

# GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

## What Pastors Actually Do

Pastor's only work one day a week. Right? Well, if you listen to some people, you would think that is correct. However, pastors do a lot of work beyond the view of the regular church participant. Here's just a short list of the many things pastors do each week.

Sermon preparation	Managing Conflict
Evangelism	Counseling
Planning/Thinking	Training leaders
Administration/Budget	Visitation and pastoral care
Prayer/Personal devotions	Leading/Attending services
Preparing for or teaching	Preparing/Attending meetings

The list can go on and on, but these are some of the major activities that occupy the normal pastor's time in the USA.

### Where the time goes

Not surprisingly, pastors spend most of their time on sermon preparation. The average is about 13 hours each week. Since most pastors work between 50 and 60 hours a week, they spend about 20% of their time in this activity.

Twice as much time is spent on preparing for meetings, attending meetings, administration, and budget issues. Most pastors spend 20 to 25 hours a week on these activities, or about 40% of their time simply managing the church.

According to the Gallup Poll, the average person works 47 hours per week in the USA. The 2014 poll found that 18% of those who work full time work 60+ hours a week, 21% work 50-59 hours, 11% work 41-49 hours, 42% work precisely 40 hours, and just 8% work less than 40 hours.

In comparison a special report in *YOUR CHURCH* magazine in 1995 noted that pastors work an average of 55 hours each week. A newer report in the July 2013 issue of *The Christian Report* stated the median work week for pastors was 50 hours, i.e., half of pastors work more and half work less than that each week. A 2008 study by Lifeway Research found a similar result.

For information on scheduling  
Dr. Gary L. McIntosh

Write: PO Box 892589, Temecula, CA  
92589

Email: [cgnet@earthlink.net](mailto:cgnet@earthlink.net)  
Call toll free: 1-877-506-3086

There is no such thing as an "average" work week for pastors. The unpredictability of a pastor's schedule makes it difficult for many pastors to

correctly estimate how much time they spend in any particular church or ministry activity. Since pastors are on call 24/7, they may work 40 hours one week and 80 hours the next. Most pastors start their work day at 8:00am and end at 6:30pm. Yet, they usually average four evenings a week away from home, which increases the work day from 10 to 12 hours.

### *Three studies*

According to a study conducted in 1995 by John C. LaRue, Jr. for *YOUR CHURCH*, pastors split their time according to the following weekly breakdown:

Sermon Prep: 10 hours  
 Miscellaneous Activities: 9 hours  
 Preparing and Attending Meetings: 6 hours  
 Prayer/Personal Devotions: 6 hours  
 Visitation/Pastoral Care: 5 hours  
 Administration/Budget: 4 hours  
 Leading/Attending Services: 4 hours  
 Counseling: 3 hours  
 Teaching Preparation: 3 hours  
 Planning/Thinking: 2 hours  
 Evangelism: 1 hour  
 Training Leaders: 1 hour  
 Mediating Conflict: 1 hour  
 Total: 55 hours

In comparison a study by LifeWay Research, reported in *Christianity Today* in 2008, found that pastors invest the following hours per week in . . .

Sermon Prep: 12 hours  
 Pastoral Care: 5 hours

Prayer/Devotions: 9 hours  
 Administration/Meetings: 3 hours  
 Counseling: 3 hours  
 Emails: 3 hours

A more recent study by *Stewardship Advocates* (2015) found the following for Protestant pastors:

Sermon Prep: 18 hours  
 Pastoral Care: 11 hours  
 Administration/Meetings: 9 hours  
 Training Leaders: 7 hours  
 Denominational Affairs: 3 hours  
 Prayer/Personal Devotions: 4 hours  
 Reading/Personal Development: 3 hours  
 Total: 55 hours

While these three studies differ slightly due to the questions asked of each pastor, they do provide a baseline for comparison.

### *Thinking it through*

How many hours do you (or your pastor) work each week? Keep a record in 15 minute intervals for one week and then total the results. It may surprise you.

How does your average work week compare to the three studies mentioned above?

How many hours does your church board think a pastor should work each week? Ask them to make a list of activities and the time they feel a pastor should give for each activity. Discuss the results.

How does your work week reflect your priorities, goals, or life purpose? Take time to design a one-week schedule that represents the important elements of your life?

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### *FACULTY-MENTORS*

**DR. GARY MCINTOSH** is Professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Talbot. He has served as a consultant for hundreds of churches in North America. Dr. McIntosh is also the Founder and President of the Church Growth Network, which provides a wide range of professional consulting services in the areas of church growth analysis, strategic planning, and generational change. He is the editor of the Growth Points newsletter. Having published over 100 articles and written over 16 books, he is a prolific writer and church growth expert.

**DR. ALAN MCMAHAN** has served in churches in North America and on the Pacific Rim. He has also taught in the areas of missiology, church growth, leadership, organizational development and evangelism. He has been active in training undergraduate and graduate students including mid-career professionals, Bible school teachers, pastors, and denominational leaders through the U.S., Canada, and much of Southeast Asia in the effective means to develop leaders and grow churches. He has served as Vice President for the Alliance Theological Seminary and as the Academic Dean at the King's College in mid-town Manhattan. He and his wife, Terri, have two sons, Billy and Jonathan, and live in La Mirada, CA.

“As I look at the United States today, I see people who are receptive to spiritual things. We need to learn how to communicate to them in a way that draws them to Jesus Christ.”

**DR. GARY MCINTOSH** PROFESSOR OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY  
AND LEADERSHIP

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