

Couples spend workdays side by side

By IONE GEIER

In more than half of all American families, both spouses work. Usually, the husband goes off to one job and the wife to another. But in some households, husbands and wives work together, sharing career hours as well as personal time.

Couples working together are nothing new in the United States. The nation has a long history of husbands and wives splitting chores on family farms and in small stores and restaurants.

Mom-and-pop enterprises of this type are decreasing due to advancements in farm technology and the growth of chain stores and fast-food franchises. Today, couples who work together usually choose other ways of sharing careers.

For the Rev. Myrna Kysar and the Rev. Robert Kysar, it's serving as co-pastors of Christ United Lutheran Church, a congregation of almost 1,000 members in northern Schuylkill County.

Being together 24 hours a day has its hazards. So much closeness can result in a loss of identity or a spillover of professional matters into personal life. However, the Kysars say they have found tremendous satisfaction in a total sharing of both personal hours and pastoral responsibilities.

Their congregation is unique in that it has churches in four localities — Lavelle, Gordon, Girardville and the Ashland area. Until the arrival of the Kysars, most of the parishioners had never seen a woman minister, much less a clerical couple. Dubious at first, now the congregation looks more favorably upon the co-pastors who are also husband and wife.

To many parishioners, the Kysars are "Pastor Bob" and "Pastor Myrna". This informal but respectful manner of addressing the couple solves the problem of distinguishing between two ministers with the same last name.

"When we first came here, members of the congregation tended to think of me as the main minister and Myrna as the minister's wife," Pastor Bob says. "Now they have become accustomed to the fact that I teach one day a week at Gettysburg College and am not always available. Myrna is the full-time minister."

Psychologists agree that the best working relationships between couples are those in which the partners contribute equally but in different ways. An efficient organizer, Pastor Myrna usually handles administrative duties. Her husband, who is more extroverted and an effective group leader, concentrates his talents on adult and youth study groups.

Almost all decisions concerning the church matters are made jointly. Even the Kysars' sermons are cooperative efforts.

Early in the week, one member of the clerical team types out a first draft. Then both pastors make revisions. By the following Sunday, they have produced two sermons on the same theme and with the same message but written from different perspectives.

The Kysars collaborated in much the same way when they wrote "The Asundered: Biblical Teachings on Divorce and Remarriage", a book published by John Knox Press. Pastor Bob is also the author of three books on the Gospel of John.

One of the dangers in a couple working together is the competition involved in such an arrangement. Inevitably, there are situations in which one partner takes on more responsibility or receives more recognition than the other.

The Kysars say that a frank discussion of their feelings is the best way to handle such problems. Getting rid of some of their competitiveness on the tennis courts also helps, according to Pastor Myrna.

Another danger of working together is the constant temptation to make every waking moment of the day a staff meeting. Even washing dishes can become an occasion on which to talk shop. In an effort to solve the problem, the Kysars made a pact banning all discussion of parish affairs on their day off but they admit that the pact is often broken.

One of the activities they enjoy on days off is riding their motorcycles. To save on fuel costs, there are also times when they use the bright red



range vacations together. Before the Kysars accepted their present post, they made sure they would have time off together.

The Revs. Robert and Myrna Kysar, above, husband-and-wife pastors at Christ United Lutheran Church in northern Schuylkill County, use their bright red motorcycles (complete with clergy insignia on their helmets) for parish business as well as for pleasure. In photo below they meet for work at the altar.

