

4 true confessions of a truly bivocational minister

By [Celeste Kennel-Shank](#)

September 4, 2014

A few months ago I wrote about [the difference between having two jobs and two vocations](#). A commenter wondered, "What if you really do have two callings?" I've been doing bivocational ministry in one way or another for the past seven years. Overall I have found having two vocations—I serve as a hospital chaplain in addition to being a *Century* editor—to be fruitful and fulfilling. But I have to confess that it isn't easy.

- 1. Work-rest balance is tough.** While some of the [concern about clergy with multiple jobs](#) focuses on debt—a crucial subject to address—there's also the challenge of finding time off to spend with family or just rejuvenate, especially since ministry usually involves working weekends. I also need to be even more intentional about times when I can take a sabbath, including turning off my phone and not checking e-mail, for example.
- 2. One of my callings can be draining.** Anyone who has known someone doing a unit of clinical pastoral education in a hospital or hospice knows that chaplaincy can be exhausting in a way that few other kinds of work can. Not being full time as a chaplain is a plus, but it also means I miss out on some of the times for self care other chaplains encourage, like taking a day off after a tough weekend on call.
- 3. One of my callings can be stressful.** Magazine and web work comes with a slew of deadlines—daily, weekly, biweekly, and so on. And with the expectations of responding to news, as well as attending to the ongoing challenges of the life of faith, it sometimes means relying upon extra doses of caffeine and adrenaline to get through the day. This is part of the thrill of journalism. But placing a high premium on getting information out and getting the facts right means a lot of pressure, and not always a lot of grace.
- 4. I have little time and energy for volunteering.** I used to volunteer often, but now having two jobs means also juggling two sets of responsibilities, schedules, relationships, and more. Add to that my commitments to the congregation in which I

am a minister—including being a coordinator of our church garden and preaching every couple of months—I have to say “no” a lot. Setting those boundaries is a good discipline to have. But I wish I could say “yes” more often, because I would genuinely enjoy some of the opportunities I decline.

Each of my jobs gives me perspective I likely wouldn't otherwise have. At the *Century*, working with articles by scholars and pastors, as well as facilitating [our blog network](#), I get to hear insights about ministry from many corners of the globe. In my hospital work, which is primarily with low-income people, I hear the struggles of not having one's basic needs met intermingled with gratitude for having woken up another day.

Recently, I went to the hospital for my chaplain shift on a Friday after spending much of the week working on coverage of the Ebola epidemic for our news section. I had learned that one of the most difficult parts of the epidemic for West African communities is taking precautions around funerals, as Ebola can be transmitted through touching the dead. While at the hospital, I accompanied a family as they viewed the body of their loved one who had died. I said a blessing over the body and stood with them as they shed their tears and grappled with the initial shock of loss. I thought of families in West Africa who would have no such final goodbye.

In that moment I felt compassion as a chaplain and a journalist—as one who is called to care for and about communities nearby and around the world in the suffering they face.