Hellenistic society the giving and receiving of benefactions was an extremely important component of the social structure. The wealthy expressed their power by becoming patrons, and since benefaction was the basis of friendship, refusing a gift was an act of enmity. Philosophers who wished to avoid this network of obligation could either beg, as the Cynics chose to do, or work. However, since most of Greek society looked down on those who worked at a trade or begged, not many philosophers chose these methods of support. Those who did gained freedom at the expense of social status.

*("Financial Support," Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, p. 295)*

Given this background, it is reasonable to believe that the apostle Paul was also careful about who funded him, because he understood that patronage entailed influence on what he was to teach about. Gordon Fee sees this denial of patronage as the meaning of Paul's "boast" in 1 Corinthians 9:15 and goes on to explain that "in offering the 'free'

gospel 'free of charge' his ministry becomes a living paradigm of the gospel itself" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 417, 421).

Our world has grown increasingly suspicious of the church in recent times. Like the traveling philosophers of Paul's day, some churches are inordinately focused on money and commission leaders who use religion as a means to financial gain (1 Tim. 6:5). Therefore it is wise to ask what impression we are giving to our surrounding community. How are we to distinguish ourselves from religious peddlers of our day? Bivocational ministry can be an embodied apologetic for a ministry of servanthood that is God-glorifying rather than one of financial gain.

c. Model the godliness and dignity of work

In contrast to the Hellenistic devaluation of work as God-given and God-glorifying, He warned the church in Thessalonica against idleness (1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6) and urged them to follow his example of work as an economic and social responsibility (2 Thess. 3:7-10). Working with our own hands helps us to avoid sin and enables us to be generous toward others (Acts 20:35; Eph. 4:28). It is also clear that Paul conducted some of his ministry in the marketplace and therefore modeled for others what it meant to be followers of Jesus Christ in and through their daily work.

One can detect a resurgence of the old Hellenistic sentiments in our current cultural climate. Many today aim their lives toward getting the most money for the least amount of effort, viewing labor as a necessary evil, and are captivated by a vision of the good life that entails perpetual vacations with little productive contribution to society. Some Christians are finding a growing disconnect between their daily work and their life of discipleship. Bivocational ministry can help churches recover a biblical perspective of work.

Pastors who gain credibility and influence in the marketplace are given opportunities to communicate with people they would not know otherwise, to lead as a model for people to be disciples of Jesus in the workplace, and to provide an embodied apologetic for the goodness of human labor that reflects God's character.

B. *Historical considerations*

A cursory glance through church history reveals unity and diversity in applying the biblical principles outlined above. While some have tried to make sweeping statements about how tithing and ministers' compensation developed over the years, these usually do not hold up to further analysis. Throughout all eras of Christian history, some churches have been able to provide abundantly for ministers while others struggled to provide for their needs. Some who have committed themselves to ministry gained wealth and prestige while others' entry into ministry involved a vow of poverty. In some eras of church history, tithes have supported one cause to the neglect of others, whether that be church facilities for worship and fellowship, compensating clergy, or giving to the needy.

The Didache, one of the earliest writings about Christian teachings, distinguishes between traveling prophets, to whom the church was to give hospitality, and prophets who settled down to serve a particular community and were to receive financial compensation. It warned the early church

against supporting itinerant prophets who only took advantage of Christian hospitality (“The Didache,” *Early Christian Writings*, pp. 195-96).

It is helpful to remember that in the monastic movement, many who committed their lives to the full-time service of the church also worked gardens, produced books, maintained the building and grounds, and incorporated other productive labors into their daily rule. To this day many monasteries contain nonprofit organizations that grow or build things to sell in order to support their religious communities, which supplement any share of tithes they might receive. Most monks throughout history have been essentially bivocational.

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin briefly surveys the church’s practice of dividing the revenue from tithes into four categories: “one for the clergy, another for the poor, a third for the repair of churches and other buildings, a fourth for the poor, both foreign and indigenous” (pp. 1074-75). This guideline served as an application of Scripture to prevent leaders from being able to leverage their position to take more than their share of resources for themselves. Imagine how different our congregations would operate if our annual budget were divided into four equal parts this way. While some might operate in this way, we know this is not the norm across our denomination.

The Christian Reformed Church has historically been able to use its tithes to support its pastors, build adequate church facilities, do the work of benevolence in their congregation and community, and support denominational agencies, while its members establish and maintain Christian schools and support other nonprofit organizations. Until fairly recently, bivocational pastors have been rare in our 163-year history. The CRC’s letter of call template for ministers of the Word notes that “laborers are worthy of their hire” (see Luke 10:7 [KJV]; Matt. 10:10) before spelling out a compensation package. We do not believe 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.

## V. Definitions

The word *bivocationality* implies two vocations or callings from God, one in ministry and the other in another field of work. This simple definition falls short theologically and practically. All Christians have multiple callings from God. Likewise, this definition does not reflect the various callings a pastor may be called to. Thus defining *bivocationality* simply in terms of calling or vocation is problematic.

The COD Bivocational Task Force defined *bivocationality* in terms of financial income. Bivocationality is “any arrangement in which a pastor gains financial support from more than one employer.” This definition is helpful in its practicality. Financial dynamics are often an important factor related to bivocational ministry. Yet it is not the desire of the task force to define *bivocationality* exclusively in financial terms. There are other dynamics in play.

One of those dynamics for pastors in bivocational ministry is accountability. An individual involved in bivocational ministry is accountable to at least two entities, one of which is the supervising council (and/or in cooperation with other congregations, institutions, or agencies involved). The other entity could be a corporation, the customers of one who is self-employed, a

nonprofit or parachurch organization, or another ministry. Being accountable to multiple entities is an important factor for persons in bivocational ministry.

Finally, bivocational ministry requires individuals to spend time and energy in multiple settings. The time and energy one uses ought to be significant in order to be considered bivocational. Some ministers have activities “on the side” that generate some income but do not interfere with their pastoral duties. Bivocational ministry is distinct in that the nature and time-demands of the work require mutual discernment between the pastor and the supervising council.

Given the importance of these factors, we suggest 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.” It is worth noting that in this definition pastors are those ordained to the offices of minister of the Word or commissioned pastor.

However, our task force observes that this definition does not cover all the possible situations surrounding “what it means to be a bivocational pastor today” per our mandate. Historically, the CRCNA has seen pastoral ministry as a full-time profession. This is reflected in our Church Order as well as in our denominational culture and administration. In today’s world creativity and necessity have resulted in multiple nontraditional arrangements that are furthering the work of God through the church and its pastors. Some of these arrangements do not properly fit *bivocationality* as defined above. While much of this report refers to bivocationality or bivocational ministry, it may be better to view this report as reflecting nontraditional pastoral arrangements rather than only bivocationality.

To help in providing this wider perspective, the task force here details nontraditional arrangements as follows:

A. *Bivocational* – 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. This may mean working in a part-time or full-time capacity in a nonecclesial occupation while also leading a church or church plant and receiving financial support for that work in ministry. It may also mean working in more than one ordainable ministry position (e.g., as a local church pastor and as a hospital chaplain).

1. Bivocational by necessity – this arrangement describes a pastor whose calling congregation cannot afford to support a full-time position. Thus the pastor is required to find additional financial support through another occupation.
2. Bivocational by choice – this arrangement describes a pastor who has chosen to be bivocational, working by design both in vocational ministry and in another occupation. Often this is done for missional reasons.

B. *Covocational* – in this arrangement the pastor’s calling and ministry occur in a traditionally nonpastoral setting. In other words, the pastoral calling is combined with a nonecclesial occupation. For example, a church planter may

open a coffee shop as a vehicle for ministry. The coffee shop is a business, yet it also provides the setting for pastoral ministry and evangelism.

### C. *Other arrangements*

1. Part-time position – this arrangement describes a pastor who for various reasons works part-time hours. This may be dictated by the ministry position (i.e., a small congregation or an interim position) or may be due to a personal issue such as the pastor’s health or family situation.
2. Clergy couples in shared or part-time positions (a clergy couple is a husband and wife who are both ordained pastors) – many different arrangements may occur for clergy couples. For this report, we have focused on arrangements in which neither spouse as an individual is in a full-time position. This may include a clergy couple who are job sharing a single full-time position or a clergy couple in which each spouse has a separate part-time pastoral position.
3. Volunteer, unpaid ministry – this arrangement describes a pastor serving a ministry without financial compensation. A situation like this can occur when the pastor’s family income is provided through their spouse or when the pastor has sufficient income through other means. This kind of arrangement can occur in congregations that have little or no financial means.

It is worth observing that in the descriptions above we have referred only to part-time positions or arrangements. We have not referred to *part-time pastors*, because there is no such thing in our polity and understanding of ordination. Any ordained person, whether a minister of the Word, commissioned pastor, elder, or deacon, by God’s calling through the church and by virtue of the ecclesiastical office, always bears that office regardless of the activities they are engaged in at a given moment. Every pastor in a nontraditional arrangement is fully and at all times the pastor of the community they have been called to serve. Thus we discourage any reference in any context to a part-time pastor.

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

### A. *What is*

What are the cultural and contextual experiences of bivocational ministry within the CRCNA? What follows is dependent on several informal and qualitative surveys done within the CRCNA and on external resources such as the Canadian Multivocational Ministry Project: Research Report<sup>1</sup> and the Wellness Project @ Wycliffe (University of Toronto).<sup>2</sup>

Although bivocational ministry is relatively rare within churches of the CRCNA that are monoethnic and middle class, the same is not true among

<sup>1</sup> Canadian Multivocational Ministry Project: Research Report; James W. Watson, Wanda M. Malcolm, Mark D. Chapman, Elizabeth A. Fisher, Marilyn Draper, Narry F. Santos, Jared Siebert, Amy Bratton; May 22, 2020; [canadianmultivocationalministry.ca](http://canadianmultivocationalministry.ca).

<sup>2</sup> [wycliffewellnessproject.com/](http://wycliffewellnessproject.com/)

CRCNA churches that reach ethnic minorities and economically challenged communities.

To gain some qualitative understanding of the blessings and challenges of bivocational ministry among churches that reach ethnic minorities within the denomination, an informal survey was conducted among seven leaders of several ethnic subgroups within the CRC—namely, African American, Korean, Chinese, and Hispanic leaders.<sup>3</sup> The informal survey revealed that the percentage of pastors who are doing ministry bivocationally is 70-75 percent among African American pastors, 40 percent among Chinese pastors, and 65-70 percent among Hispanic pastors. Korean congregations had less than 5 percent of lead pastors working bivocationally while the majority of Korean associate pastors worked bivocationally.

Mixed in this informal survey were factors including the relative newness of a church as well as the economic challenges within a supporting community. Resonate Global Mission indicated that, as of April 2020, 48 percent of new churches planted today are led by bivocational leaders. This percentage would be higher if it included church planters who are paid part-time hours but are not bivocational. For example, in some cases the planter does not receive full-time pay, but their spouse provides the family's primary income.

A third factor affecting the level of bivocational leadership has to do with whether the churches served exist in economically challenged areas, such as the inner city or in a remote rural community.

In short, 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.

#### *B. What will be*

The percentage of pastors working bivocationally in the CRCNA will likely radically increase in the coming years for the following reasons.

Changing population trends in North America have spurred the conversation around bivocational ministry. When the CRC began, North America was a largely rural country, and our churches were generally monoethnic, multi-generational, and growing congregations. In the years following World War II the CRC produced an influx of suburban daughter churches. We are now a denomination with many struggling inner-city and rural congregations in which supporting a full-time pastor position is a challenge.

The average CRC congregation size has been historically larger than that of most non-CRCNA congregations in both Canada and the United States. While the 2020 CRCNA *Yearbook* statistics show that our average congregational attendance is 156 people, less than half of that number (70 regular participants, including children<sup>4</sup>) are in attendance in the average congregation in the United States. Our task force was unable to find comparable gross numbers for Canadian church attendance averages since 2001. Our denomination has not struggled with maintaining smaller congregations as much as have many other denominations in North America. However, current CRCNA statistics indicate that an average 2 percent annual decrease in

<sup>3</sup> These were informal and qualitative surveys connected to bivocational ministry experiences among ethnic-minority church leaders (by David Koll), church planters (by Erica Ezinga, Kevin Schutte) and CRCNA church leaders (by Beth Fellingner) in general.

<sup>4</sup> See [soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII_report_final.pdf)



congregational size will put increasing pressure on congregational financial sustainability based on full-time pastorate models. In other words, more of our established and declining congregations who wish to continue as functioning churches will be led by bivocational pastors as their budgets decline below the capacity to pay a full-time pastor.

Positively, if we continue to plant new churches, then more of our new and emerging congregations will be led by bivocational pastors. And they will likely continue to be, as they are now, an important resource in growing the church.

Also positively, we expect to see an increase in immigrant and ethnic-minority congregations. These congregations are more likely to be led by bivocational pastors. Bivocational pastorates or other nontraditional arrangements will be an important tool for the CRCNA in pursuing the growth of the church in new fields of harvest.

### *C. Why it matters: challenges and opportunities*

The current experience of bivocational ministry and its expected increase in the coming years present bivocational pastors and our denomination with challenges and opportunities.

#### 1. Bivocationality and proper care

In this context the importance of proper care for pastors and their families will increase. Bivocational pastors face many challenges, as highlighted in the surveys we have reviewed. These challenges include the following:

- Financial care: Because financial resources are low, a tension between financially supporting a pastor versus financially supporting ministry growth can arise. This tension can be difficult for both the pastor and the church council to hold in balance in a healthy manner.
- Quality of life care: Various challenges exist for bivocational pastors, such as
  - health insurance choices (a top concern in completed surveys).
  - life, ministry, family-time balance.
  - anxiety about supporting one’s family.
  - busy households with both parents working more than full-time.
- Call satisfaction: Many pastors can struggle with a sense of having a divided mind between direct ministry work and their other job(s), whereas some love and thrive on the diversity of their experiences. Many may wish they had more time for ministry. Others may feel that their other job is part of their ministry and part of their divine call. Others may prefer full-time ministry and even feel that their work is not honored when not fully compensated.

There is an intensity to the challenges that may be faced by pastors working bivocationally. Beyond the anxieties of finance, life balance, and foundational understanding of one’s call to ministry, there may also be experiences of feeling defeated, emotional and relational breakdown, and even ministry-ending trauma.

The following four suggestions highlight moves that the CRCNA can make to help pastors discern their calling for bivocational ministry,

balance ongoing bivocational ministry, prevent breakdown, and learn from breakdowns that occur.

a. Multivocational training

Multivocational training is the first step in bivocational leader care. Various forms of training, such as leadership skills development, business skills, and job application training can help future bivocational leaders. Pastors who have developed a second collection of skills while in college or university will be better prepared for the eventuality of needing to work bivocationally.

While it's not within the mandate of our task force, we encourage Calvin Theological Seminary to consider ways to provide training with the realities of bivocationality in mind. Future pastors need to be prepared for challenges and opportunities that come from bivocational and nontraditional ministry arrangements.

b. Balancing unique stressors and satisfiers

All pastors, including bivocational pastors, need a unique balance in their vocations to sustain both their ministry and other aspects of their lives. The Canadian Multivocational Ministry Project ([canadian-multivocationalministry.ca](http://canadian-multivocationalministry.ca)), a multid denominational and multiagency research project, released their findings in May 2020. The project was launched to learn about issues faced by multivocational pastors, including both challenges and opportunities. The report provided our task force with insight into the importance of balance for long-term, healthy ministry and life.

Relying on the work of the Wellness Project @ Wycliffe, an online questionnaire for assessing wellness in congregational ministry run by Wycliffe Seminary at the University of Toronto, the report notes that every pastor is wired differently in what tasks and responsibilities are core satisfiers and core stressors. By knowing what these are, pastors can minimize the potential for burnout. The report noted that 90 percent of multivocational participants identified time and workload strain as a core stressor (p. 9). Positively, shared ministry and workload among ministry partners, both vocational and volunteer, was noted as essential (p. 10).

A challenge to bivocational leaders is that even moderately satisfying tasks can become a potential irritant when frequently required. In the study, one example of a positive role becoming an irritant was management responsibilities. One may enjoy doing these tasks in small amounts, but as the demand for administrative work escalates, it can become an irritant. The pastor perceives a lack of balance that, over time, contributes to burnout. An inventory of stressors and satisfiers shared within the context of team ministry can yield a greater chance of bivocational longevity.

The report notes that perceived balance in bivocational ministry depends on how one categorizes the interplay between ministry work and other work—namely, is it *integrated* (“a synergistic relationship between congregational leadership and other work”), *complementary* (in which the arrangement provides a benefit beyond financial support to the pastor that is not ministry related), *lucrative* (in which the arrangement

only provides financial benefit), or *conflicted* (making the arrangement unsustainable)? “Asking questions which help the multivocational leader clarify to what degree they fit with any of these categories . . . can encourage reflection on how the different forms of work are perceived. If other work is perceived to be a positive contributor to ministry, then there are positive implications for sustainability. If other work is considered more important than the congregational ministry or detrimental, something will need to change in the current situation” (p. 18).

In the CRC, the respondents to our ethnic-minority bivocational leaders survey included people in each of these categories of bivocational balance. Intermixed with these perceptions of balance are unspoken theologies of work, particular understandings of the division of or mixing of sacred and secular, and the cultural importance of pastoral honor and value being linked to a fully paid position.

The most significant challenge toward satisfying bivocational ministry is having a clear sense of call that fits the bivocational reality. If the sense of call to bivocational ministry is absent, the leader will remain at best seeing other jobs as lucrative and at worst conflicted.

We encourage pastors, especially bivocational pastors, to learn what contributes to stress and satisfaction in their vocations. Such information will help pastors and supervisory councils design and execute a healthy ministry plan that contributes to long-term, healthy ministry and life.

c. Ongoing wellness assessment

Because the challenges of care for bivocational pastors are ongoing, our third suggestion is to initiate regular (and also by request) ministry wellness assessment for pastors in bivocational ministry. A tool similar to the Wellness Project @ Wycliffe questionnaire would be beneficial to bivocational pastors and the congregations they serve. It generates helpful feedback, including a burnout score. Such an assessment could help anticipate challenges before they happen, guide plans to reverse any decline, and return ministry to a positive direction.

The results of a regular ministry wellness assessment would foster regular conversation between pastors and their supervisory council regarding a shared understanding of financial support, hours at work, responsibilities, and other expectations between the congregation and the pastor.

d. Ministry postmortem

Our final suggestion assumes that some form of bivocational ministry burnout has already occurred. We recommend intentional exit interviews for the pastor and the ministry as a means of both picking up the pieces and providing healing and learning from what happened. Although this is an emotionally charged moment and would seek voluntary participation by the participants, exit interviews can yield healing while also teaching us how to avoid future burnout or breakdown for churches and pastors.

We recommend that Pastor Church Resources create an exit interview/ministry postmortem learning process for classes, churches,

leaders, and their families to heal and for our denomination to learn from the occurrence of burnout in bivocational ministry.

## 2. Bivocationality and opportunity

Alongside the challenges that call us to care for bivocational leaders, there is also a transformative and creative opportunity for the CRCNA in this conversation.

### a. Incarnational witness

Our culture, as in Paul's day, is more and more suspicious of the motives of the church and church leaders. Churches and pastors are often seen as financially motivated with self-preserving intent while seeking to reach out with gospel ministry. Many pastors who use bivocational ministry as a strategy testify that they are better able to enter into a respectful relationship with others in the community. Thus they are given better access to the lives and spiritual needs of persons who need to encounter Jesus Christ.

### b. Greater organic flourishing

As a thought experiment, if one assumes \$80,000 USD or \$100,000 CDN per year as the payroll cost of a full-time pastor position, this creates two interconnected challenges for a 21st-century North American congregation. First, the congregation must have an approximate minimum size to cover this full-time salary. Second, the congregation and the community the congregation is reaching must have the financial capacity to support this full-time salary. In short, they need both minimum numbers and minimum wealth.

Bivocational pastors, however, can help congregations flourish regardless of their size or wealth. Bivocational pastors can help sustain and sometimes grow small congregations. Bivocational pastors or pastors in nontraditional arrangements are also instrumental for ministry in low-income and socially disadvantaged locations. This provides greater opportunity for organic flourishing in these otherwise challenging settings.

Larger congregations can also benefit. Rather than focusing on pastors in only full-time positions, a large church with bivocational pastors can provide ministry leadership that matches the organic growth of the congregation. For example, a congregation may have one full-time pastor and then add a bivocational pastor in a 1/3 FTE arrangement as it grows. Some evidence of this type of arrangement surfaced in our survey among ethnic-minority leaders in the CRCNA. It was noted that most Korean churches have full-time senior pastors but that they also have bivocational leaders in other positions in the church, positions that would likely add to more continuous or organic growth.

### c. Ecclesiological toughness

Bivocational leadership provides an ecclesiological toughness for small or underfunded congregations. These congregations may not be able to pay a pastor full-time. Thus they may feel forced to choose to either limp along without pastoral leadership or to close. Bivocationality could help those congregations maintain a greater ecclesiological toughness to weather the storm and perhaps experience renewal.

#### d. Missiological flexibility

Bivocational leadership provides missiological flexibility. With bivocational leadership, congregations can have the flexibility to target specific towns or neighborhoods that have challenging demographics for church growth.

Bivocational pastors also help small congregations fulfill their distinct and important roles in the spread of the gospel. For example, small congregations can have an attractive intimacy that larger congregations are unable to provide. Small congregations provide a unique and important setting for faith nurture and gospel proclamation that are necessary for the health of the broader church. Bivocational pastors help small congregations have the missional flexibility to continue their important ministry.

### VII. Council and classis oversight

#### A. *Minister of the Word*

At present, ministers of the Word do not receive the letter of call until it is reviewed and signed by the classical counselor (Church Order Art. 9). This ensures that all ecclesiastical regulations for the call (Art. 8) have been followed and that the minister is provided with “proper support” (Art. 15.) There may come a time when the minister’s job description changes into a bivocational ministry, and at that time it will be essential that classis, perhaps through church visitors, review and approve changes from that in the original signed letter of call.

In our recommendations in this report (section XI) we encourage supervising councils to review bivocational ministry arrangements on an annual basis to see if any changes need to be made. For example, they could consider questions like these: Does the bivocational pastor have the support of the council and congregation? Is the ministry of the church to the community benefiting from bivocational ministry? These and other questions can help to generate mutual reflection and discussion so that the work of the Lord moves forward.

#### B. *Commissioned pastor*

Commissioned pastors, including those in bivocational or nontraditional arrangements, are called by the council of their calling church. At present, classis and synodical deputies must approve the job description of the commissioned pastor (Church Order Supplement, Art. 23-a). The Commissioned Pastor Handbook gives guidelines regarding “proper support,” but there is no requirement for approval by classis in the letter of call. We propose that the job description for commissioned pastors include the calling congregation’s support plan, including financial support, for classis review and approval before the calling of the pastor. In section VIII of this report we recommend such changes to Church Order Article 23. This will ensure a healthy discussion.

For both ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors, we believe there needs to be a healthy discussion among the parties before the call to ensure a clear understanding about the conditions spelled out in the letter of call. Is there a clear understanding regarding “proper support”? sabbatical? personal time? self-care? time expectations? etc. In some cases, we

have heard of bivocational pastors agreeing to minimal or no salary because the alternate work outside of the church was financially sufficient or the spouse's work supported the family. Not all scenarios can be spelled out, but before the call there should be a clear and shared understanding that ensures "proper support" for the pastor and the pastor's family.

Classis also provides oversight through the annual church visit (Church Order Art. 42). Church visitors are urged to ensure the health and welfare of the church's ministry and its pastors (i.e., that there is "proper support"). We encourage all classes to ensure that its ministry of church visiting is healthy for the sake of the churches and our pastors.

### **VIII. Financial considerations**

Synod also mandated that our task force "address financial implications and responsibilities (clearly defined 'proper support'; see Church Order Supplement, Art. 15) relative to church, classis, pastor, and the like."

Much of this is addressed in section IX of this report in our proposed changes to Church Order Article 15 and its Supplement, and in a proposed addition to Article 23 and its Supplement. In that section of the report we also clearly define the term "proper support" for both minister of the Word and commissioned pastor.

It is the responsibility of the calling church and classis to ensure that the pastor who enters into a bivocational, covocational, or other nontraditional ministry arrangement has a plan that adequately addresses matters such as income, medical insurance, disability insurance, housing provision, pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items. The majority of proper support may come from the calling church or other employer(s) or entrepreneurial business. Unfortunately, there are situations in which a pastor does not receive proper support and yet is expected to provide full-time work. Before the calling of the pastor, there needs to be a thorough discussion of and assurance of proper support. Not every situation will be the same, so the calling church, classis, and pastor must discuss proper support and where it is coming from.

In light of these concerns, we are proposing changes to the Church Order Supplement for Articles 15 and 23 in order to provide "Guidelines for Churches in Conversation with Pastors about 'Proper Support.'" Specifically, the task force is recommending that a calling council provide a support plan for the pastor. Included in the support plan should be a financial plan that includes arrangements for income, medical insurance, disability insurance, housing provision, pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items. For ministers of the Word, the support plan, including the financial plan, should be included in the letter of call. Classis should provide its input by way of the classical counselor who will approve the letter of call. For commissioned pastors, the support plan should be approved by classis as part of approving the position description. (During our work, denominational employees noted that other aspects of Church Order Supplement, Art. 15 require revision. Current guideline 1 is no longer valid because there is no longer a "synodically stated minimum salary" provided. Likewise, guideline 4 is no longer valid because ministers can only be 100 percent in the pension plan, not credited "proportionate to the percentage of time devoted to the duties of the church." These matters have



been taken into account in the proposed Church Order changes in section IX of this report.)

We encourage supervising councils to initiate annual discussions to review existing financial plans. We also encourage supervising councils to initiate annual discussions to review support plans, including areas such as emotional health, self-care, any changes in support, and other factors relating to pastors' well-being. This is also an area that church visitors are called to discuss during the annual visit with the church council (Church Order Art. 42).

#### *A. A living salary*

For ministers of the Word, before 2019 the CRCNA published the Ministers Compensation Survey, based on the outcome of a detailed survey mailed to churches and pastors. Over the years the returned surveys continued to drop. Since 2019 the CRCNA now publishes the "Average Total Base Salary plus Housing by Classis" report. This information is updated after synod and can be found in the Church Administration and Finance Guide on the CRCNA website (crcna.org). This information, along with regional and ministry contexts, can be used to guide the discussion of proper support for pastors.

Regarding commissioned pastors in bivocational, covocational, or nontraditional positions, proper support guidelines are found in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook posted on the CRCNA website (crcna.org).

#### *B. Health insurance, disability insurance, and other benefits*

Health and disability insurance presents particular challenges to pastors in bivocational or part-time arrangements. This is especially true in the United States, where health insurance costs have skyrocketed while coverage has decreased. Long-term disability insurance is provided as part of the ministers' pension plan. However, the pension plan is only available to ministers of the Word who pay as if they are full-time and requires a minimum of 30 hours of work per week as clergy. This excludes ministers of the Word whose positions call for less than 30 hours per week, and it excludes all commissioned pastors. The task force affirms that health insurance and disability insurance are required aspects of "proper support." Supervisory councils need to discern together with their pastors how health and disability insurance and other benefits will be provided for the pastors and their dependents.

#### *C. Pension and other retirement considerations*

While the ministers' pension plan has been a wonderful provision for ministers of the Word in full-time positions, it does require full premium payment even if the minister is in bivocational or part-time ministry. Commissioned pastors, on the other hand, have sought out other retirement-funding tools, many of which have been after-tax savings options. In November 2019, the CRCNA began rolling out a new 403(b)(9) retirement plan that supervising councils in the United States can make available to commissioned pastors and ministers of the Word (as well as church staff). This development has been welcomed. Canadian pastors continue to rely on government retirement programs such as registered retirement savings plans (RRSPs) and personal savings plans such as tax-free savings accounts (TFSAAs).

The ministers' pension plan does not recognize the ordination of both spouses who share ministry together as ministers of the Word, thus requiring

two full premium payments for two separate pension accounts at a significant cost to the clergy couple and their congregation. This situation has resulted in many couples choosing one spouse to receive the ministerial recognition in the plan, while the other spouse, who is also ordained as a minister of the Word and sharing the work, is simply registered as a spouse and is limited to spousal benefits only. We urge synod to direct the U.S. Board of Pensions and the Canadian Pension Trustees, in consultation with clergy couples, to amend the pension plan to recognize the ordination of both spouses who are ministers of the Word by providing the option of a single, full membership and benefits to both spouses as a single entity who contribute to a single pension plan. Thus, when one ordained spouse dies, the surviving, ordained spouse will be recognized and honored as a minister of the Word. While we recognize that there are challenges and difficulties related to this request, we urge the boards to take this request seriously and find a way to provide due recognition.

*D. Classis student aid funds (cf. Church Order Article 21)*

Church Order Article 21 states, “The churches shall encourage individuals to seek to become ministers of the Word and, in coordination with classis, shall grant financial aid to those who are in need of it.” Each classis has its own set of rules or guidelines regarding the financial aid it offers to students in master of divinity programs who are seeking to be ordained as ministers of the Word. The classis committees overseeing these funds may struggle with how to respond to former students who then enter into bivocational ministry or another nontraditional arrangement.

While specific decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis, we offer the following observations and encouragement to these committees. First, as stated earlier in this report, there is no such thing as a part-time pastor; there are only part-time arrangements. Second, we encourage these committees to view these individuals through their ordination, whether minister of the Word or commissioned pastor. The goal of Church Order Article 21 is to encourage persons to be and serve as ministers of the Word, not that they serve in a particular way or context. Third, we ask student fund committees to remember the importance of bivocationality and other nontraditional arrangements for church planting, small or impoverished congregations, and immigrant congregations. These gospel activities are hindered when their ministers are burdened with repaying financial aid. Fourth, we encourage classis student fund committees to continue to be generous. While it is not the role of our task force or synod to direct the forgiveness of aid that has been granted, we encourage financial forgiveness for pastors who are bivocational or serving in other nontraditional arrangements.

## **IX. Church Order considerations**

The Church Order currently states in Article 15 that

Each church through its council shall provide for the proper support of its minister(s). By way of exception and with the approval of classis, a church and minister may agree that a minister obtain primary or supplemental income by means of other employment. Ordinarily, the foregoing exception shall be limited to churches that cannot obtain assistance adequate to support their minister.

While well-intentioned, this and other sections of the Church Order treat bivocational ministers, covocational ministers, and ministers in other ministerial situations as exceptions to the rule rather than as normal. The Church Order also assumes in places that these arrangements are by financial necessity only rather than driven by mission and vision or other important factors. Article 15 has remained in place with its current wording since 1988 and reflects the understanding of ministry at that time, but it needs to be updated to include new trends in ministry that approach various forms of ministry as a valid choice rather than as a result of financial need.

In response, our task force recommends the following changes to the Church Order and Its Supplements (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~strikethrough~~).

#### A. Article 14-d

Article 14 deals with the release of a minister of the Word from ordained ministry. Article 14-d specifically deals with a minister who has forsaken the office (see Art. 14-c) and has entered a vocation that is judged by their classis to be nonministerial. In its current form, however, Article 14-d implies that a nonministerial vocation conflicts with the work and ordination of a minister of the Word. In other words, it assumes that bivocational ministry is not an option. We believe that the addition noted below clarifies that forsaking the work of the office is cause for a minister to be released, not simply having another vocation in addition to the calling of a minister of the Word.

##### *Current Article 14-d*

d. A minister of the Word who has entered upon a vocation which classis judges to be nonministerial shall be released from office within one year of that judgment. The concurring advice of the synodical deputies shall be obtained at the time of the judgment.

##### *Proposed Article 14-d*

d. A minister of the Word who has entered upon a vocation which classis judges to be nonministerial and forsakes the calling of a minister of the Word shall be released from office within one year of that judgment. The concurring advice of the synodical deputies shall be obtained at the time of the judgment.

#### B. Article 15

Article 15 deals with the support the church provides for ministers of the Word in their covenantal relationship together. This support includes, but is not limited to, financial, physical, emotional, and spiritual support. While all of these are important for all pastors, these aspects can be particularly complex for pastors in bivocational or other nontraditional arrangements.

Our task force is proposing changes to Article 15 to allow flexibility of local congregations in discerning “proper support.” The phrasing “attend to” (in place of “provide for”) maintains the covenantal relationship between pastor and congregation while giving flexibility with regard to where “proper support,” especially financial support, is coming from.

We are also proposing removal of the latter section of this article because it discriminates against bivocational ministry. The resulting simplified Article 15 will provide the flexibility required while supporting the acceptance of

various forms of ministry and maintaining the covenantal relationship of service and support between ministers and congregations.

*Current Article 15*

Each church through its council shall provide for the proper support of its minister(s). By way of exception and with the approval of classis, a church and minister may agree that a minister obtain primary or supplemental income by means of other employment. Ordinarily the foregoing exception shall be limited to churches that cannot obtain assistance adequate to support their minister.

*Proposed Article 15*

Each church through its council shall ~~provide for~~ attend to the proper support of its minister(s). ~~By way of exception and with the approval of classis, a church and minister may agree that a minister obtain primary or supplemental income by means of other employment. Ordinarily the foregoing exception shall be limited to churches that cannot obtain assistance adequate to support their minister.~~

*C. Supplement, Article 15*

The supplement to Article 15 defines “proper support,” especially with regard to financial considerations, and provides “Guidelines for Churches Whose Ministers Receive Salary Support from Other Employment.”

It was noted to the task force that this supplement has been in need of revision, and some matters in need of change are described in section VIII of this report (“Financial Considerations”). The proposed changes below address some of these issues, give further clarity to the proposed Article 15, and support flexibility in the covenantal arrangement between the minister and the calling church. We have also revised this supplement to include nonfinancial support.

*Proposed Supplement, Article 15*

*“Proper Support” Defined*

Proper support of a church’s minister is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, disability insurance, a housing provision, payment to the denomination’s ministers’ pension plan payment to an appropriate pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items.

To “attend to” proper support does not imply that the calling church is responsible to provide all of these items of support. Rather, the calling church is responsible to ensure that the minister has a plan that addresses these items. In many traditional ministries the local church itself accepts these responsibilities in order to facilitate full-time or part-time ministerial service. In other settings—such as church planting, various forms of chaplaincy, bivocational arrangements, multi-point ministries, and so on—the financial plan will include income and benefits provided by a variety of potential sources. The financial plan should be carefully reviewed and signed by the classical counselor when a call to ministry is made or when a pastor and church decide to change their financial arrangement.

*Guidelines for Churches Whose Ministers Receive Salary Support from Other Employment in Conversations with Pastors about “Proper Support”*

1. The church is responsible for a total compensation package proportionate to the time spent in ministry to the church (forty-eight hours equals full time). The compensation package shall ordinarily be based on synodically stated minimum salary, fringe benefits, and housing costs.
2. Since the compensation package includes a percentage allowance for health insurance, the minister is expected to secure adequate health insurance for the minister and the minister’s family.
31. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.
42. The minister shall receive pension credits in the Ministers’ Pension Fund proportionate to the percentage of time devoted to the duties of the church. Eligibility for full pension credit may be secured if full contribution to the Ministers’ Pension Plan is made.
53. The nature and amount of time of the task(s) other than ministry shall be specified shall be mutually discerned by minister(s) and the supervising council. The support plan in the letter of call, including the financial plan, shall be specified in writing, approved by the classical counselor, and normally reviewed annually by the supervising council. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not normally exceed sixty hours per week.
4. The supervising council shall annually attend to nonfinancial support of ministers, including but not limited to physical, emotional, and spiritual support.

*D. Article 23-d (new)*

The task force proposes an addition to Article 23 that calls for the proper support of commissioned pastors. This parallels the role of Article 15 for ministers of the Word. The same purpose and phrasing choices that are mentioned regarding Article 15 apply here as well.

*Proposed Article 23-d*

d. Each church through its council shall attend to the proper support of its commissioned pastor.

*E. Supplement, Article 23-d (new)*

The proposed supplement to proposed Article 23-d reflects similar proposed changes to Supplement, Article 15, with some alterations bearing distinctly on the nature and processes regarding the office of commissioned pastor.

*Proposed Supplement, Article 23-d*  
*“Proper Support” Defined*

Proper support of a commissioned pastor is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, disability insurance, a housing provision, payment to an appropriate pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items.

To “attend to” proper support does not imply that the calling church is responsible to provide all of these items of support. Rather, the calling church is responsible to ensure that the commissioned pastor has a plan that addresses these items. In many traditional ministries the local church itself accepts these responsibilities in order to facilitate full-time or part-time ministry service. In other settings—such as church planting, various forms of chaplaincy, bivocational arrangements, multi-point ministries, and so on—the financial plan will include income and benefits provided by a variety of potential sources. The calling church’s support of the financial plan should be carefully reviewed at the time classis approves the commissioned pastor’s position. This includes a call to bivocational ministry or when a pastor and church decide to change their financial arrangement.

*Guidelines for Churches in Conversations with Pastors about “Proper Support”*

1. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.
2. The nature and amount of time of the task(s) shall be mutually discerned by the commissioned pastor(s) and the supervising council. The support plan, including the financial plan, shall be specified in writing, approved by classis along with the position description, and normally reviewed annually by the supervising council. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not normally exceed sixty hours per week.
3. The supervising council shall annually attend to nonfinancial support of commissioned pastors, including but not limited to physical, emotional, and spiritual support.

## **X. Postscript**

As a task force, we are grateful to God for the men and women who serve in bivocational or other nontraditional arrangements. We pray for God’s blessing on these and all pastors so that they may know “the gift of God’s grace given . . . through the working of his power” (see Eph. 3:7-13). We ask synod and the congregations of the CRCNA to join us in prayers of thanksgiving and supplication for our shared mission as a denomination and for the pastors who serve our congregations.

## **XI. Recommendations**

The Study of Bivocationality Task Force presents the following recommendations for consideration by Synod 2021:

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Bernard Bakker (chair) and Rev. Michael Vander Laan (reporter) when matters pertaining to the Study of Bivocationality Task Force report are discussed.
- B. That synod propose to Synod 2022 the following changes to Church Order Articles 14, 15, and 23 and their Supplements for adoption (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~strikethrough~~):



1. Proposed Article 14-d

d. A minister of the Word who has entered upon a vocation which classis judges to be nonministerial and forsakes the calling of a minister of the Word shall be released from office within one year of that judgment. The concurring advice of the synodical deputies shall be obtained at the time of the judgment.

*Grounds:*

- a. Without this addition, Article 15 implies that a nonministerial vocation is in conflict with the work and ordination of a minister of the Word.
- b. The addition clarifies that forsaking the office is cause for a minister to be released.

2. Proposed Article 15

Each church through its council shall ~~provide for~~ attend to the proper support of its minister(s). ~~By way of exception and with the approval of classis, a church and minister may agree that a minister obtain primary or supplemental income by means of other employment. Ordinarily the foregoing exception shall be limited to churches that cannot obtain assistance adequate to support their minister.~~

*Grounds:*

- a. The change in phrasing maintains the covenantal relationship between pastor and congregation while giving flexibility with regard to where “proper support” is coming from.
- b. The removed section discriminates against bivocational ministry as an “exception” rather than recognizing it as a desired, missional choice.

3. Proposed Supplement, Article 15

*“Proper Support” Defined*

Proper support of a church’s minister is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, disability insurance, a housing provision, payment to the denomination’s ministers’ pension plan payment to an appropriate pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items.

To “attend to” proper support does not imply that the calling church is responsible to provide all of these items of support. Rather, the calling church is responsible to ensure that the minister has a plan that addresses these items. In many traditional ministries the local church itself accepts these responsibilities in order to facilitate full-time or part-time ministerial service. In other settings—such as church planting, various forms of chaplaincy, bivocational arrangements, multi-point ministries, and so on—the financial plan will include income and benefits provided by a variety of potential sources. The financial plan should be carefully reviewed and signed by the classical counselor when a call to ministry is made or when a pastor and church decide to change their financial arrangement.

*Guidelines for Churches Whose Ministers Receive Salary Support from Other Employment in Conversations with Pastors about "Proper Support"*

1. ~~The church is responsible for a total compensation package proportionate to the time spent in ministry to the church (forty-eight hours equals full time). The compensation package shall ordinarily be based on synodically stated minimum salary, fringe benefits, and housing costs.~~
2. ~~Since the compensation package includes a percentage allowance for health insurance, the minister is expected to secure adequate health insurance for the minister and the minister's family.~~
31. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.
42. ~~The minister shall receive pension credits in the Ministers' Pension Fund proportionate to the percentage of time devoted to the duties of the church. Eligibility for full pension credit may be secured if full contribution to the Ministers' Pension Plan is made.~~
53. ~~The nature and amount of time of the task(s) other than ministry shall be specified shall be mutually discerned by minister(s) and the supervising council. The support plan in the letter of call, including the financial plan, shall be specified in writing, approved by the classical counselor, and normally reviewed annually by the supervising council. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not normally exceed sixty hours per week.~~
4. The supervising council shall annually attend to nonfinancial support of ministers, including but not limited to physical, emotional, and spiritual support.

*Grounds:*

- a. These revisions address issues described in section VIII of this report ("Financial Considerations").
  - b. These revisions provide further clarity to the proposed Article 15.
  - c. These revisions promote flexibility while also promoting the covenantal arrangement between the minister and the calling church.
4. Proposed Article 23-d
- d. Each church through its council shall attend to the proper support of its commissioned pastor.

*Grounds:*

- a. The proposed addition calls for the proper support of commissioned pastors.
  - b. The proposed addition parallels the proposal for Article 15.
5. Proposed Supplement, Article 23-d
- "Proper Support" Defined
- Proper support of a commissioned pastor is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, disability insurance, a housing provision, payment to an appropriate pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items.

To “attend to” proper support does not imply that the calling church is responsible to provide all of these items of support. Rather, the calling church is responsible to ensure that the commissioned pastor has a plan that addresses these items. In many traditional ministries the local church itself accepts these responsibilities in order to facilitate full-time or part-time ministry service. In other settings—such as church planting, various forms of chaplaincy, bivocational arrangements, multipoint ministries, and so on—the financial plan will include income and benefits provided by a variety of potential sources. The calling church’s support of the financial plan should be carefully reviewed at the time classis approves the commissioned pastor’s position. This includes a call to bivocational ministry or when a pastor and church decide to change their financial arrangement.

*Guidelines for Churches in Conversations with Pastors about “Proper Support”*

1. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.
2. The nature and amount of time of the task(s) shall be mutually discerned by the commissioned pastor(s) and the supervising council. The support plan, including the financial plan, shall be specified in writing, approved by classis along with the position description, and normally reviewed annually by the supervising council. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not normally exceed sixty hours per week.
3. The supervising council shall annually attend to nonfinancial support of commissioned pastors, including but not limited to physical, emotional, and spiritual support.

*Grounds:*

- a. This addition provides further clarity to the proposed Article 23-d.
  - b. This addition promotes flexibility while also promoting the covenantal arrangement between the commissioned pastor and the calling church.
  - c. The proposed supplement reflects similar proposed changes to Supplement, Article 15.
- C. That synod encourage classical student funding committees (providing financial aid for seminary students—cf. Church Order Article 21) to treat those who are in or anticipating bivocational or other nontraditional ministry arrangements in the same manner as those who are in or anticipating full-time arrangements.

*Grounds:*

1. Bivocational pastors and pastors in nontraditional arrangements retain the honor of the office they have been ordained to and remain accountable to the work to which they have been called.
2. Burdening bivocational pastors and pastors in nontraditional arrangements with financial debts does not serve the church as a whole, nor does it serve the cause of the gospel.

3. Article 21 states that “the churches . . . in coordination with classis, shall grant financial aid to those who are in need of it” and thus make their decisions based on their knowledge of specific situations.

D. That synod instruct the executive director to direct Pastor Church Resources to create an exit interview/ ministry postmortem learning process for classes, churches, leaders, and their families to use when burnout occurs in bivocational ministry.

*Grounds:*

1. Exit interviews/ postmortems can provide healing to those involved.
2. Exit interviews/ postmortems may help to teach us how to avoid future burnout or breakdown situations between churches and pastors.

E. That synod instruct the executive director to direct Pastor Church Resources to provide a ministry wellness assessment for pastors in bivocational ministry and their supervisory councils to use as part of their regular conversations.

*Grounds:*

1. Such an assessment could provide helpful feedback regarding a bivocational pastor’s well-being.
2. Such an assessment could provide a helpful tool in the regular conversations between a bivocational pastor and the supervisory council.

F. That synod direct the CRCNA’s U.S. Board of Pensions and Canadian Pension Trustees, in consultation with clergy couples, to amend the pension plan to recognize the ordination of both spouses who are ministers of the Word by providing the option of a single, full membership and benefits to both spouses as a single entity who contribute to a single pension plan.

*Ground:* The current rules of the pension plan do not equally recognize and honor the ordinations of clergy couples who are both ministers of the Word.

G. That synod encourage all pastors together with their supervisory councils to annually review the “proper support” required for pastors, including the financial plan.

*Grounds:*

1. An annual review of “proper support” will help to encourage the ongoing health of pastors and their families.
2. Annual reviews that include a review of “proper support” will fulfill the requirements regarding the same in proposed Church Order Articles 15 and 23-d and their Supplements.

H. That synod encourage church visitors to inquire about the health and welfare of pastors, including whether they have “proper support.”

*Grounds:*

1. Inquiry about the health and welfare of pastors will encourage the same.
2. Inquiry about whether pastors have “proper support” is included in the church visitors’ mandate to ascertain whether a church’s office-bearers “observe the provisions of the Church Order” (see Art. 42-b).

I. That synod encourage the classes and congregations of the CRCNA to affirm the challenges of bivocational ministry, support the leaders of adaptive changes that are happening in our current ministry settings, and celebrate the dedicated and creative pastoral work many are doing and will do for the sake of the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

*Ground:* Bivocational pastors, those in nontraditional ministry arrangements, and their work require affirmation, support, and celebration by the broader body of believers.

Study of Bivocationality Task Force

Bernard Bakker (chair)

John Bouwers

Beth Fellingner

Ernesto Hernandez

Sharon Jim

David Koll (staff)

Michael Vander Laan (reporter)

Phillip Westra

Robert Zoerman

## Appendix

### Internet Resources regarding Bivocational Ministry

“Why I Choose to Be a Bivocational Pastor”—story of a Canadian bivocational pastor in Saskatoon; [thegospelcoalition.org/article/chosen-bivocational-pastor/](http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/chosen-bivocational-pastor/)

Eight Characteristics of the New Bivocational Pastor; [factsandtrends.net/2018/01/26/eight-characteristics-new-bi-vocational-pastor/](http://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/26/eight-characteristics-new-bi-vocational-pastor/)

“The Art of Bivocational”—Theology on Mission podcast by Northern Seminary; [seminary.edu/the-art-of-bi-vocational-theology-on-mission-podcast/](http://seminary.edu/the-art-of-bi-vocational-theology-on-mission-podcast/)

Bivocational Pastor Job Description; [bscln.net/ministry-description/bivocational-pastor-job-description/](http://bscln.net/ministry-description/bivocational-pastor-job-description/)

Understanding Bivocational Ministry; [nph.com/vcmedia/2419/2419936.pdf](http://nph.com/vcmedia/2419/2419936.pdf)

“A Bivocational Minister Warns against Bivocational Ministry”—*The Christian Century*; [christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2013-08/bi-vocational-minister-warns-against-bi-vocational-ministry](http://christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2013-08/bi-vocational-minister-warns-against-bi-vocational-ministry)

Video presentations from speakers at “What Role Will Bivocational Ministry Play in the Future of the CRCNA?”; [network.crcna.org/pastors/resources-bivocational-ministry-gathering-last-month](http://network.crcna.org/pastors/resources-bivocational-ministry-gathering-last-month)

Canadian Multivocational Ministry Project; [canadianmultivocationalministry.ca/master-report](http://canadianmultivocationalministry.ca/master-report)

The Wellness Project @ Wycliffe College (University of Toronto); [wycliffewellnessproject.com/](http://wycliffewellnessproject.com/)