

Is the Gap Between Pulpit & Pew Narrowing?



<http://centerforfaithandwork.com/article/gap-between-pulpit-pew-narrowing-read-latest-research>

via [LeTourneau University](#)

Dallas TX: New research conducted by the Barna Group for the Centre for Faith & Work at LeTourneau University shows a substantial uptick in the number of pastors who say they preach on the topic of work. However, most church-goers still doubt the significance of their work to God.

"While American church-goers hear more sermons on work these days, there's still a gap between what's preached from the pulpit and what's grasped by those in the pew," says Bill Peel, Executive Director.

The research revealed that 70 percent of Christians do not see how their work serves God's purposes, and 78 percent see their work as less important than the work of a pastor or priest.

How American Church-Goers SEE Their Work



“I love the work I do”



“I can clearly see how the work that I am doing is serving God or a higher purpose”



“I believe the work that I am doing is just as important as the work of a pastor or priest.”

Jim Mullins is a pastor who has been pondering this breakdown of communication between the pulpit and the pew. In an [insightful article](#), Mullins tells how one of his parishioners—a biomedical engineer who developed devices to help doctors detect early-stage cancer—was considering a career change to become a pastor or missionary. He told Mullins, “I don’t want to waste my life. I want to do something that has real significance, where I can glorify God and actually love people.”

Mullins says this faulty perspective was not for lack of hearing sermons on God’s view of work. He writes,

At our church, we preach the lordship of Christ over all aspects of life, offer classes about the theology of work, and repeat our favourite phrase every Sunday: “All of life is all for Jesus.”

Mullins pondered why the message about the broad scope of the gospel and its implications for work wasn’t getting through. Then he had a revelation.

I realized that the issue wasn’t with what he heard, but with what he saw. He frequently heard teaching about the importance of vocation and all-of-life discipleship, but he never saw anyone’s work—apart from pastoral, missionary, and nonprofit work—publicly celebrated.

Pastors are awakening to the importance of helping people integrate faith and work. But it's going to take more than sermons and classes to inculcate a biblical theology of work. Like the engineer, most of us need not only to hear that our work is important to God, we also need to see it honoured and celebrated as well.

Over the past four years, Barna Group research, commissioned by LeTourneau University's Centre for Faith & Work, has uncovered some important trends.

In 2011

- Nearly all (93%) of pastors said that helping people integrate faith into daily work is "very important."
- Two-thirds (68%) of those pastors questioned their understanding of workplace issues.
- Only half (49%) of churchgoing, employed Christians "strongly agreed" that their church provided information, guidance and support to live out faith at work.
- One in four (26%) of pastors said their sermons addressed faith at work.
- Fewer than one in ten (8%) of pastors said they provided prayer support for workplace issues.
- Only a fraction (3%) of pastors reported visiting their members at work.

Fast forward three years and note the increases our new research reveals.

In 2014 ...

- Over one-third (36%) of senior Protestant pastors say they preached a sermon on what the Bible says about God's view of work within the past month.
- An additional 36% say they have preached on work in the past six months.
- In all, 86% of pastors have preached a sermon within the last year that focused on what the Bible says about God's view of work, and specifically on how one's faith should impact one's work.

American church-goers are hearing MORE sermons on work



In 2011, one in four pastors reported preaching sermons that addressed work



Today, one in three pastors report preaching sermons that addressed work in the past month



Today, almost three-quarters of pastors report preaching sermons that addressed work in the past six months



Today, almost 9 out of 10 pastors report preaching sermons that addressed work in the past year

According to Peel, "These findings indicate a significant surge in the attention pastors are giving to the importance of faith and work—an encouraging trend indeed! However, there's still a gap between what parishioners are *hearing* about the importance of their work to God, and they are *seeing*."

The new research shows that, apart from pastoral and missionary work, little attention has been paid to publicly celebrating the work most parishioners do between Sundays.

- During the last year, fewer than one in five (18%) of churches publicly dedicated or commissioned their members to serve God in the places where they work.

What's the Connection?



..... During the last year, fewer than one in five churches publicly dedicated or commissioned their members to serve God in places where they work.

Almost four out of five church-goers doubt that the work they do is equal in importance to the work of a pastor or priest.



"I believe this gap between what is preached and what is celebrated continues to cloud how people assess the value of their work to God," says Peel.

- Over two-thirds (70%) of Christians still cannot envision how the work they do serves God.
- Almost four out of five church-goers (78%) doubt that the work they do is equal in importance to the work of a pastor or priest.

"Clearly, increased preaching and teaching about faith and work is a positive and praiseworthy step, but more is needed. Churches must become fully engaged in shaping people spiritually for the workplace. A powerful next step is to schedule time in worship services to publicly celebrate all kinds of work that advance God's creation," advises Peel. "This simple action can help people connect God's truth with their work in life-changing ways."

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The 2014 data about pastors originated through research conducted by Barna Group of Ventura, California. The questions were commissioned by the Centre for Faith & Work at LeTourneau University. The PastorPollSM included 602 telephone interviews conducted among a representative sample of senior pastors of Protestant churches from within the continental U.S. The telephone interviews were conducted from June 3 through June 13, 2014. The sampling error for PastorPollSM is +/-4 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level. The cooperation rate in the PastorPollSM was 96%.

The 2014 data about church-goers originated through research conducted by Barna Group of Ventura, California. The questions were commissioned by the Center for Faith & Work at LeTourneau University. The OmniPollSM included 1,036 online surveys conducted among a representative, nationwide sample of adults ages 18 and older. The online interviews were conducted from September 2 through September 10, 2014. The sampling error for OmniPollSM is +/-3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The participation rate in OmniPollSM was 95%.

The 2011 data about pastors originated through research conducted by Barna Group of Ventura, California. The questions were commissioned by the Center for Faith & Work at LeTourneau University. The PastorPollSM included 646 telephone interviews conducted among a representative sample of senior pastors of Protestant

and Catholic churches from within the 48 continental United States. The survey was conducted from May 26, 2011 through June 20, 2011. The sampling error for this PastorPollSM is +/-4% at the 95% confidence level.

The 2011 data about church-goers originated through research conducted by Barna Group of Ventura, California. The questions were commissioned by the Center for Faith & Work at LeTourneau University. The OmniPollSM included 1,007 telephone interviews conducted among a representative sample of adults over the age of 18 within the 48 continental states. The survey was conducted from August 1, 2011 through August 14, 2011. Only those adults who self-identified as Christian or Catholic, who attended church in the past six months, and who were employed full-time or part-time qualified to participate in the module of questions for LeTourneau University. In this study, a total of 350 adults qualified to participate. The sampling error for a sample of this size (n=350) is plus or minus 5.2 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level.

Channel(s): Calling and Career, Culture and Worldview, Leadership: Church, LeTourneau Originals

Media: Infographics, Research

Tags: research, Barna, church, sermons, integration, commissioning

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