

Equipping churches actively hunt for examples and resources

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Leaders and people together are attempting to learn what they can from the examples of other churches engaged in this process elsewhere. They are actively on the hunt for good theological and practical resources for personal and group studies and worship. The sidebars throughout this article describe a variety of practical strategies that churches have adopted. All of these are activities we hope will stimulate readers to think about creative options in their own settings.

THIS TIME TOMORROW

The *Imagine Church Project* in London encourages churches to invite a different person each week to answer three questions about *This Time Tomorrow* (TTT) in their worship services. What will you be doing this time tomorrow? What opportunities or challenges will you face? How can we pray for you?[12]

From his study of a number of American churches that have embarked on the faith-at-work journey, Stuart Dugan drew four important conclusions:

1. There is no single model for marketplace ministry that fits all churches or communities.
2. Large churches are able to draw from more internal resources than small churches. Churches in business communities have a different orientation from those situated in labour or agricultural settings. Affluent churches are often better able to make a wider impact than those whose people are struggling just to make ends meet.
3. Churches that adopt another church's model without due consideration of its own ministry context, level of spiritual maturity, or regional need will most likely become frustrated. In other words, any church wishing to embark on this journey must discern its own path and follow the Spirit in its own congregation.
4. No single model is adequate in and of itself even within a single congregation.

Successful churches never limit themselves to a single approach. Instead, they assess, re-evaluate, adjust and innovate to gather the strengths from different modes of operation, and they selectively adopt those best suited for their own needs. The church has much to learn from this entrepreneurial spirit that quickly adapts to changing market circumstances. Just as businesses must be highly adaptive in order to stay competitive in an ever-changing market, so too the church needs to respond flexibly and quickly in order to best serve the ever-changing needs of its people and community.

One key to the success of these efforts is the concept of permission-giving. Men and women who are already successful in their professions outside the church need to be given permission to convert their skills, contacts and passions into Kingdom-enhancing ventures. Traditional clergy-led churches often have the mindset that the pastor knows best and that the most effective approaches and programs come out of seminaries and Christian publishing houses. However, experience is teaching us that even greater things can be done by granting people who are already successful in businesses the permission to be successful in ministry beyond the congregation.

There is a wealth of creativity still to be tapped, and innovative models to be developed that will far outpace what is currently being done.

When given permission and adequate support, innovators in the field of faith-at-work ministry will likely accomplish what has not yet even been imagined. In the current age of ever-changing technology and workplace dynamics, including the impact of the global informational age, the types of marketplace ministry needs will be changing constantly and in need of new innovation.

Robert Lewis, pastor-at-large at Fellowship Bible Church says it clearly, 'Underneath the fabric of American Christianity are people who are crying out for a personal, hands-on experience for being difference makers, not serving difference makers. They come to the church to be cared for and challenged, but there needs to be a point of ultimate destination – a hands-on ministry of their own. Helping them find this opportunity should be our greatest passion'.^[15]

WHERE DO I FIT IN GOD'S JIGSAW?

Where do I fit in God's Jigsaw? Avonhead Baptist Church in New Zealand includes a lot of high school and university students about to graduate. They do a series of Sunday evening services and mid-week workshops on career and life planning. They find that a number of mid-lifers are also interested and looking for help in this area. They are using some outside expertise at this time. But they are hoping that some people graduating from this course can be trained to offer it to others themselves.^[13]

Willow Creek Church has offered a 9 week workshop for people who are in transition and exploring new directions, and Bob Buford's 'Halftime' resources have also been widely used in American churches for mid-lifers.^[14]

JUST 4 QUESTIONS

When asked, 'If there was only one thing you could do to change the culture of a congregation to support Christians at work, what would you do?' R. Paul Stevens says 'Give me three minutes and four questions in a service every Sunday for a year. I would get a different person up in front of the congregation each week and ask them: 1. Tell us about the work you do? 2. What are some of the issues you face in your work? 3. Does your

Strategies for helping churches become better equipped need to be worked on thoughtfully over the long term. It requires changing the congregation's

faith make a difference to how you deal with these issues? 4. How would you like us to pray for you and your ministry in the workplace? Then we would pray for them.'

expectations and culture. A broad spectrum of participants from across the church is needed to accomplish so much change effectively and sustainably.

Another approach to implementing this sort of process has been adopted by churches involved in the Imagine Church Project that Neil Hudson is heading up for the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity. The process they follow is circular and continuing as churches are encouraged to revisit and reinforce changes that have been made previously. The six steps they picture moving clockwise around the circle include:

1. Cast a vision – the vision of becoming a whole-life disciple-making church.
2. Focus on the frontline – those contexts for mission where people already spend time in the world outside the church.
3. Grow a core team – a group of personally engaged people to communicate the vision, encourage initiatives and pilot the change process.
4. Make one-degree shifts – promote small but effective changes that act as levers reinforcing each other towards an overall change of culture.
5. Share stories – celebrate small and everyday signs of growth and change, listen for the stories that are told in conversations that can be shared to encourage and bless others.
6. Redefine the church contract – a change of focus as leaders and members learn to see church not primarily as a place to receive pastoral care but primarily as a place to develop vocational capability.[16]