

*Part-Time is Plenty: Thriving Without Full-Time Clergy*  
By G. Jeffrey MacDonald

**Discussion Guide**  
**Prepared by The BTS Center**

Book Description

Churches experiencing numerical and financial decline may dread the day when they can no longer afford a full-time pastor. Freeing up funds that would go to a full-time salary sure would help the budget — maybe even enough to turn things around — but is it even possible to run effective ministries with just a half- or quarter-time professional?

Journalist and part-time pastor Jeffrey MacDonald says yes — churches can grow more vibrant than ever, tapping into latent energy and undiscovered gifts, revitalizing worship, and engaging in more effective ministry with the community.

Readers of *Part-Time is Plenty* get a much-needed playbook for helping congregations thrive with a part-time ministry model. They learn to see the model in a new light: to stop viewing part-time as a problem to be eradicated and to instead embrace it as a divine gift that facilitates a higher level of lay engagement, responsibility, playfulness, and creativity.

Note: The BTS Center awarded Jeff MacDonald an Innovation Incubator grant in 2016-2017 for a project entitled "Discovering the New Ministry: Exploring Shifting Roles in Congregations with Bivocational Pastors," and then invited him to share his learnings as the keynote speaker for our 2018 Convocation, "Growing by Half: Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church." This book represents the culmination of his research, and we are excited to have partnered with him to create this discussion guide.

Session 1: Introduction & Chapter 1

1. When the image (or idol) of the “right way” of being church is removed from your view, what possibilities for ministry emerge - from our book’s descriptions, from your experience, or from your imagination?
2. If scripture and history point to models of ministry where clergy are engaged in trades and enterprises beyond the Church and communities utilize the gifts of many, where have you seen or heard of such models in contemporary Church? What excites or challenges you in them? What hinders you from exploring or embracing such models? What hinders your congregation?
3. What did you notice / appreciate in Chapter 1? And what did the content in Chapter 1 cause you to wonder more deeply about?

## Session 2: Chapters 2 & 3

1. At the end of chapter 2 it says, “‘We are a community of practitioners, not consumers.’ As laypeople learn to value and seize that all-important difference, congregations with part-time clergy will make the most of what they have to offer – and what they delight in giving.” Share a story of a time when you delighted in a volunteer task. What made it so life-giving for you? What implications might that hold for identifying, equipping, and nurturing a congregation’s lay leaders?
2. Consider the three ministry models presented in Chapter 3: pastor as equipper, pastor as ambassador, and pastor as multi-staff team member. In what ways do you think identifying and working to implement a particular model might be helpful? Which model resonates most strongly for you personally?
3. What did you notice / appreciate in Chapters 2 & 3? And what did the content in Chapters 2 & 3 cause you to wonder more deeply about?

## Session 3: Discerning Gifts with the Author

Prior to this session, learn more about G. Jeffrey MacDonald’s 3 proposed ministry models, by reading this article published by Leadership Education at Duke Divinity:

<https://faithandleadership.com/move-part-time-clergy-sparks-innovation-congregations>.

Then consider these questions, prepared by G. Jeffrey MacDonald, as you discern your congregation’s gifts and assets:

1. Does your congregation have a team of laypeople who are prepared to share several of the pastoral responsibilities? Is your pastor eager to engage more in the community through networking or mission outreach? Are church growth and mission enhancement among your church’s targeted goals?

If you answered yes to all three, then your church is a good candidate for the ambassador model. Also consider these questions:

2. Would some of your laypeople carry some pastoral responsibilities if they were trained to do so? Could the pastor provide some of that training by encouraging their gifts and teaching them what he/she knows about the craft? Would outside training fill the gaps, such as via courses, individual coaching or working as a group with a consultant?

If you answered yes to all or most of these, then your church might do well with the pastor as equipper model.

3. Is your church unable to imagine freeing up even a handful of laypeople to share ministry responsibilities with your pastor? Are your people willing to be challenged and supported by more than one specialized professional pastor? Are you in a region where it's realistic to employ more than one part-time ministry specialist?

If you answered yes to these, then the part-time pastor as multi-staff team member model might be the right fit.

“Whichever model you choose, know that it’s adaptable and combinable with others to suit your context. Be clear about who will be responsible for what and how the sought-after marks of vitality will be measured. Keep praying and discerning. Make adjustments as needed and rejoice in the new thing God is doing among you.” • G. Jeffrey MacDonald

#### Session 4: Chapters 4 & 5

1. Chapter 4 talks about a number of ways national and regional denominational bodies have the power to support and encourage congregations with part-time clergy – by spotlighting models to follow, creating frameworks for networking and learning, equipping and coaching leaders, and more. Where have you seen something along these lines done well? Where could you imagine denominational bodies making a real difference?
2. Reflecting on Chapter 5, and considering each of your particular contexts and roles as it relates to part-time ministry, what is something that you’ve been taught that has been helpful to you? What is something you would like to learn? And what would it look like for seminaries, denominations, and/or other institutions to offer such opportunities for learning, training and/or credentialing?
3. Both Chapter 4 and 5 reference the possibility of stipends for lay leaders. “It’s worth considering that if pastoral duties are to be distributed more equitably, then compensation perhaps ought no longer be reserved only for the ordained” (page 109). Have you seen this done effectively? What are your thoughts on this possibility?
4. What did you notice / appreciate in Chapters 4 & 5? And what did the content in Chapters 4 & 5 cause you to wonder more deeply about?

#### Session 5: Chapter 6

1. Chapter 6 suggests a number of possibilities for congregations to boost their energy and ‘buzz’ in their community through partnerships – from hosting art shows to teaming up with a local health clinic. What ideas do you have for potential life-giving partnerships?

2. On page 156 it says, “Being visible and proudly part-time can be the first steps toward fulfilling what God has prepared for [congregations with part-time clergy].” What would it look like for a congregation to come out of the shadows and position itself as proudly part-time?
3. What did you notice / appreciate in Chapter 6? And what did the content in Chapter 6 cause you to wonder more deeply about?