

Writing FAQ: how do you find time to write?

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At a [church leaders' retreat](#) last month, we talked about having an [I don't do](#) list as a way of making time for sacred pauses in life and ministry. The things we don't do make it possible to do some other things. The things we say No to allow us to say Yes to other things.

So one pastor said, "I don't answer the phone at home after 8 p.m." People can leave a message, and if it's urgent she will call them back; if it's not urgent that phone call can wait.

Another said, "I don't go to every funeral in the community." In a small town, he knew most of the people even if they weren't part of his own church, and he had started out with attending every funeral. But that got to be too much, so he is now more discerning.

A Sunday school teacher said, "I don't do committees and have no guilt about it." I think that last part is key to any effective I don't do list, and wow, Sunday school teachers are gold, so no committee work sounds like a good trade-off to me!

Having an I don't do list also helps me find time to write. For some pastors, writing is actually part of their church work—their blog posts, books, and speaking beyond their own congregation are considered part of their church time. For me, this blog and my other published work are quite apart from my church hours. Of course, I write sermons and church blog posts on church time, but if I counted all of my blogging here and other writing in the same way, there'd be no time for the other things my church has called me to—worship and preaching, leadership and admin, pastoral care, teaching, community outreach.

Here's my I don't do list that makes my writing time possible (in no particular order):

I don't do personality tests.

No, I don't know what colour aura I am, what '80s cartoon character I'm most like, which Star Wars character, which animal, etc., etc. I haven't even done the

Enneagram, and I only know that I'm ENFJ on the Myers-Briggs because it was part of a denominational resource day.

I don't do surveys, give donations, or buy services from people who call on the telephone.

The one exception is Big Brothers Big Sisters since they pick up any donated items from our doorstep.

I don't cook or bake complicated recipes.

I love to cook and bake—natural ingredients, healthy, simple, delicious, but more muffins than fancy cakes, one or two dishes instead of the gourmet 12-course meal. (Although if that's on your do list, I'm always open to invitations!)

I don't endorse people on LinkedIn.

I almost feel guilty about this one since I've received endorsements from others, and it would be most polite and social to reciprocate. But I know if I start that, it would snowball into one more thing that I just can't handle.

I don't mow the lawn.

We live in a townhouse where the lawn around us is more or less common property and looked after by others, and we're responsible for just a small garden area.

I don't keep regular hours.

I know the best sleep advice is to go to bed at the same time and get up at the same time every day, but I vary from that considerably. It's not unusual for me to be writing at 6 a.m. or well past midnight, though hopefully not in the same night!

I don't use social media constantly.

I generally take at least a 24-hour social media sabbath from Saturday evening to Sunday evening and most often extend that until Monday morning.

I don't do church work on my days off.

Or if I do need to see someone in the hospital when I should be on vacation, or take a meeting on my usual evening off, then I pay myself back with an equivalent time off some other time. To some, that might sound legalistic. (Aren't pastors supposed to be available 24/7?) To others that may seem like a matter of course. (Isn't pastoral ministry a profession like any other?) But I've talked with exhausted pastors who say they haven't had a day off in 3 weeks or even 6 weeks. I read recently that 43 percent of Canadians [do not take all of their allotted vacation time](#). I take all of

the time off I'm eligible for, and use some of it to write.

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