

HOW HARD DO MINISTERS WORK?

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Unlike most mortals, ministers have no set hours of work. Instead of a nine to five job, churches often seem to expect them to be at work twenty-four hours a day. The story is told of how members of one church were given a questionnaire in which they were asked to state how many hours they felt their pastor should devote to the following tasks: administration, sermon preparation, evangelism visitation, youth work, counselling and personal prayer. The totals on the answers averaged 82 hours per week. Even though a week has only 168 hours, one member actually proposed 200 hours a week. Clearly such expectations are totally unreasonable. So, what then is a reasonable work-load? To what extent should churches be encouraging ministers to observe the European Working Time Directive, which limits the average weekly work time to 48 hours – although individuals can choose to work longer? In most churches ministers still have only one day off a week – since almost everybody else has two days a week off, should not all churches now ensure that their ministers take off two days too? I confess that I find these difficult questions to answer. The difficulty lies in the fact that I do not consider myself an employee of the church: instead, I am an office-holder, set free by the church to devote myself to the ministry and mission of the church. For me ministry is not about ‘rights’, but about ‘privilege’. Last year I kept a careful time log for seven weeks: I discovered that in that period I averaged 57 hours a week. It was, of course, my choice – my privilege, if you like – to work that hard. I certainly do not feel that my church has any right to expect me to work that number of hours. A different approach to determining a minister’s workload is not to count hours at all, but rather to count time blocks. Each week has 21 time blocks: i.e. each week consists of seven days of three sessions a day. An employed person in a secular job normally works five days and two sessions per day – i.e. ten sessions a week. Therefore a minister should at the very least work ten sessions a week – and probably a good deal more. A minister friend of mine, however, argues that ministers should work 15 sessions a week. His reasoning is as follows: if, in addition to the ten sessions per week taken up by his normal employment, a member attends church twice a Sunday, the total becomes twelve sessions; a deacon or other church officer might spend two evenings a week on church business; the minister should pave the way and do three – hence 15 sessions. This leaves six sessions (two days) clear! Gosh, I feel I have set the cat amongst the pigeons!

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