

Part Time is Plenty Book Club: Vestry Questions for chapters 1 & 2

Exercise One

On page 21, G. Jeffrey MacDonald notes that *“Continued decline, rather than vitality, is unfortunately more the rule than the exception for churches that have made the switch to part-time,”* but goes on to argue that decline is **not inevitable** when churches make this switch. On page 22 and following, to what does he attribute the main difference between churches that thrive and become vital during times of part-time paid clergy leadership and those that decline?

Take a sheet of paper or a whiteboard, and with your vestry, make two lists of attributes:

Congregations that thrive w/ PT clergy

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Congregations that decline w/ PT clergy

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Be sure to add at least 5 attributes or hallmarks of each. Keep going until all attributes are listed. The author lists these on page 22, 23 and again 40-48 and throughout the chapter.

Now look at the two lists. Which attributes do you see at work in your congregation? Put a star next to them. Congregations can be complex. Be honest and listen to one another carefully. Taking an honest appraisal of your congregation, is it where you want it to be?

Exercise Two

The author gives a healthy and robust list of activities a congregation can engage in order to tip the scales toward becoming a thriving congregation w/ PT clergy. Name some of them and write them where everyone can observe.

Facilitator hints: use Canon Beverly Hurley Hill’s list of resources here. Also see: p. 43, p.48, p. 51.

Which of these could you engage with your congregation? Encourage brainstorming, creativity, and idea generating before you attend to evaluation and “realistic” voices. The hope is to be able to see how your congregation can embody the quote from page 42 *“Congregations that thrive in part-time ministry often dare to think differently.”*

Exercise Three

Looking ahead, next week we will talk about supporting the kind of pastorate needed for your congregation to thrive. But first, these chapters conclude with the statement:

“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. That orientation complements and feeds off that which part-time clergy do in owning what is distinct and life-giving about their types of pastorates.”

What do you think about that statement that a congregation can be a community of practitioners or of consumers? Where do you see those influences at play in your congregation? If you currently have a clergy serving in your location, ask them where they see this dynamic at work in the congregation. As leaders, to where is your attention being called?