

The Future of Work in Church: Ten Realities You Might Not Know

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AI. Robotics. Work-from-anywhere. The disappearing middle manager. The stress of blue-collar and service workers. Gigs and side gigs.

The headlines state the obvious. Work is changing. The pandemic accelerated the change. Workers are adjusting. Companies are adjusting. The marketplace is adjusting.

I am concerned, however, that most churches are not adjusting.

The most common question we get at Church Answers about work in the church is, “What is the next full time staff person we need to hire?” But, in most churches, that is not the right question. Indeed, most churches do not or will not even have the financial option to ask that question.

The better question is, “What is the future of work at church?” As church leaders ask that question, the answer becomes clearer and more relevant.

We do not have all the answers to the question. What we do have, however, are troves of data and conversations with church leaders. We are also watching closely the future of work beyond churches. Based on what we see at this point, we can offer ten realities for church leaders and members.

- 1. In person worship gatherings will be more important.** Churches should staff accordingly. With the increase of remote work and digital communications, the yearning for in-person connections is growing. The church is the place such connections are meant to take place.
- 2. The majority of churches in five years will have a non-church organization using their facilities on weekdays.** Thus, the future of work will not be in a church building for most churches for five to six days a week.
- 3. Small groups will be even more vital to the health of congregations.** Churches should staff accordingly. The yearning for in-person community will go beyond the gathered worship services. Bible teaching, ministry, discipleship, evangelism, and relationships will find their hub in small groups.
- 4. Office workers will disappear.** They will largely be replaced by virtual workers whose efficiency could be two to three times greater. In other words, one 20-hour virtual worker might replace two 40-hour office workers.
- 5. Part-time ministers will increasingly be the dominant work choice.** Full-time ministers are disappearing rapidly. The study by Faith Community Today (FACT) was stunning. The median attendance of a church today is 65 compared to 137 in 2000. Most churches cannot afford full-time ministers today. In a non-scientific survey we did of churches at Church Answers, we found that 94% of the churches under 100 in attendance had zero or one full-time ministry staff person, usually the pastor. Today, two-thirds of the churches in America have an average attendance under 100. The numbers of smaller churches are increasing, which means more part-time ministers.
- 6. We must be prepared for the dominance of bi-vocational and co-vocational ministers in our churches.** Indeed, that is fast becoming the reality.
- 7. This new future of work will require more “raising up” of ministry staff within our churches.** Such is a major reason we began Church Answers University last year. We desired to come alongside church leaders and offer ministry training and education that are affordable, attainable, and accessible (see www.ChurchAnswers.university).
- 8. The enigma in the future of work in churches is the positions of student ministry and children’s ministry.** We do not see a consistent pattern about the future of these ministry positions. If we begin to see a clear trend, we will let you know.

9. **Pastors and ministry staff should prepare now for this new reality.** Not only should they get their churches ready, but they also need to be asking the question, “What do I do if I have to become bi-vocational from full-time?”
10. **Technology will continue to change the work of pastoral care.** Since COVID, more church members in the hospital and homebound indicate they are fine with a call, a text, or a Zoom prayer time. Pastoral care is time-consuming, but there are growing efficiencies in technology that are good solutions for church members.

Of course, we don't have all the answers to the future of work in church. As we get more clarity, we will share it with you. In the meantime, let us know what you see in this new future.