

The Difference between Pulpit Supply and Less than Full Time or Bi vocational Ministry
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I am on occasion asked “What is the difference between pulpit supply and part time ministry?” A follow up to that question that appears on the scene is “how do we measure, or hold accountable, our servants who do not serve with the privilege of a full time call with all of the trappings that are included with it.” I have and in some ways continue to serve in these situations. This is intended to be fodder for discussion and is not exhaustive. We should also admit that time invested and effectiveness in ministry is very difficult to measure and any attempt to do so should be tempered with grace, understanding and mercy!

Pulpit supply is in its purest form simply a preaching ministry on Sunday mornings. The ministry is almost exclusively a Sunday morning sermon. From time to time funerals or an occasional hospital visit may be made, but by and large pulpit supply is what you see is what you get! This is almost always compensated by the job and sometimes paid weekly on the spot. Not all who undertake this have ministerial standing with the denomination or possess a theological education or training.

Pastorates that are not full time are common in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). These are often considered less than full time; however, like any ministry will take whatever is given or needed. Given this it is hard to measure a part time ministry by the hour even when a budget of time for the work (say 20 hours a week) is provided and expected. Because of the very nature of ministry some members will be unable to distinguish between pulpit supply and a less than full time ministry.¹ These pastors may or may not be theologically trained, and they may or may not have other jobs that require attention and time.

In order to keep things healthy, I recommend that minister who are called to be pastors in a less than full time setting should at minimum do the following:

- report regularly and in appropriate detail to the board officers about how time is spent
- set a goal for pastoral contacts outside of worship weekly, this keeps us in touch with our people
- report in worship, if sensitivity allows, when hospital visits are made
- have a discipline about shut in contact
- work with the congregation at vision casting and church development
- be active with the board and committees
- participate denominationally

These ministerial practices will help keep the office of minister visible and can be accomplished without putting undo stress on the time budget. I believe that these tips will serve both the pastor and

¹ this can cause concern about how the minister is spending his or her time, and can create an environment where members feel that the church is not receiving what it should be from the arrangement

the people well. In all cases communication about activity and expectation can only bless the Body of Christ.