BIVOCATIONAL

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Introduction

In Team 63 at C. E. MacDonald Middle School in East Lansing, Michigan, the sixth-grade math and science teacher was a fellow named Jerry Smith. Mr. Smith lives for me in the category of teachers you remember long after most of the rest of the parade of instructors who passed in front of the classrooms you sat in have been forgotten. He expected a lot out of us, but his class was engaging, intriguing, and just occasionally a place of wonder.

Even more impressive to this sixth-grade boy, he was a pilot—and not just any sort of pilot; he had flown C-47s in the Canadian Air Force and held ratings as a multiengine aircraft pilot and as an instructor. He even had aviator glasses and a goatee. To me and to most of my friends, Jerry Smith was the epitome of cool.

Pretty much every boy in the middle school wanted to be in his class when, every other week, we had "flex time"—alternative classes the teachers offered to broaden our horizons. There were classes in macramé and origami, pottery and ballroom dancing (thanks, no). Mr. Smith offered an hour-long class in aviation and navigation—which was pretty much the only thing I wanted to do during flex time. He brought in aeronautical charts and taught us how to plot flight paths accounting for the speed and direction of prevailing winds and the variations between true north and

magnetic north. We used (no kidding) circular slide rules called E6Bs, straight edges, and pencils to plan endless trips we never made from St. Louis to Denver, from Phoenix to Santa Fe, from Baltimore to Tampa.

Of course, he never told us that the whole point was to get us to learn trigonometry. We didn't care. We were completely fascinated by the idea of airplanes.

Jerry Smith was a marvelous and creative teacher. He was also an Episcopal priest. He served as the part-time vicar of the little mission church in Williamston, Michigan, a town about ten miles to the east of where I grew up. Most kids can't imagine the lives their teachers have in the hours they don't spend in the classroom; for Jerry Smith, it was the life of ordained ministry.

I only learned after I was out of sixth grade that Jerry Smith was also Pastor Jerry. I didn't go to church in Williamston, so I never saw him there. Instead, a couple of years or so later he came to my church when we were instituting a new rector, and for the first time I saw him in a clerical collar. I was completely floored. But somehow I wasn't surprised. To me, he was still Mr. Smith—a great teacher with a gift for engaging kids and getting them to learn even when they thought they were doing something else.

I have thought a lot about Mr. Smith in the years since I was ordained, after first pursuing a graduate degree and a research career. I wonder how he managed to keep the balance between the steep demands public school teachers manage (something I grew up knowing, because my mom was one, too) and the needs of his parish. I have come to see that the people of his parish had to have been a big part of making it work, just as the people of my parish have been more than half the equation of creating our own kind of bivocational ministry.

But mostly I think back to that flex-time class because, in a lot of ways, it held the key to Jerry Smith's success, not just as a teacher but as a

person called to the ministry of the church—and as a Christian who lived his ministry not just in the church, but in the world. Jerry Smith knew how to capture our imagination and our interests. I thought I was exploring my fascination with flying; in fact, I was learning math. He translated my curiosity into exploration—which is, after all, what lies at the heart of the call to witness that all members of the church have. By engaging my curiosity about airplanes, he taught me something about trigonometry. By affirming my interests and channeling my enthusiasm, he helped me realize my gifts. But, of course, for Jerry Smith that wasn't just what teachers do; it was, in no small way, the cornerstone of what ministry is, no matter who is doing it.

This is a book about bivocational ministry. In some ways the idea that ministry is bivocational may seem like a statement of the obvious; each of us who shares in the ministry of the baptized is meant to carry out that ministry in the world, and not merely in the church. But in some ways it is profoundly countercultural, at least in terms of traditional church culture, because it imagines a different way of structuring the ministry of the faith community, parish, or congregation, from the model we have received.

Most of us grew up with the model that ordained ministers are people who "have a vocation," and who serve the church in a *profession* called ordained ministry. Many if not most of us still regard that idea—consciously or unconsciously—as normative. Like all professions, the ordained ministry is characterized by specialized knowledge and a set of institutions for transmitting that knowledge (divinity schools and seminaries). It has systems for credentialing those who are approved to become part of the profession (usually a qualifying examination and a rite of ordination), standards of professional conduct (a book of discipline,

canon laws), and expectations for participation in the profession (continuing education, participation in regular meetings of clergy).

Those who become admitted to this profession receive certain benefits by means of being credentialed. First, they have a particular kind of authority within their church. To cite specifics, in some churches only ordained people can preach, can read from the gospels at the time of Holy Communion, can pronounce a blessing or absolve people of confessed sins, or can perform certain other sacramental acts. In churches of Protestant persuasion this authority is generally held in balance by a democratically governed congregation, or by the expectation of obedience to a bishop or polity—or both. Members of the profession are also entitled to certain privileges created by custom (for example, the honorific "The Reverend") or by law (in most states ordained people may still function as civil authorities in solemnizing marriages).

Members of the ministerial profession are typically given exclusive access to certain sorts of jobs within the church. One must be ordained not just to exercise certain kinds of spiritual authority, but to be employed in certain jobs within the structure of a given polity: a pastor, a senior minister, a rector. Being chosen for one of these jobs means a salary, general participation in a retirement program, and access to health insurance.

So our model of ministry, at least since the late 1800s, has been one of professionalization. That, in turn, has had a formative impact on our notion of what "church" is. Among other things, a church is a social institution that has an ordained professional as its leader. And that has some particular economic implications as well: a church is an economic entity that can afford to hire a full-time professional as its leader. That's pretty much what we mean when we call something a "church."

It is no accident that this general notion of how the church is (or should be) structured arose during the period of industrial organization—which itself happened in parts of the world significantly shaped by Protestant ideas. Theorists today speak of this as one of three basic ways

of organizing human communities to produce things humans need: it is "firm-based production." Firm-based production is a way of organizing to produce goods—not necessarily material goods, but cultural or spiritual goods as well—that depends on a hierarchical structure best suited to a centralized decision-making process. Market-based production, by contrast, uses the incentives and signals of the market to encourage creativeness, invention, and efficient distribution. Markets produce things in a decentralized way, while firms do best in areas where centralization and hierarchy confer advantages.[1] (I'll get to the third alternative in a little while.)

Of course, the hierarchy of the church existed long before the emergence of industrial economies. In virtually all expressions of the Christian community—Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant—a hierarchical structure has been seen as both grounded in scripture and essential to the maintenance of doctrinal discipline. Hierarchical structures facilitated the kind of centralized decision-making that made possible the global spread of different expressions of the Christian message; the building of universities, schools, and hospitals; and even the creation of the ecumenical movement. But the strong emphasis that industrial economic development gave to both hierarchical structures and the dominant role of professions in shaping the leadership of those structures has had a profound impact on our understanding of what the church is and does. The ministry, one of the three ancient "learned professions" (along with medicine and law), became a *modern* profession—an occupational specialization with attendant structures, expectations, and privileges.

To get a sense of the true scale of that impact, think for a moment about other parts to our model of ministry—things seemingly so obvious we don't really think about them. A church not only has a full-time

1. Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006).

ordained minister as its leader; it typically has a building of its own. It may also have a residential building that is kept to house the minister—something that has long been understood to be both a benefit to the minister and a matter of convenience for the congregation. (Members of other professions, especially in government and academe, sometimes receive a similar benefit.) Typically it has a parish house or church hall, a function room where activities of the community can take place. All of this property, under our current model, is given privileged treatment by the civil authorities—specifically, it has been exempted from taxation for most purposes.

And there are other, less obvious, parts of our model of ministry. Often, the children of ordained ministers have been given discounted tuition at private schools and colleges. Ministers and their families were often welcomed at different sorts of social clubs for a discounted fee. And it is still the case that members of the clergy may write a letter to the front office of the Boston Red Sox in the late winter of each year to receive a pass to Fenway Park, assuring them a place in the standing-room-only section—alongside members of the armed services—for a relatively small price.

The power of this model of ministry—let's call it the "Standard Model"—has shaped not just the economic arrangements that underlie what we think of as "church"; it has shaped much of what we understand to be involved in the practice of ministry and congregational leadership. Under the Standard Model, we expect the minister to be not just the chief spiritual officer of the community, but the chief operating officer of a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation. We expect the professional minister to administer a staff of varying sizes, or to perform the functions of what needed staff might do in a small parish. We expect the professional minister to be the public face and voice of the congregation within the community it serves. We expect the professional minister to be the first responder to the spiritual and pastoral needs of the parish, to manage

business relationships on the part of the church with contractors and vendors, and to interact with municipal authorities on topics from parking spaces and garbage collection to low-income housing and food and fuel assistance for the poor.

Said in different terms, we expect our professional ministers to exercise more than spiritual leadership with the congregation. We expect them to discharge a variety of delegated responsibilities that have more to do with running the business of an entity called "the church" than with any theologically grounded understanding of the distinctive gifts and distinctive roles of those set apart by the body of Christ—the community of the faithful—to exercise a distinct sort of ministry, an ordained ministry, for and within the church. The Standard Model looks a lot like firm-based production. It is organized hierarchically in order to support centralized decision-making in an institution that provides spiritual services to its members and the broader community. Exactly because we are pooling our resources to pay our professional ministers, we expect them to do everything from running the worship service to fixing the copier machine, maintaining the web page, showing up at the affordable-housing hearing, dealing with the nursery school renting space in the basement, and—oh, yes—visiting the folks on the at-home list, teaching us about the faith, attracting new members, and making us want to be better people.

If you are reading this book, chances are you are aware that many of the assumptions—explicit and implicit—on which the Standard Model of ministry were based are now under tremendous pressure. For some of us, it feels as though the very stones in our foundation are giving way; where once all was certainty, now the world of the church seems a realm of instability, decline, and loss. Certainly the privileged treatment of churches and faith communities once typical in our society—expressed not just through

favored treatment in law and tax code but by school calendars, shopping hours, and countless other expressions of deference to Christian values—is ending. With the collapse of much of this favored treatment has come a rise in the sheer cost of doing the work of the church. To say it in other words, the basic assumptions of our business model are changing. Simply maintaining a full-time, fully benefitted professional as the head of the organization known as "the church" is increasingly something beyond the resources of more and more congregations.[2]

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2. A major change may be coming in the basic costs of the Standard Model. A number of recent cases in federal court have challenged the constitutionality of 26 U.S.C. § 107(2)—the law that exempts clergy housing allowances from taxation. After an initial ruling in the Western District of Wisconsin striking down the provision was vacated on appeal, a second case was brought—and, again, the decision at the district court has been to declare the provision unconstitutional, "because it does not have a secular purpose or effect and because a reasonable observer would view the statute as an endorsement [by the federal government] of religion." Gaylor vs. Mnuchin, United States District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin, Case 3:16-cv-215-bbc, decided October 6, 2017.

To understand why this decision has significant impact on parish finances, imagine a senior minister in a congregation who is paid $80,000 per year, of which she has asked $24,000 to be paid as a housing allowance. She would have to be able to show that her actual housing costs—her rental payment, or the rental value of a home she uses the funds to pay a mortgage with, together with utility costs—are at least $2,000 per month; but in most American cities that would not be hard to do, especially if she has a home that must accommodate a family. Let's also say that she's the only wage earner in her home, that she's married and filing jointly with her spouse, and that they have no dependent children at home.

Under the recently revised tax law, the minister's taxable income for 2018 would be $56,000 per year; the $24,000 she receives in housing allowance would not be taxed. Assuming, just to make this simple, that she has no other exemptions, she would pay $3,459 in federal income taxes. But if the housing allowance were ended, her taxable income would now be $80,000—which would mean she would now pay $6,339 in federal income taxes. The net impact of this would be a decrease in her income (because of a rise in taxes) of $2,880—or an effective cut of 3.6 percent in her total earnings. (Remember, she still has to pay her rent.) Needless to say, the effect of this will be to raise the bar on the average cost to a congregation of maintaining a full-time professional minister—our Standard Model—and to increase the number of congregations confronting a difficult decision about their future.

So here is the hard truth: the question many congregations face today is whether this professional model of ministry is consistent with their future, or with them *having* a future. Because we have equated a vocation to ministry with membership in a profession called "the ministry," and because the Standard Model of ministry expects that a congregation must have a full-time member of that profession to be a viable church, we have created a set of economic circumstances that are causing a great many congregations to make hard choices. Will we have to close? Will we have to merge with another congregation across town, or maybe in the next town over? Or maybe—just maybe—might we reimagine the model of ministry we have inherited from the generations of faithful people before us?

Other Choices, Other Models

Of course, the expectations of the Standard Model are far more a result of choices that we have made—or that our ancestors made—than they are a theological necessity. As I said, we have created these expectations. And that means we could create a different set of expectations by making a different set of choices. So while it might cause us some discomfort, exploring the full range of choices in structuring new models of ministry might just open new possibilities for flourishing in the faith communities we love. That is the opportunity before us. And while it may feel disorienting, it may even be that there is something in it of God's hope for us.

A first step some congregations have already taken to relieve economic pressure is to move toward a *part-time* model of ministry. A number of conditions have to be in place for this to work. The congregation has to be of such size and scale that a part-time professional minister can cover the needed tasks. Because this model is usually premised on an assumption that the basic division of labor between the ordained and lay members of the congregation remains substantially unchanged, the size of the congregation and of its associated work—liturgical, pastoral, administrative, and social—has to match the availability of the minister.

At the same time, the part-time model imposes an implied expectation that the minister chosen by the congregation will have other financial resources on which to survive. A working spouse or partner—or perhaps a trust fund—will provide the resources for that minister's health insurance and retirement investment plan. The congregation may provide much the same support to the part-time minister as they would to a full-time minister in terms of expense reimbursements—for travel, say, or perhaps for a car or a telephone—but the elements of a total compensation plan that increasingly drive costs (for example, health care and retirement, and potentially housing) are managed in this model simply by being avoided.

A second alternative model is to unite two or more parishes into a model often labeled *shared* ministry. In a shared ministry model, the resources of a number of congregations are combined so as to preserve, and thus work in service of, the basic outlines of the Standard Model of ministry: a full-time, fully benefited professional who, in this case, serves more than one parish.

The shared ministry model is even more likely to be based on the same essential concepts as the Standard Model because the central orienting concept of a shared ministry approach is the preservation of a full-time position for an appropriately qualified and certified professional. (Indeed, you could say that the shared ministry model is basically a preservation program for the full-time professional model of ministry.) For this reason, the basic division of responsibilities between the ordained professional and the lay members of the congregations gathered together in this ministry is—as in the part-time model—unlikely to change in substantial ways. The ordained professional will still be looked to for performing traditional roles and responsibilities within the congregation. The basic change that members of each of the participating communities will need to work through centers on appropriately calibrating their expectations of the pastor's time for the needs of *their* congregation, given that *other*

congregations also have a claim on the pastor's time as well. Success in a model of shared ministry depends in large part on creating effective governance structures able to clarify the shared expectations of each congregation participating in the arrangement—to make certain they cohere together and do not end up creating an impossible set of demands.

Both the part-time model and the shared model of ministry can be made to work, and in many places they are already doing so. This book does not address either of those models. Instead it focuses on a third, very different model—that of *bivocational* ministry.

Bivocational ministry begins with a different set of assumptions, and ends with a different understanding of how the church can be structured to do its work of ministry. First, in a bivocational congregation the ordained minister works both in the church and, in some way, in the secular world. This latter role may be easily imagined as an outgrowth of pastoral ministry—say, working as a social worker or therapist, or perhaps in a leadership role within a non-profit agency. Like my old teacher Mr. Smith, the minister's job in the secular world may be as a public-sector employee—a teacher, or perhaps an administrator or public defender. Or it may be in a different form of self-employment—say, as a consultant or a real-estate agent. Typically, one result of this arrangement will be that the minister's access to health insurance and a retirement plan are provided through the secular employer, or through an individual policy for which the congregation provides some limited support.

But it is not only the ordained minister in a bivocational parish who is bivocational. In fact, in the optimal realization of this model *the entire congregation adopts a bivocational understanding of the ministry it is called to do in the world*. This is not just an accidental byproduct of the sort of person a congregation hires; it is an intentional outcome of a purposeful process.

In a bivocational church, the historically rigid division between ordained responsibilities and lay roles is instead understood as different expressions of the *same* ministry—one in which *all* are now understood to be ministers of the congregation. Not surprisingly, in a bivocational congregation, the whole idea of what the church is, and what it is for, begins to change.

This sort of language is often heard in congregational life, but in the bivocational congregation it takes on a new and vivid reality. The first step in creating an effective bivocational model is typically to lift up and articulate some of the basic (and often unspoken) expectations we have of our ministers—and that ministers have of their congregations. Through this exercise congregations discover and make plain how much the Standard Model has shaped their expectations of people who serve the church in ordained ministry—and how many, if not most, of those expectations can be held up to the light of inquiry once they are brought to the surface.

A second step is to identify new ways in which these expectations can be taken on by other people in the congregation—people who may, more often than not, be better equipped for these roles than an ordained professional ever would be. An architect in the pews is probably going to be a better person to take on the work of evaluating and dealing with contractors undertaking an accessibility project. A family living with a child on the autism spectrum will probably be better and more effective advocates for community-housing opportunities for adults with autism-spectrum disorder on behalf of the congregation. And no one should have a monopoly on pastoral visitations with the sick, the elderly, and the marginalized, although that is often exactly the pattern followed in the Standard Model.

The ordained minister in a bivocational model accordingly needs a different set of skills, and even a different understanding and practice of leadership, in order for this model to flourish. In this model, something much more like "servant-leadership"—a phrase often used but rarely

exemplified in a hierarchical, firm-like church culture—is not just desirable, but necessary. The ordained member of the community now has as a first task the identification, development, and encouragement of the various gifts for ministry that exist in all members of the community—and in those who come to the community to explore their faith.

This means that in a bivocational model of ministry, something about the very nature of the community itself must undergo a shift from what is, in the Standard Model, typically a *consumer* or *recipient* ethos to a *participant* or *stakeholder* ethos. This is a critical point that we'll develop more fully in chapter 2, but, for now, a brief description will point the way forward.

We said earlier that theorists have described three basic ways of shaping organizations for providing the things people need. The market is one; firms are another. Markets do well at things like building carts and growing vegetables; firms do well at things like creating bus companies and airlines, productive work that inherently demands, and benefits from, operating at larger scale.

A third way of organizing people is by means of a commons. What's different about a commons is that it does not operate, at least not in a primary way, by means of the signals of the market (so, it's not like market-based production); and it is, in general, a non-hierarchical organization (which means it's not like firm-based production). A good way of understanding this is to think about the difference between the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and Wikipedia. The *Britannica*, in its heyday, was a classic firm-based, hierarchically structured enterprise focused on the production of a knowledge resource called an encyclopedia. It had (and still has) an editor-in-chief, an editorial board, assistant editors with responsibility for specific subject areas, a team of writers and editors, and (at least back in the day) a door-to-door sales force the size of a small army. If you sketched all this on a piece of paper, you'd see something that looked pretty much like a pyramid.

A commons is different. Wikipedia is produced by a commons. It has a relatively tiny organization, and a vast number of contributors with very little structure defining their relationships to one another. What makes the production of Wikipedia possible is that the thousands of people who have generated content for it are *united by a shared passion and commitment* to the goal of providing a resource for everyone, and a shared set of values and norms for how they do their collective work. That is what a commons is, and how it works. One of the most hopeful things to happen to the Christian church in a long time is that the church itself is now facing the challenge of becoming less like a firm, and more like a commons. That is the idea at the heart of this book.

A Church of the Commons

Bivocational communities answer this challenge head on. They do so by focusing on doing the work of the church in a way that is fundamentally based, not on a hierarchy of distinctive roles and a division of labor, but on a group of peers sharing the full variety of their gifts, contributing them on the basis of a common passion and commitment to a shared goal. In this case, the "product" we are producing is both speaking about and living in accord with the Good News of the Christian gospel. Doing that still takes human organization, and likely always will. It's just that the sort of organization best suited to our vision and our hope is changing, for the simple if inconvenient reason that the world in which we do the work of discipleship is changing.

Bivocational communities are one way of responding constructively and hopefully to that change. It may seem like they are radically different from the Standard Model that all of us grew up with, and that many of us still cherish; and, to be honest, in important ways they are. But it's equally important to remember that in the whole history of the Christian faith, our model of ministry is a pretty recent invention. Over the centuries of Christian witness, a tremendous variety of ideas for how ministry should

be structured and lived out have been tried, tested, implemented, and left behind when they no longer served the purpose.

For us, the Standard Model has such paradigmatic status that we can scarcely imagine how the church could ever have been organized differently. But even in the relatively short history of the United States, our basic concept of how ministry should be structured has changed dramatically. Donald Scott has shown, for example, how being the minister of a church—at least a Protestant church—in the eighteenth century was to hold what was, in effect, a public office. The history of the American ministry in the nineteenth century is in many ways the history of a shift in the idea of ministry, as Scott calls it, "from office to profession"—the sort of modern profession that forms the core of our Standard Model.[3] The fact that it has not always been so means that it need not always remain so. We are being called to respond to the changing world around us, and to bear fruit, not sour grapes.

The Structure of this Book

The full impact of a bivocational approach to ministry touches on virtually every aspect of the Standard Model we have received from our traditions. In the chapters that follow we will look at four broad categories of the life of the church, and explore how a bivocational approach to ministry would involve significant changes in each of them.

1. The Bivocational Pastor

It may seem ironic to begin a study focused on the empowerment of all people in the church for ministry by focusing on the ordained minster. But because the Standard Model shapes so much of the financial and

3. Donald Scott, *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750-1850*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978.

psychological reality of parishes and congregations today, it is appropriate to begin with an examination of how a bivocational pastorate differs from other models in terms of the practical realities, personal gifts, and leadership style of the individual pastor. As with any model of ministry, the bivocational pastorate has both advantages and disadvantages. Success in building a flourishing congregation with this model depends on a clear understanding of both, and the ability to craft a transition strategy from one model to another.

At the same time, the strengths and skills brought by bivocational pastors will be different, in some important respects, than those who have traditionally been seen as fit for, or "called to," the profession of ministry. Perhaps most important, their relationship to some of the traditional privileges associated with the ministerial profession will need to change, or be different in important ways. Simply put, they will need to be less focused on what makes the ordained ministry *distinct* or *privileged* in comparison to the ministry of all baptized, and instead much more engaged with, and able to develop, the shared passion and commitment on which the success of a commons-based approach depends.

2. The Bivocational Congregation

There are significant differences in both the role of the pastor and the ethos of the congregation between the Standard Model and a bivocational model of ministry. In this chapter we will describe some of those differences, seeking to point out some of the distinguishing characteristics of a bivocational congregation and the qualities present in any Christian community that can become the foundation of such an approach to ministry. The simple truth is that a successful bivocational congregation has a different feel and a different culture than a congregation in the Standard Model of ministry. Some of those differences are positive differences, at least in the sense of what Christian discipleship is supposed to be about. But some of them are just plain countercultural. They involve a set of

demands that run directly against trends in the dominant culture in which our churches operate. This chapter will outline both sets of differences and look for ways to leverage the positive elements of a bivocational faith community, so as to offer an effective witness against some of the most corrosive forces of contemporary society.

3. The Bivocational Polity

If the Standard Model of ministry has shaped our experience and understanding of our own faith community, still more has it shaped the structure and functioning of our denominational polities. Tremendous resources are devoted by these organizations to the maintenance and development of the profession of the ministry. Denominational authorities typically determine the standards for credentialing members of the ministerial profession; issue these credentials, and maintain systems for revoking them; create and implement systems for the deployment of these professionals and the development of their careers; provide pension plans for members of the profession and create means of funding them through congregational contributions; and establish the organizational principles of member congregations, many of which effectively reinforce the Standard Model.

In this chapter we'll explore how polities can create conditions favorable to the emergence of bivocational ministries and communities. We'll describe ways in which, through expanding and reorienting the standards by which candidates for ordination are selected, denominations can help provide the resources critical to the emergence of bivocational ministries as a real and substantial alternative to the Standard Model. We'll look at some of the roadblocks created by the standards by which denominations determine what a "church" is that stand in the way of the emergence of bivocational congregations, and look at ways they might be removed. We'll also look at other traditional professions that have adapted successfully to the presence of bivocational members of the profession and have

encouraged their professional development, seeking lessons and ideas from other experiences that might help us understand how to build a bivocational approach to ordained ministry.

4. The Bivocational Church

Ultimately, a conversation about how best to structure the work of ministry and how to steward our resources of time, talent, and treasure most effectively for the work God calls us to do is a theological conversation. To be specific, it is a conversation about *ecclesiology*—a seminary word that is meant to summarize all the elements of our doctrine of the church and the relationship between those elements.

For some readers this may well be the least interesting chapter of the book. Yet in important ways, it is perhaps the most crucial. It starts with a basic question on which Christians are not, and never have been, of one mind: Is the church meant to be a realm separate from the world, with its own structures, processes, language, and rules? Or is the church meant to be the place through which God engages the rest of the world, seeking to draw the whole world into the reconciliation offered through Jesus Christ?

This is a crucial distinction, and a great deal hangs by it. It is often oversimplified by drawing a distinction between those who see the church as an *end* unto itself, and those who see the church as a *means* to an end. But like most oversimplifications, there is a degree of truth in this distinction that sheds light on the question. If you see the church as an institution set apart and existing for its own purposes and ends, then it's fairly likely you will see our willingness to adapt to the church's needs and expectations as the means to that end. The church in this model is a source and symbol of permanence and unchanging standards, a reflection of the unchanging and transcendent nature of God.

Conversely, if you see the church as the means, then probably it is people themselves—or their engagement with the loving, transforming work

of Christ—who are the end in view. The church in this model is *simply* a means—a beautiful, blessed, beloved means, but a means nonetheless—by which God seeks to achieve the end of relationship with all people. And if the means we have developed—the models we have constructed—for doing this are no longer effective, then God will dispense with them and build new ones, whether we like it or not. The church in this model is an instrument more than an objective. It is part of the continuing incarnation of God in the body of Christ, the church; but like any body, it must grow and change if it is to remain vital.

These are two very broadly defined views of what the church is and does. One is institutional, one is incarnational. Needless to say, perhaps, a bivocational model of ministry is strongly oriented toward the idea that the church is a means, not an end; that it is essentially incarnational, not essentially institutional. This means that building a model of a bivocational ministry means taking a clear set of positions in the conversation about ecclesiology. We will argue that an institutional understanding of the church has both led to, and resulted from, a firm-based approach to ecclesiology with the professionalized ministry at its center, one specific outcome of which is an essentially *transactional* understanding of what discipleship means. By contrast, an incarnational understanding of the church may point us toward, and be strengthened by, an understanding of the church that sees it as something operating more like a commons—one specific outcome of which is an essentially *relational* understanding of discipleship. This focus on authentic relationship is itself potentially the most dramatic and countercultural witness the Christian faith has to offer against the social forces arrayed against the message of the gospel.

Without becoming too deeply theological, in this chapter we'll chart out what all this means and explore the deeper vision of the church and its future from which a bivocational understanding of ministry springs.

5. Getting There from Here

One thing I know from spending a lifetime in the church is that we can be really good at describing and discussing ideas but not very good at translating these ideas into concrete proposals, creating a strategy to achieve our proposals, and measuring our progress toward them. Oftentimes we conclude with the idea that, if we just pray harder, the Holy Spirit will somehow come and do the work for us—or will somehow possess us to do it. I come to this work with the idea that what it means to be the body of Christ is that God is entrusting this work to us, and has already given us the hearts, the minds, and the strength sufficient for the task.

So we'll wrap up the book by setting out some specific proposals in each of the areas addressed by the previous chapters. I'll offer some ideas for how we can identify and raise up bivocational people to the ordained ministry; what changes distinguish a congregation that is moving toward a bivocational ethos, and how to measure progress toward those changes; and how larger denominational structures can examine their own basic assumptions with a view to opening space and possibility for the emergence of bivocational expressions of ministry.

> After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers. Every Sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.
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> —Acts 18:1-4

Models of ministry have changed a lot since the days of the apostle Paul. One wonders what he would have made of all the trappings and affectations that have sprung up in the two millennia since he stitched tents together in the back alleys of Corinth to support his work with the nascent Christian community there, and his evangelism to communities outside the church.

Of course, the conditions of ministry were profoundly different then. Christianity was not the dominant cultural backdrop of the day. Most people had no idea of what was distinct or different about the Christian understanding of God and God's purposes, and those who did have some idea generally had a pretty bad, or at least misinformed, apprehension of it. Paul had to do the work of a disciple on the terms the culture gave him.

When we state it in these terms, however, it becomes quickly apparent that the parallels between Paul's day and our own may be closer and more numerous than we would at first imagine. Christianity is misunderstood in most places, and persecuted in more than a few. It has a complicated and often turbulent history that has caused many people to dismiss it as a source of moral authority. It is no longer the dominant force in places where it once held unchallenged cultural authority. And in many places matters of belief generally have become relegated to the private sphere, and made a matter limited to questions of individual conscience.

In these conditions, Paul's example has renewed force and salience. Tentmakers don't divide their existence between church on Sunday and the sewing floor on the weekdays. They are ministers *every* day, sometimes in church and sometimes in the world. They make community with other people who understand their own place in the faith community in similar terms. By coming together with each other, by making genuine community out of authentic relationships with each other, they receive the support and strength they need to do the work of disciples—which is, in the end, nothing more or less than to bring other people seeking

relationship with the Source of all being into exactly that community of relationship. Mr. Smith, it turns out, was a tentmaker.

The tentmakers of Paul's day are the bivocational ministers of our day. All of them—all of *us*—are empowered in baptism to claim this ministry. Some of them become ordained. In the pages that follow, we'll look at how this works in a bivocational community, and how these communities offer a compelling and magnetic answer to the question of the future of the church in an increasingly secular society.