**Ministry: How do you do what you do?**

“Ministry is one of those vocations where the lazy can hide, and the workaholics can work themselves to death.”[[1]](#footnote-2) What do you do with your time? How do I get a full-time job where you only work one day a week?

You have, no doubt, been asked or heard one of the questions above during your time in ministry. How much time do you give to your sermon preparation? Do you prepare a Sunday school lesson, bible study, or do home visits each week? What kind of administrative tasks do you do each week? Keeping a log of your time and tasks can help you exegete your time and style of ministry for lay leaders and your congregation. It can provide a glimpse into what you do with your time and illuminate the skills you need as part of your lifelong learning. When shared with your congregation, it could help when discussing priorities and vision.

Like many in congregational life, I was expected to provide a written report to the board, offer some words about what I was doing, and take questions. I was not proficient at keeping track of my time until I joined the Regional staff in Kentucky. There, the ministerial staff were required to keep track of our time, eight hours a day, seven days a week. My first response was, “You’re kidding me.”, and I was put off by being required to “account” for my work in ministry. But, after adopting the routine and creating an effective report, I was rarely questioned about what I did with my time. I was able to identify where I needed help with my own organizational skills, as well as what took more of my time than was a priority. If you don’t have a way of keeping track of your time and how you “do what you do in ministry,” it might be a good day to consider that discipline.

**Suggestions**

There are many ways to track your time and many apps to help. Whatever you choose to do, the important part is keeping it up to date and being clear when translating the numbers for your congregation.

* **Define Terms**  
  My time log is divided into: Office, Field, Day Off, Vacation, Sick Day, National Holiday, Personal Day, and Civic Duty. When creating a report, be sure people know what you mean by an “office day” or a “field day.” For me, “office time” is when I’m at my desk or laptop computer working on Regional ministry. “Field Time” is the time when I get in my car to go visit a congregation or minister, attend a meeting, or attend a retreat, until I get back to my house. Field days can be 12hr to 16hr days. Some of my days are a mix of office and field. In the log it would read: Office: 5 and Field: 3.
* **Honest Accounting**  
  Be honest about the time you put in as well as what you did with those hours. An example: I may work 8 hrs in the office and then do another 2 hrs at home on some project “after business hours.” I would log that as a 10hr office day.   
    
  What did you do with the time? Calls, emails, the newsletter. study, read, talk to members that stopped by the office, admin tasks, etc.? Keep this information as well so you can; look back and see what you were doing. You may not share all of this with your congregation, but it will help you get a sense of what takes “most” of your time. I do the preparation and planning for a trip for CYF youth we offer in Oklahoma, called International Affairs Seminar. I keep notes about the time I spend doing the planning work, before the trip departs. In 2014, I had 47 hrs of planning and prep time, before the morning check-in began, and we left on an eight day trip that included 16-18 hr field days.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Office | 21 |
| Field | 18 |
| Day Off | 3 |
| Vacation |  |
| Sick Day |  |
| Total 8 hr Days | 42 |
| Mileage | 102 |

* **Create a Clear Report**  
  However you choose to present your time to the congregation be sure it is clear. This begins with your understanding of time. What does a “day off” mean to you? If you interrupt a day off to handle congregational life, then you’ve only had part of a day off, and you should account for that in your log. When I am not traveling for a weekend retreat, my Friday’s are spent half office time (4hrs) and half a day off (4hrs).   
    
  A report for the month might look like:  
  The Phelps family visited on 7/14. I stopped in to thank them for the worship visit and to see if they had questions about our church. They asked about a Sunday school class.

Rather than note that you made 5 hospital calls, and two prospective member calls this month, talk about the importance of evangelism and member care noting your visits. List the stories as bullet points explaining your 18 hrs in the field last month.

**Keeping Track – the spreadsheet**

The Rev. Adam Frieberg helped me create a Google Docs spreadsheet that is a good starting point for keeping a log of your time. [**Click here to download the Excel file**](https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/MinisterLog.xlsx). I use a version designed for my work on Regional staff here in Oklahoma. The first sheet of the file is a list of days in the month with categories across the top. The second sheet is a beginning list of meetings, tasks, and ministry, that you might do each week or each month. This file can be altered as needed to fit your setting.

Hints

* Begin by choosing a month to start and work forward. I typically update my log for the past week as part of my Monday morning admin routine.
* Since I have a Gmail Account, I use Google Docs and Google Drive for my log rather than keeping an Excel file or Numbers file on a particular computer. This way the data is backed up and accessible from any computer.
* Give yourself a couple of months to get familiar with your own accounting, before you roll this out to your PRC, Personnel Chair, or Board Chair. You want to be comfortable with the why and the how, before trying to explain it to others. The explanation can then reflect the story of the ministry you are doing, and participating in, with the congregation; and the kind of time it takes to do it with volunteers and paid staff.

Finally, don’t create a time log as a defense mechanism against the antagonist in your congregation. Don’t use it to argue for a raise or justify your compensation package. When the haters “hate,” you can demonstrate your commitment to the ministry of the congregation and allow the listening leaders to deal with the disgruntled, who think you are paid too much or take too much time off or work with the Region or Disciples Home Mission too much.

At the end of six months, you will have a good snapshot of how much time you are giving to ministry as well as where you gave that time. This will inform your priorities, your use of vacation days and days off, and the areas where you exceed expectations or need some continuing education.

**This document and attached spreadsheet were provided by** [**The Rev. Michael Davison**](http://www.okdisciples.org/index.php?cID=129) **as an example of a ministry tool that may be helpful to vocational clergy in ministry settings. Permission was given for use by author.**

1. *Paraphrase of words from Rev. Dr. Joey Jeter as recorded in my notes from the fall of 1988. I was sitting in Introduction to Preaching at Brite Divinity School. Dr. Jeter was responding to a question about creating a preparation routine for preaching in a local congregation alongside other duties required of the minister.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)