

Equipping churches connect daily work to worship

<https://www.theologyofwork.org/key-topics/the-equipping-church>

These churches are changing their approaches to worship. The connections between work and worship are explored in the songs they sing, the prayers they pray, the testimonies they share, and the themes that are sounded in the preaching. These churches have realised that worship is not just what happens in church. As a Sydney Anglican paper on the *Meaning and Importance of Worship* says, 'Worship is the appropriate response of the entire person to God's revelation in Christ: it is an all-of-life activity (e.g., Romans 12:1)'.^[17] These churches are encouraging their people to practise what the apostle Paul talked about when he said, 'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord...It is the Lord Christ you are serving (Colossians 3:23-24).

There are many ways in which stronger links between faith and work can be forged in our corporate worship events.

Some examples include:

Preaching and Teaching: Many Christians say they cannot remember hearing a sermon or lesson about the meaning of work from God's perspective.^[19] Equipping churches are learning how to teach and preach the Bible story from work-related angles.^[20] In sermons based on exploring a passage of scripture ('expositional' preaching), it is probably more effective to incorporate work-related themes into sermons on a weekly basis, rather than to preach one or two sermons on specially-selected workplace scriptures. The Theology of Work Project's online commentary covering every book of the Bible can be a very useful resource for this.

PREACHING

Steve Graham, pastor of a Pentecostal church in Christchurch, New Zealand, is preaching a series of sermons on Joseph. He feels challenged to try harder to understand Joseph's daily work circumstances and relate these insights to the working lives of his congregation. He is stunned by the warm response from people and the feedback they provide. He gets some of them to tell their stories in church. He starts getting questions about other ethical dilemmas. So he decides to do another series based on the 10 commandments, also with a workplace emphasis. The lively feedback and stories continue.^[18]

Bible Readings: Most people are not used to listening for work-related themes in Bible readings. It often helps if such readings are introduced in a way that more explicitly invites congregation members to think about any connections with life and work concerns. The commentaries covering every book of the Bible at www.theologyofwork.org offer ideas for applying hundreds of Bible passages to work and may help congregations learn how to look for work-related themes in the Bible.

Children's Sermons: There are many different ways that work-related stories or object lessons can be included as part of the children's talk in a service, as the sidebar 'Children's Talk' suggests.

Hymns and contemporary songs: There are many traditional hymns that talk about aspects of faith related to daily life and work, but contemporary songs that do this are harder to find. A number of work-related songs can be found at <http://www.faithatwork.org.nz/hymns-songs-2/>.

Intercessions: Regular prayers of intercession can include specific or more general expressions of concern for people in their places of work and the issues they are working through there.

Liturgy: This includes both formal and informal worship forms that forge stronger links with daily life outside the church by incorporating elements (both verbally and by using symbols and images) of people's every day circumstances and concerns. One online source of work-related liturgical resources can be found at <http://arc.episcopalchurch.org/ministry/daily.htm>.

Visual images: Along with the usual images that appear in church sanctuaries it is good to include some that relate to people's daily work in the world as a visual reminder of God's involvement. These images offer another invitation to connect worship and work. This can be in the form of work tools or work-related sculptures or pictures of people at work.

CHILDREN'S TALK

The pastor grabs a big bag full of interesting objects and invites the children to come forward and see what's inside. It is full of uniforms and objects from people's daily work. The kids put on the uniforms and guess who they belong to. There is a carpenter's belt and blocklayer's trowel and big white gumboots and a laptop computer and a plumber's wrench and.... The noisiest moment is when the pastor starts up a chainsaw. The kids have a lot of laughs and end up praying for people in their work.

PARTICIPATORY PRAYER

As people file into Opawa Baptist Church they write down three different kinds of paid and unpaid work they are likely to do this week. During the offering, their writings are pegged on string lines in the auditorium. Later, during a prayer time, a couple of people walk along the lines reading off some of the different kinds of work listed there and everyone is invited to offer their work to God.

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Reflection Time: Music plays and is interspersed with some brief readings about God's work and our work. At the same time, a series of images illustrating different aspects of God's work in creation and also human work are projected onto a screen. This concludes with a corporate responsive prayer.

Commissioning

Services: Numerous churches are experimenting with different ways of offering prayer and support for peoples' daily life and work, similar to the way they do for people's work in the church and its ministries. Sometimes this takes the form of a formal commissioning ceremony, but often it means just simply acknowledging and praying for different occupational groups on successive Sundays. It is important, however, not to give the impression that such ceremonies are second-rate versions of clergy or church worker commissionings. For example, instead of 'ordaining' someone for 'ministry' in their workplace—which uses terms most people regard as pertaining to clergy—it may be more helpful to 'commission' or 'authorise' someone for 'work' or 'service' in their field. Whatever terms are used, equipping churches pay attention to the overall pattern of recognizing and supporting congregants' work. For example, if people are commissioned for short-term missions, but not for their daily work, it sends a message that church missions are more important than regular work. Or if doctors and nurses are commissioned for their work, but retail workers and homemakers are not, it sends a message that some jobs are more important to God than others are.

Festivals: Many churches are using Harvest Festival, or Rogation or Industrial Sunday, or Labour Day festivals to celebrate workplace experiences and explore work-related issues in creative ways.

Worship and Small

Groups: Surveys suggest that although pastors think people talk about work issues in small groups, in fact they seldom do unless these issues are also raised in the congregational setting.[23] Most Christians have never talked at any length to others in their group about their regular working lives, except when they have experienced a crisis at work. This

BRIDGING THE SUNDAY MONDAY GAP

Small Boat Big Sea is a Christian group in Sydney that has adopted a pattern for its community life that includes talk about work as part of their regular sending function. A Christian lawyer is invited to talk about his job, what he enjoys, what he struggles with, and how his faith influences his approach to work. People also ask him some other questions. He is then asked what he would appreciate prayer for and the community gather around to pray for him. A different person is invited to talk about their daily work each week.[21]

FESTIVAL OF WORK

In numerous churches the traditional Harvest Festival service has been transformed into a festival of work. Other churches use Labour Day services for this purpose. People come dressed in their work clothes and bring objects related to their work to place around the front of the sanctuary. The high point is a commissioning service in which everyone is commended to God for their ministry in daily life. In Bakewell in England they arranged a week-long festival of work with the whole town involved in a variety of displays and activities and culminating in a special service to celebrate and say 'Thank you' for different types of work in the town.[22]

suggests that work-related issues need to be named in preaching and prayers and testimonies and other meaningful ways in services if they are going to stimulate conversations beyond the worship service.

Worship and Spiritual

Growth: A recent survey at Willow Creek Church and a number of other congregations discovered that church attendance and participation in church programmes is not directly connected with spiritual growth except for a believer's early Christian experience.[24] The development of personal spiritual practices is the key to ongoing spiritual growth. The report concluded that churches need to transition from the role of spiritual parent encouraging dependence on church programmes to spiritual coach providing resources for people to feed themselves. Churches that focus on this transition have begun to explore concrete methods of spiritual for whole-life discipleship. They also consider how the form and content of their worship services may need to change.

ARE YOUR HOME GROUPS WORKING?

At Ilam Baptist Church (Christchurch, New Zealand) several home groups decided to take the daily work of their people more seriously. They began by spending the first part of each evening listening to one person's story of their work history and an explanation of the opportunities and challenges they now face in their work. Where they can, they have decided to visit that person's workplace. They ask questions and end by praying for that person in their work and for the good of the enterprise and people they work with.

FAITH AND WORK RESOURCE CENTRES

A number of churches have started faith and work resource centres and web pages. At one church this includes a library of books for individuals to read and study resources for small groups, such as Mark Greene's *Christian Life and Work* 6 week DVD series; *Going to Work with God* by Robert and Linda Banks (8 sessions); *Where's God on Monday?* by Alistair Mackenzie and Wayne Kirkland (12 sessions). Faith and Work resources designed specifically for churches may be found, among other places, at the websites of:

- [Redeemer Center for Faith and Work](#)
- [Faith at Work \(New Zealand\)](#)
- [Episcopal Church Ministry in Daily Life Resources](#)
- [Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Mockler Center](#)
- [Le Tourneau University Center for Faith and Work](#)

Worship and Ethics:

Does churchgoing make a difference to the ethical perspectives of regular attenders? According to research done by Robin Gill and others who have examined the results of

values surveys in Britain, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, the answer is a clear, but qualified, yes. Qualified, because according to these surveys, this is only true with regard to a few issues of personal morality (in particular sex, stealing and accumulating wealth), and not related to wider ethical considerations having to do with business, the environment and government.[25] It would seem that going to church does make an ethical difference, but only as it relates to issues that are regularly addressed in church. Churches need to expand the range of issues they are prepared to name as important (this doesn't mean that lots of service time needs to be devoted to detailed discussion of these issues, just that they have been put on the agenda). We can also start to explore more deliberately and carefully the working lives of biblical characters who faced ethical challenges in their places of work and encourage Christians to relate these examples to their own circumstances.

- [London Institute of Contemporary Christianity](#)
- [Rightnow.org](#)

Workplace Fellows and Intern Programs in Faith and Work

Some churches have started year-long fellows or internship programs for recent university graduates committed to integrating faith and work. The fellows form a close-knit community of worship and prayer under the leadership of a local pastor and a workplace Christian. They study the biblical and theological foundations of work, then apply their studies while working in ordinary jobs. They are paired with Christian mentors in their fields.

Some large churches have created programs on their own, including the Falls Church in Alexandria, Virginia, USA, and Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York. Smaller churches can work together to create programs, and in many cities, they have received assistance from [The Fellows Initiative](#), an outgrowth of the program at the Falls Church. Often a local university, seminary or workplace ministry contributes expertise and organizational stability.

Benedictions: Benedictions that speak of God sending his people into the world to make a difference there can remind people that God is with them in their work. By utilizing people in such a way, God is fulfilling His words to Abraham, 'By your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves' ([Genesis 22:18](#)).

BENEDICTION

The congregation of Dumfries Baptist Church in Scotland turn to face the exit door as they say , 'May the love of God sustain us in our working, May the light of Jesus radiate our thinking and speaking, May the power of the Spirit penetrate all our deliberating, And may all that is done witness to your presence in our lives'.