

Churches Making Paradigm Shift in Equipping the 9 to 5 Window

Os Hillman • Church-Based Ministry

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There's a fresh wind blowing in a number of churches across the U.S. right now. It's blowing in some of the smallest as well as the largest mega-churches. This fresh wind is a new emphasis on how to equip and commission the church member where he or she spends the majority of their time - - the 9 to 5 window. For years we've heard about sending missionaries to the 10/40 window of unreached people groups. However, many church leaders have been frustrated in their ineffectiveness to impact the 80/20 rule in their local congregations. That rule says that 20% of the people do 80% of the ministry. Part of the problem lies in the way churches attempt to equip these people.

Doug Sherman, one of the earliest pioneers in the faith at work movement and author of *Your Work Matters to God*, said, "Our surveys reveal that 90 to 97 percent of Christians have never been taught to relate biblical principles to their work life."^[1] When I first read this statistic I questioned the accuracy of such an alarming figure. I had heard others use figures in the 40 to 50 percent range for this trend. However, in my own random surveys among people and groups, I have asked this question: How many of you have been intentionally trained at church to apply biblical faith in your work life? That means you have been in a Bible study, heard a sermon series, or had a training course on applying biblical faith at work.

The percentage of hands that go up is consistent- 3 to 5 percent. So, I believe that Sherman's figure is still accurate.

Further studies have found that 47 percent of people surveyed say that the preaching and teaching they receive is irrelevant to their daily lives.^[2] Given these statistics, it is no wonder the average Christian has had no spiritual impact on their workplace and has been unable to integrate their faith life into their work life.

Work Life Ministry in the Local Church

There are some positive developments taking place in the way a group of churches is now making a major paradigm shift in how they are approaching equipping believers in their workplace calling. I'd like to share five case studies with you.

When we think about implementing work life ministry into a local church environment, we must realize there are varied ways this can be accomplished. There are a few major components for any church that is going to be successful in this. First, it must be intentional and it must become part of the DNA of the local church. In other words, a church must make it part of *everything* they do because this is not just another program to be selected as an *a-la-carte* offering by the members. It must be part of the philosophical fabric of the local church body-from *how you speak* to *how you equip* to *how you affirm and commission* the people.

Two Churches That Have Seen Fruit by Implementing a Philosophy of Work Life Ministry

The following case studies reveal how unique each approach can be for different kinds of churches.

Sonset Baptist Church Grapevine, Texas

Ron O'Guinn is the pastor of Sonset Baptist Church in a community near Dallas, Texas. Ron founded Allofus Ministries, a ministry that is focused on reconciliation among races. He is a former director of reconciliation for Promise Keepers. Ron is also a former businessman who worked at Motown Records during the heyday of soul music. He worked with people such as Diana Ross.

Ron attended the April 2003 "His Presence in the Workplace" conference held at the Billy Graham Training Centre and came away from that conference with his eyes opened to a whole new way of looking at things. "It was like the veil was removed from my eyes," said Ron. "I can't believe I have not seen this before. It makes all the sense in the world. I have failed to equip my people to really see their work as a ministry." Ron was so impacted by the conference he immediately went back to his small congregation in his bedrock community and began to implement immediate changes.

First, he made a change in his own life regarding workplace ministry and his own workplace-his church. He decided that every person with whom his church came into contact-including the postman, the UPS man, repairmen, and so forth-needed to experience the love of Christ personally through that contact. Second, he began to equip and affirm those in his congregation that their work was a ministry and a calling. Third, he decided to begin pastoring the city. That meant he did not wait for people to come into his local church building; instead he began to reach out to the community in very creative ways. He began a program he calls the "Business Marketplace Enhancement Program."

The purpose of this initiative is twofold.

- To analyze every workplace represented in his church and to visit these workplaces and their employees and begin to pastor them just like he pastors every church member.
- To make available a twenty-two step ministry to them that involves everything from transportation for employees who can't get to work to childcare to wedding and funeral services for the unchurched.

Ron explained that he saw every member in his congregation as a potential church plant. This change in philosophy has revolutionized his ministry. He recently had a major corporation president call him and ask him to come pray over the new business year. The CEO was not even a member of his church. But because he saw something unique in Ron that was bringing faith into the workplace, the CEO was drawn to him. "We are no longer ministering to the church, we are now ministering to

the community. This is an entirely different approach for us and it has become part of the DNA of our church," said Ron.

One of Ron's "membership clients" is a local restaurant. Ron visits the restaurant regularly and pastors the employees. The owner of the restaurant is appreciative of this special touch from Ron-so much so that he gives Ron a special table in the restaurant to bring his guests. There is also a side benefit to Ron-he gets to eat free! He loves that part of the deal!

Ron has taken this a step further. He wrote a proposal to the governor and the mayor of his city asking that the Sunday before Labour Day each year be recognized as Business, Commerce, and Labour Appreciation Day. He wants to recognize the contribution of working people and the enhanced value they bring to the community. Ron is only one pastor of a small community church who is making a difference in his community by taking a proactive approach to viewing the workplace as a mission field. He is actively planting churches in the 9 to 5 window of his community.

Brunswick Church Troy, New York

Not every church takes a formalized approach to workplace ministry. Some pastors simply make it a part of their DNA in the way they minister to their flock. Following is an interview with Pastor Harry Heintz of Brunswick Church in Troy, New York. He has been pastoring this church for twenty-nine years.

Question: You are considered a church that emphasizes that its people are all ministers and have been sighted as a model church in the faith and work movement. What makes you different from other churches in your ministry model?

Pastor: We believe in the priesthood of all believers. In a practical sense we live this out in many ways:

- We are less programmatic and more comprehensive in our approach. A program often isolates those who are not interested in the program and you contribute to the segmentation problem again. A programmatic method often tends not to spread to the entire congregation if it does not have the interest of the entire body. We teach and repeat the philosophy in all we do and say.
- We've abolished the term "laity" because we don't believe it is biblical unless used of everyone.
- We don't use titles such as *reverend*, *doctor*, or *the minister*, but we believe in the office of pastor and are fine with using *pastor*.
- We don't elevate our vocational pastors spiritually above others who are also called in a bi-vocational way.
- Everyone is on a first-name basis.
- We always enforce the idea we are all ministers.

- Our corporate prayer focus is "community" prayer, not just from pastors, though often led by pastors.
- We are careful with our language so as not to isolate believers who are not paid by the church.
- We commission our people on a regular basis to the workplace on a par with overseas missionaries.
- We open the pulpit to others inside our congregation who demonstrate a gift for preaching. We are always training people inside our body in their gifts.
- Every worship service concludes with a clear charge to daily ministry.

I believe the whole movement is about the Reformation's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. We have a team approach to sermon development. I work on sermons a couple of months in advance. I have meetings with a team of staff and non-staff people to discuss and pray about issues that should be preached. These all have mixed vocations in order to give the preacher perspective on the topic. This team meets weekly to do serious biblical spadework. The one who will be preaching takes notes and listens.

About once a month I pick one person in the congregation to spend the day with at their workplace to learn what they do and I observe. This gives me a great education on what the people in my congregation face every day.

When asked why more pastors don't embrace this concept, Pastor Heintz suggested two reasons:

Institutionalism: The body has become more institutionalized than organic. We are often more concerned about survival than pouring ourselves out for others.

Hierarchal: We have become caught up in this stuff. I believe control on the part of the pastor is at the centre of this. I have learned a lot from reading books about Southwest Airlines and Jim Collins's books, *Built to Last* and *Good to Great*. The CEOs in those companies actually have it together better than many of the pastors in our churches today because they manage in a less hierarchal manner.

I believe most of the congregation I serve understand their calling. Our pastors are treated like regular people rather than elevated to a higher spiritual plane. We are constantly developing other preachers in our congregation that can speak in the pulpit. Currently about half of our preachers are professionally trained (seminary) and about half, actually a little over half, are amateurs, doing it for love and trained locally."

The fresh wind is blowing and will only get stronger as church leaders realize the potential and the impact they can have on their members, the workplaces in their cities and the spiritual fabric of their cities. The Church is on the move. Get ready!

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[1] Doug Sherman, author, *Your Work Matters to God, Interview, Discover the Word Radio Bible Class*

3 *Supporting Christians at Work*, Mark Greene, The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, p. 5