

Equipping churches empower and collaborate with people in the congregation to lead the ministry

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The leaders of equipping churches have started to think about the complete mission of God as well as church growth. They are thinking about how they can help to enhance the everyday ministry and mission of their people in the world as well as through their own church programs and ministries. They are thinking about what their people are doing all the time and not just with their spare time. They also realise their own limitations and are recruiting lay leaders to head up workplace ministries.

It is easy to blame church leaders for the failure of churches to resource their people better for ministry in daily life. Leaders are only partly to blame, though. For many church members, it may be a relief to leave the responsibility for ministry up to the professionals and avoid accepting responsibility themselves. The equipping church vision is about the whole church accepting responsibility. In most churches where an equipping movement has begun to happen, it has been the result of new levels of conversation and partnership between church leaders and grass-roots church members. Sometimes this has also been assisted by input from resource people involved in other churches or other faith and work ministries. This is sometimes in-person and sometimes through their books, videos or online resources. For any of these initiatives to be sustainable requires vision casting from the top, ongoing energy and enthusiasm from the grass roots memberships, and outside resourcing.

Many pastors recognize the need to empower every believer in the ministry of daily life, but they experience multiple roadblocks when attempting to address this need. Dwight Dubois' report "[Equipping Pastors Conversations](#)" explores the myriad difficulties that pastors face. View or download the full report: [Equipping Pastors Conversations \(PDF\)](#).

If equipping is to become embedded as a priority in the life of a congregation, pastoral leadership and how it is exercised are crucial, though it is difficult to unpack what such leadership looks like. David Miller identifies five factors that are related to core aspects of pastoral ministry in general, which he thinks need to be more specifically applied to the workplace by church leaders. These include:

- A ministry of presence or listening in the work sphere, by visiting people in their places of work
- A ministry of preaching and prayer that intentionally and constructively addresses faith and work issues
- A ministry of teaching designed to address faith and work issues, also using the experience and expertise of other church members for input
- A ministry of personal integration that ensures that congregants are trained to utilise personal prayer and devotional study in their daily lives
- A ministry of gatherings of business people, perhaps in partnership with other marketplace ministries[34]

Miller comments, 'my research has found that lay-led and lay-founded groups are generally more effective at understanding and meeting workplace integration needs'.[37] William Diehl has said something similar: The key to bringing the workplace into the worship place is the pastor. If he or she has to have tight control over everything, it will not happen. There are two reasons why the pastor should not totally try to control: very few pastors have the breadth of knowledge of workplace issues to be able to design educational programmes of relevance; and secondly, lay leadership must be involved in both the planning and presentation of programmes in order to give them credibility in the eyes of the rest of the congregation.[38]

Robert Banks also argues strongly for the involvement of 'ordinary' Christians if we are to develop a useful theology of everyday life, because:

- Ordinary Christians can best identify their everyday concerns.
- Ordinary Christians already have some elements of an everyday theology.
- Everyday theology is a co-operative effort between ordinary Christians and professional theologians.
- A workable theology of everyday life requires practical testing by ordinary Christians.
- Only a theology forged in the cut and thrust of everyday life will have vitality and relevance.[39]

WORKPLACE VISITS

British Baptist Pastor David Coffey says, 'In my time as a Pastor I made a regular pattern to visit church members in their place of work, whenever this was appropriate. I have sat with the defence lawyer in a court room; I have watched a farmer assist in the birth of a calf; I have spent time with a cancer consultant in his hospital; I have walked the floor of a chemical factory and sat in the office of a manager who runs a large bookshop. I have driven a tank and spent time with some senior military officers; I have shared the tears and joys of family life with homemakers; I have visited a London hostel for the homeless and walked round a regional prison with a Governor. The purpose of such visits is primarily to encourage and disciple a church member in that place where God has called them to be a worker.'[35]

Bible scholar Dale Bruner reports, 'The revered Presbyterian preacher, George Buttrick, told a preaching class that the reason he gave a considerable amount of his workweek to visiting his parishioners in their homes and offices in downtown New York City was a passage from John's Gospel: 'the sheep will not listen to the voice of strangers' ([John 10:4-5](#)). I could believe that much of Dr. Buttrick's effectiveness as a preacher was this care for and time with his parishioners'.[36]

WHAT SHOULD CHURCH LEADERS DO?

A very prominent Australian businessman commented in his acceptance speech at a

Businessman Kent Humphries, when he was President of *Fellowship of Companies for Christ International*, emphasised the important role that pastors have to play as equippers and mentors for ministry in the marketplace.[41] It is clear that many pastors feel out of touch with the modern marketplace and inadequate for task. Some feel

threatened by the enthusiasm and big dreams of marketplace entrepreneurs. Yet the clear message is that pastors have a very important role to play—not by pretending to be the experts, or as controllers, but rather as encouragers and supporters.

Initiating a process of partnership between pastors and working people will take a lot of time, a lot of conversations and a lot of collaboration. This sort of partnership also has the power to realise the dream of the whole church mobilised and supported in mission and ministry all of the time. Debra Meyerson explains the sort of leadership that is involved in her description of the best culture changers:

They bear no banners; they sound no trumpet. Their ends are sweeping, but their means are mundane. They are firm in their commitments, yet flexible in the ways they fulfill them. Their actions may be small but can spread like a virus. They yearn for rapid change but trust in patience. They often work individually, but pull people together. Instead of stridently pressing their agenda, they start conversations. Rather than battling powerful foes, they seek powerful friends. And in the face of setbacks they keep going.[42]

dinner in his honour when he was presented with a prize for integrity in public and working life that while he had spent ten years as churchwarden of his Anglican church, as a support to and confidante of the ordained minister, not once in those ten years did that minister ask about his work or how he expressed his faith there.[40]