

Pastors are feeling the stress of carrying on during coronavirus era



Bray

LEXINGTON, Tenn. (BP and local reports) – The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic forced Richard Bray, pastor of Rock Hill Church in west Tennessee, to become a one-man worship service team – preaching; leading music with his guitar; recording the service on his phone; handling the sound equipment; broadcasting the service via FM transmitter to worshipers who listened in their cars in the parking lot; and uploading videos to YouTube, Facebook, and the church website after service ended.

All of that and more, and then he was exposed to the COVID-19 coronavirus and had to quarantine. “I think I was tired, just physically and mentally,” Bray, age 61, said months later. “Tired of dealing with all the issues, the stress of COVID, the stress of trying to do the right thing, the stress of the church members who see things differently than you do. It does take its toll.”



Wright

Joe Wright is executive director of the Bivocational and Small Church Leadership Network designed to serve about 83% of Southern Baptist churches. “We are hearing, just across the nation, of pastors and churches both struggling. We’re seeing just the stress of trying to do ministry in this kind of environment is taking a toll on pastors and church leaders.

“There are a number of issues that we have identified. One is decision fatigue. What is happening is that the landscape is changing so quickly that from the time a decision is made early in the week, oftentimes they’ve had to make changes to those decisions before the week is over.

“We’re also seeing ministerial frustration. There’s a tremendous amount of emotion that is being exhibited within the church right now, and a lot of that emotion is negative. ...Frustration also leads to anger, leads to discord, and of course Satan also utilizes those things to create sin within the church.”

Wright advised that pastors need a break, as many like Bray are working longer hours than they worked before the pandemic. He has not heard of any small church and bivocational pastors leaving the ministry because of the pandemic, but pointed out, “There is no doubt that many churches, because of the stress of the situation, are finding themselves in positions where they’re terminating pastors, oftentimes unexpectedly.”



Pace

John Pace is a longtime Mississippi Baptist pastor currently serving as director of the Pastor/Leadership Development Department at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB). “I think ‘fatigue’ and ‘frustration’ are good words to describe the feelings of many of the pastors and ministers in our state at this time,” Pace said.

“Thankfully to this point we have not seen the great exodus from the ministry that some were predicting, but many of our pastors have shared a definite weariness from the challenges of the past year, along with some anxiety over what lies ahead in the current COVID battle and what the church should prepare for in the post-COVID world,” he said.



Yates

Hubert Yates has been a bivocational pastor in the state for years, and is now serving as the full-time disaster relief consultant in the MBCB Men’s Ministry Department. “After almost a year, the struggle continues. It is real in the hearts and minds of pastors and church leadership,” Yates said. “The constant stress is wearying. Pastors and church leadership can find themselves in the middle, even more so than before the pandemic. Most congregations do not realize what their pastor and congregational leaders are going through

on weekly basis.”

The Bivocational and Small Church Leadership Network has increased both its online outreach and resources to help pastors cope during the pandemic, offering free Zoom meetings and conferences and encouraging state conventions to reach out to pastors and churches within their reach.

As early as March of this year, the network will launch Small Church America!, a monthly webinar of free resources for leadership and especially pastors of smaller attendance churches across the nation.

Congregations should continually encourage their pastors, Wright said. “We feel like the best thing you can do for a pastor right now is to call him and just encourage him. It’s the absolute best thing you can do for a pastor. It’s just to call him up and say, ‘I know this a hard time for you. I know you’re struggling, but I want you to know I’m praying for you as a leader, and I appreciate you.’”

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Joe Wright, Bivocational and Small Church Leadership Network executive director

For more information on the Bivocational and Small Church Leadership Network, visit <https://bscln.net/>. Joe Wright may be contacted at joe.wright@bscln.net. John Pace may be contacted at jpace@mbcb.org. Hubert Yates may be contacted at hyates@mbcb.org.