

# Workplace Ministry a Job for Everyone

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Doug Spada is convinced God is moving through the American workplace like a passenger train, dropping people off at their appointed stations. He just hopes pastors and church leaders will hop on board for the ride.

Spada is executive director and founder of His Church at Work, a La Mesa, Calif.-based ministry that exhorts church leaders to equip men and women so they might experience and fulfill their "God-given calling of work as ministry."

[His Church at Work](#) helps churches develop an infrastructure for a sustainable ministry to support its members in their on-going workplace ministries.

## Stumbling Blocks

Spada maintains that for years a stumbling block for workplace ministry has existed because the vocabulary and style of communication has narrowed its appeal to a limited audience: the "business person."

While that audience needs to hear messages of hope, the message must go beyond this limiting group to the majority of the workplace constituency.

Over the years, whenever workplace is mentioned in a ministry context, the typical businessman's lunch or breakfast comes to mind.

"It has been all about reaching the executives," Spada said.

Spada's vision has a much broader scope. He hopes to see churches sending out members to minister in the workplace just as missionaries are sent out to foreign lands.

"What we've done is we've laser focused on local congregations and helping them actually launch workplace ministries in and through their church," Spada said. "This isn't, 'Hey, let's meet for breakfast.' This is actual ministry, just as you would walk into your church and you have a women's and a men's and a youth ministry."

Beyond that, Spada said, there's a second compelling reason to shift approach: Spiritual renewal movements, particularly in Western culture, are almost always birthed, and driven, by the less successful, less affluent segments of a society.

"If you start talking business person, you isolate about 95 percent of the church," he said. "Ninety-five percent of the people are not 'business people.' What I've found out also from doing surveys, most professionals don't even consider themselves a business person."

## Idea Catching On

Spada is not alone in his assessment of workplace ministry.

Nearly 300 pastors, marketplace business leaders, and workplace ministry leaders attended a March 31-April 3 conference at the Billy Graham Training Centre in Asheville, N.C., designed to create an action plan to bring God's presence into the workplace.

Dr. Billy Graham has said he believes one of the next great moves of God will be through believers in the workplace.

Karen Jones, director of workplace ministry at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Ky., agrees.

"I believe it is a move of God. I believe it is just right there and cutting edge. It's the next mission field," she said.

Southeast will launch its ministry, which is based on Spada's model, in October. (see [press release](#)) Jones said her early goal is to involve at least half of Southeast's members. With 20,000 members, the impact in the community could be huge.

"Statistics say you have a sphere of influence of about 25," Jones said. "You could be influencing and or doing some type of change in somebody else's life 250,000 touches a week, very quickly."

Os Hillman, director of the International Coalition of Workplace Ministries in Atlanta, is another who believes God is speaking to men and women in the workplace.

"It's not just businessmen; it's not just executives," Hillman said. "There's a real move to help people understand the whole connection between faith and work, whether you are a housewife, a nurse, a construction worker or a CEO."

#### Early Origin

Hillman said that the priesthood of every believer was central to the formation of the early church.

However, in the early fourth century, the Greeks began to create the sacred/secular divide, a pervasive belief that some parts of our lives -- such as work -- are not really important to God.

As a result, a spiritual hierarchy was created that exalts pastors, missionaries and other church leaders, but relegates the majority of believers to be onlookers from the pews.

Workplace ministry should be part of the DNA of every church, Hillman said.

Spada agrees.

"Vocation, or work, is a holy calling," he said. "It's not like we're doing something new. What we're doing is breaking down these strongholds or these misconceptions that ministry is something to keep within the four walls of the church.

"The more you can get the local church to say, 'Oh, my gosh. Look at this. This is the most incredible mission field, right outside our church doors,'" the better, he said.

That mission field is not lost on Geoff Bohleen, outreach pastor at 5,000-member Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, Minn. He said workplace ministry allows his church to reach out to people they otherwise may not be able to.

"There's no way our pastoral staff is going to get into all those offices and our people do," he said. "Our pastoral staff is so limited in terms of the connections, the relationships (and) the friendships we can have with people who need Christ. We've got Wooddalers all over the place."

When looking for evidence that such a divide is not the intent of God, Hillman is quick to point to Jesus Christ.

Hillman said that of 132 public appearances in the New Testament, 122 were in the workplace. Of the 52 parables He told, 45 had a workplace context. Thirty-nine of 40 divine encounters in the book of Acts were in the workplace.

"Jesus was our best model," Hillman said.

#### **Intentional Relationships**

Because people typically spend so much time on their jobs, where they work is a mission field.

"We understand that is where they spend the majority of their time with the majority of people in unchurched situations," Jones said. "That's where intentional

relationships are built. You don't have to go around knocking on doors to make those relationships. They just are there."

Hillman, said pastors play an important role in workplace ministry.

"I'll give you an example. I speak all over the world on this subject and every time I go into a church or speak in a setting with a lot of people in it, I ask a question: 'How many of you have been intentionally trained to apply biblical faith in your workplace?'" he said. "Less than 3 percent will raise their hand. The key word there is intentional."

Change is in the Air

Because of that, he said, people do not know how to integrate their faith into their work lives.

"There is a disconnect between the local church and their own life in the workplace," Hillman said. "What we encourage pastors to do is really learn more about their world and how to make the Scriptures relevant to their world in such a way that (believers) feel they are being equipped and trained in their workplace calling."

Because of that disconnect, Christians have segmented their faith life from their work. Hillman, Spada and others involved with workplace ministry, see change on the horizon. "There is a whole move today of pastors coming into an awareness of the need to equip in a way that their people really feel like they are able to go into their workplace and experience God's presence -- to be able to have Bible studies in their workplace, to pray for others in their workplace, to see God move in their workplace," Hillman said.

Southeast's Jones said the ministry could spread like a virus.

"Who knows how big it can get," she said. "I think it is very evangelistic and that makes me very excited."

## Where To Begin

The International Coalition of Workplace Ministries lists [26 action steps](#) a pastor and local church can take to mobilize men and women to see their work as a calling and ministry from God. Among those steps are:

- Preach sermons related to workplace applications.
- Start an ongoing workplace ministry that mobilizes the entire congregation into the workplace. see [His Church at Work](#)
- Preach a series of messages on the priesthood of all believers in the context of work.
- Avoid addressing or favouring only those "in business" or those with influence.
- Affirm workplace believers that their call is equal to vocational ministries.
- Affirm workplace believers through church commissioning services to recognize and confirm their calling in a formal way.
- Begin a small-group ministry in the workplace.
- Read the most important books on the movement and make them available through your church bookstore.
- Once a week, spend a few hours with one member in his place of work for a few hours.
- Invite brief testimonies of how members experienced God's presence in their workplace that week.