

How Are We Doing? -- The Minister's Typical Work Week

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A survey conducted by LifeWay Research ("How Protestant Pastors Spend Their Time") provides interesting insights into the way ministers spend their time. Full-time senior ministers work long hours. While the median number of work hours for Protestant senior ministers is 55, 65% report they work 50 or more hours in a typical week, 42% report they work 60 or more hours, 8% report 70 or more hours. The research also compared evangelical ministers to mainline ministers. Generally, evangelical ministers spend more time in sermon preparation than their mainline counterparts, more time in ministry related meetings, and more time in personal devotions.

This article summarizes some of the survey results and asks about time usage and ministerial obligations in other areas of ministry. Those who minister will affirm that large amounts of time get used in activities that are hard to categorize and measure. Each minister works according to personal abilities, likes and dislikes, and specific needs in the church. Those who minister in larger churches may need to spend more time in personal contact with members. Some will make contact through email, phone, or correspondence in addition to personal contacts. In smaller congregations, a minister may have significant interpersonal contact in conjunction with scheduled assembly times.

Consider some of the things ministers do. For those involved in ministry or ministry supervision, what would you add?

SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES

The apostles in Acts 6 delegated the daily benevolent responsibilities because of their commitment to prayer and the Word. Commitments to prayer and the Word are still important to ministry today. The survey did not ask about general Bible reading done not for sermon preparation—I assume such is included in devotional time. Nor is it clear where reading for general orientation goes—Christian magazines, books, and articles. Most ministers spend a lot of time in preparation for teaching or classes, writing (class materials, small group materials, bulletin articles, articles for publication, etc.) and preparations for other settings away from the local work. Some of these may be a part of office activities, but to the extent that they are parallel to sermon preparation, they perhaps deserve mention in this section. While recognizing that ministers can abuse (overuse) opportunities for interaction with other ministers, it is likely that attendance at preachers' luncheon, special events, and training sessions should also be included in this category.

The survey results indicate the percentage of ministers who responded to involvement questions in the following areas.

How much time do you spend in prayer each week?

None	5%
1-6 hours	52%
More than 11 hours	12%

How much time do you spend in devotion (unrelated to sermon preparation)

An hour or less	14%
2-5 hours	52%

How much time do you spend in sermon preparation each week?

Less than 5 hours	7%
5-14 hours	50%
15-25 hours	34%
More than 25 hours	9%

OFFICE ACTIVITIES

The survey asked about meetings and electronic correspondence, but did not report other aspects of the administrative work that consumes significant parts of the minister's time (bulletin, phone calls, purchasing, presentation preparations, etc.). As mentioned, much "office time" is consumed in sermon preparation, preparations for teaching or classes, and writing. A list of other office activities from my own ministry includes planning (general, congregational, sermons, adult Bible school), visioning, working for and with the elders, leadership development, general office management and support (articles, information, editing), general facilities management (meet workers, solve problems), benevolent calls, requests, and contacts, support and encouragement of various ministries, evangelism ministry (records, etc.), and missions ministry support activities.

The survey results include the following.

How much time do you spend each week in meetings?

Up to 5 hours	70%
More than 10 hours	15%

How much time do you spend each week on electronic correspondence?

2-6 hours	50%
Up to 10 hours	14%

PEOPLE ACTIVITIES

An important part of ministry involves personal contacts. Many categories could be identified. An sample list from my own ministry includes (1) general contact with the community, (2) counseling (including phone counseling), (3) congregational contacts, i.e. making sure one knows the congregation, general visitation, being available for special needs such as bereavement, serious illnesses, and hospitalizations, and (4) conflict management. Other activities that could be listed as people activities might include time spent in delivering sermons and involvement in classes, small groups, or fellowship meetings.

The survey results include the following.

Counseling

An hour or less	24%
Less than 6 hours	76%
6 or more hours	24%

Visitation (hospital, home, evangelism, personal contacts):

Up to one hour	12%
2-5 hours	48%

PERSONAL ACTIVITIES

The survey results indicate that most ministers have less time with their family than they would like; especially is this true for ministers with younger families and children at home. An interesting part of the survey included time spent watching television. The survey did not distinguish the type to television program being watched, i.e. news, sports, general programming, or movies.

Television

10-14 hours	24%
More than 15 hours	15%

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