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Vol 3:2 2023

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Introduction

A couple of years ago, some people started a faith community at their office tower in downtown Calgary. When they asked for permission, they were told that company emails and meeting rooms were for company business only. This did not deter them. As there were many empty floors in the office building, they met weekly for prayer and fellowship in a meeting room on an empty floor. Six months later, I met with the faith community leader, who invited me to their Easter celebration. On the Wednesday before Easter, they brought a keyboard and microphones to the 17th floor board room of their office building. Over forty people from diverse Christian backgrounds and ethnicities attended. Various employees led in worship, shared Scripture, and led in prayer as together we celebrated Easter. One of the managers attending the Easter celebration commented to me that he noticed a difference in the atmosphere of his floor since this faith community started meeting and praying.

The following January, the leader of this faith community helped start a new faith community in another office tower. Together, the two faith groups planned an Easter celebration using a larger shared meeting venue in a different building with the same format. Over a hundred people attended.

If you had told me thirty years ago when I first moved to Calgary that one day, I would join an Easter celebration in the board room of an office tower in Calgary, I would have rolled my eyes in disbelief. Although thirty years ago Christians were much more open about their faith in the workplace, even then I would have anticipated the comment: “These meeting rooms are not to be used for religious services.”

From my experience working in the oil and gas sector, the railroads, the local church, and the faith and work movement, “the way forward for people of faith to bring their whole selves, including their faith, into the workplace is opaque and resources to support them are scant” (Ewest 2018, 2).

The Research Study

This got me interested in researching what is happening in the faith-at-work movement in Canada and in analyzing the efficacy of the movement. This qualitative, exploratory study identified fourteen Canadian national workplace faith ministries. I sought to understand their target demographic, ministry model, and why individuals chose to participate in these ministries. I conducted phone interviews with each of the ministry leaders ranging from 30–90 minutes. Each interview was transcribed. However, this study does not include local church based, independent marketplace ministries and chaplains.

Several respondents indicated there are at least two other classes of workplace ministry occurring on a fee-for-service basis. These include leadership coaching and leadership development by Christian practitioners.

Target Demographic by Organization Size

Approximately twenty percent of the Canadian workforce works in the public sector (Statistics Canada, 2019). This study identified four national ministries in Canada focused on the public sector. These include the Christian Medical Dental Society (CMDs), Fellowship of Christian Firefighters, Public Service Christian Fellowship, and the Royal Canadian Chaplain Service. For the purposes of this research, only the Christian Medical Dental Society was interviewed. Data on the other three ministries were taken from their websites.

This study identified ten national workplace faith ministries in Canada focused on the private sector. These ministries interact with about 3,000 to 5,000 people. This represents less than 0.05 percent of the Canadian workforce in the private sector. The target demographic of these private sector ministries falls into three primary categories; namely: (1) professions such as technology, legal, trucking, and trades; (2) frontline employees through Bible studies or chaplaincy programs; and (3) senior leadership of organizations, although others are welcome to participate.

Ministry Participation

The respondents identified two major categories of Christians in the Marketplace. These two categories are the dual backpack Christians and the single backpack Christians.

Dual Backpack Christians

Dual Backpack Christians are Christians who pick up their church backpack as they leave their home and head off to church. Some of these are Christians who are thoroughly committed to their local church. Then on Monday morning when they head off to work, they pick up their workplace backpack as they leave the house. For these people, faith and work are two solitudes that are not integrated. As one person said to me, “From Monday to Friday I do my work, and on Sunday I do my spiritual service by teaching Sunday School” (author interview 2019). Tim Keller, in his book *Every Good Endeavor*, suggests that this dualism leads “some to think that if their work is to please Christ, it must be done overtly in his name” (2016, 196).

Single Backpack Christians

Single Backpack Christians are Christians who take the same backpack to church and to work. Their desire is to live a holistic life. All aspects of their life, including “their work is informed, formed, transformed or malformed by their faith” (Ewest 2018, 3). Some Christians within this category find nourishment and refreshment for their soul and equipping for their role in the workplace through their local church. One respondent suggested that this was a very small percentage of Christians (author interview 2019). Some single backpack Christians choose to participate in workplace faith communities. Some Christians do not find what they are looking for in their local church or in a workplace faith community.

One benefit single backpack Christians find in a workplace faith community is that their colleagues understand their language and subculture. One respondent said, “If an [outsider] is present [in their faith community], then a different protocol is required. They simply want to fly under the radar and have a small faith community of guys who can share everything” (author interview 2019). Another respondent indicated that “meeting within a workplace area is a shortcut as you are surrounded by people who understand the question and you can get straight to ‘how do we respond?’ You don’t need to expend emotional energy helping people understand the question, or having people shocked by the situation” (author interview 2019).

The Changing Nature of Work

A respondent from CMDS indicated that the medical field has always been hard work, but now there are two significant new stressors in their world. Work has become demoralized and demoralized; and work has shifted from a covenant relationship to a contract.

The Demoralization of Work

Today, the medical profession has become demoralized and de-moralized, because decisions are now made based on what can be done and what is available, not on what is morally appropriate. This demoralization of medicine has robbed the profession of the real satisfaction of medicine for millennia, which was practicing a God-honoring vocation that endued the profession with energy and grace. Similarly, “for many teachers, their work is a vocation or calling, one replete with notions of moral and ethical commitments to their practice and the students with whom they work” (Santoro 2011,4). Yet, many teachers today are evaluated on effectiveness and quality, eliminating the moral dimension of the practice (Santoro 2011, 19).

From the dawn of scientific management principles to the rise of the white-collar factory (Godin 2010, 18), many jobs have been reduced to repetitively performing a task with little or no direct connection to an end-product or service. When a person finds that they can answer in the affirmative to the questions “Is this work worthwhile?” and “Am I engaging in good work?,” they are reaping the moral rewards of their work. The challenge for the church today is to help people answer these questions in the affirmative in environments that no longer value the moral rewards of work.

From Covenant to Contract

Forty years ago, medicine was a covenant between physician and patient, and this was satisfying. Today, medicine has shifted to a contractual interaction with a patient who is not as meaningful. For example, 40 years ago, a family doctor would deal with all the ailments of a patient. Today, a patient seeks out the most convenient drop-in clinic or the best specialist to deal with each unique ailment. I have observed the same trend in the workplace. Forty years ago, most companies would invest in a long-term relationship with their employees and remain loyal to their suppliers. Today, companies form contractual relationships with the lowest cost outsourcer or supplier to meet a short-term business need.

When a person primarily experiences contractual relationships with their employer and in other aspects of their life, it is easy for this mindset to permeate the way they perceive the church and Christianity. When Christianity is viewed through a contractual lens or paradigm, people tend to analyze the value Christianity brings to their career or to the meaningfulness of their work instead of experiencing a covenantal intimate relationship with God.

Communicating the concept of covenant is an opportunity and a challenge for the local church. It is an opportunity to invite people who have only experienced contractual interactions into a covenantal relationship with God and God's family. The challenge facing the church is to share the gospel in a way that people see the gospel not as an invitation to enter into a contract with God. Recently at a Bible study, we were discussing Jeremiah 31:33 ("this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel ..."), and one participant commented, "Oh, that is just like a contract." Is Christianity perceived as a contract instead of a covenantal relationship part of what causes people to have a backpack for Sunday and another backpack for the workplace?

Ministry Models

Historical Model of Event-Driven Evangelism

One respondent described how thirty years ago an event-driven model of evangelism was quite successful in the workplace (author interview 2019). He described how ministries would host an event over breakfast or lunch during the week, with a Christian speaker who would share a testimony and proclaim an evangelistic message and wrap-up with an altar call. Christians in the workplace would invite their non-Christian coworkers to these events, and several people would make a commitment to Christ. These individuals would then be directed to a local church for discipleship.

The respondent reported that this model is not working well today. He indicated that today the message would so turn off non-Christian folks that it would fracture their relationship with the Christian that brought them. For each person that would accept Christ at an event, five to ten Christians would stop participating in these events (author interview 2019).

Current Models of Workplace Ministry in Canada

From my observations and research, the current approach of the various ministries in Canada could be categorized into six distinct models. These models are as follows: (1) soul restoration; (2) chaplaincy; (3) personal, professional and spiritual development; (4) mentorship; (5) hands-on missional participation; and (6) advocacy.

Soul Restoration Ministries. Soul restoration ministries employ small groups engaged in Bible study and prayer. This kind of ministry is found in the public sector (20 percent of the workforce) and in one local ministry in Calgary focused on frontline employees in organizations with over 500 employees (6.3 percent of the workforce). Two national ministries follow a similar model for small business owners. This does not include leaders passionate about faith at work who start a prayer time or Bible study in their organization without any awareness or connection to a larger workplace ministry network.

Leaders of ministries that focus on soul restoration recognize that we all have a God-shaped hole in our lives that is often abused and scarred in the workplace. They understand that the stresses of the workplace combined with the stress of family life cause emotional wounds. They believe in God's ability to bring substantial healing to all aspects of life, including life in the workplace (Schaeffer 1971).

To address these emotional and spiritual wounds and needs, these ministries focus on Bible Study and prayer. In a faith community, they explore how the Bible relates to the emotional, ethical and spiritual challenges of life in the workplace. These ministries believe in the power of prayer to impact the workplace. However, one observer noted that "the prayers tended to be for health and career related concerns rather than interceding for the city or marketplace" (author interview 2019).

Faith communities typically attract believers who only have a single backpack that they wear to church and work or are in the process of combining the contents of the two backpacks into a single one. Although these groups are open to non-Christians, the participation of the latter has not been observed.

One Christian participant described her participation in a workplace Bible Study this way:

Attending the Bible Study quickly became the highlight of my work week as I was introduced to an amazing group of Christians who were committed to be a light to their colleagues in the workplace. The

fellowship was refreshing to my spirit and since I worked in a company where I knew of less than a handful of Christians, I was encouraged by the time in the Word and the shared prayer. Having the Bible Study group reminded me that I was not alone in desiring to be a witness at work (author interview 2019).

Participants in these faith communities have their faith stretched as they discuss and apply Scripture to situations in their workplace with Christians from different denominational traditions. The leaders of these faith communities bring back to their local congregation stronger leadership skills and increased faith from their experiences. The leaders of these faith communities would see their faith community as having a positive impact on their workplace by equipping the saints to revitalize their sphere of influence within the workplace.

An implicit expectation within this model is that the Christians who participate in these faith communities would courageously demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in their jobs. The assumption is that the way they approach their work and their demeanor would lead to spiritual conversations with their colleagues.

Chaplaincy. Chaplaincy ministries exist to “support business owners, management and employees as they face life’s reality at work and home. They foster relational, emotional and spiritual growth and health as these individuals serve their companies, families and communities together” (Corporate Chaplains Canada n.d.).

Language is very important in Canada. The word “chaplain” is problematic and closes more doors than it opens. One respondent indicated that in Canada, when a chaplain approaches an organization that is not led by a Christian and enquires about offering Christian chaplaincy services, they are not welcomed. He indicated that Christian business owners are often hesitant to engage a chaplain as they wonder how it would affect non-Christian employees (author interview 2019).

As a result, marketplace chaplains have rebranded themselves as marketplace care in Canada and changed their service model to offering holistic proactive employee care so that there are no concerns about proselytizing. Marketplace care targets small to midsize organizations, with care teams putting in one or two hours per week at multiple companies. These care teams are also available on-call outside business hours.

Companies pay for the services of marketplace care, creating opportunities for Christians to serve in paid part-time positions, which currently have been difficult to

fill. Although pastors can make good chaplains, this respondent's experience has been that if someone vets them and discovers that they are a pastor, they tend to be avoided like the plague.

Another respondent works for a ministry that provides chaplains for truck stops. Their organization has a unique relationship with the owners of a chain of truck stops that see the value of having a chapel and chaplain at each of their truck stops across Canada. Like his counterpart at marketplace care, he is unable to find enough individuals willing to serve as a chaplain at a truck stop (author interview 2019).

Personal, Professional, and Spiritual Development Ministries. Personal, professional, and spiritual development ministries focus on equipping individuals to impact their organization by living God's kingdom principles. They do this by providing seminars and small group meetings on topics like leadership skills or communication skills. These groups are confidential, authentic, and diverse. People participate in activities or faith communities hosted by these organizations to develop personally, professionally, and spiritually. Respondents indicated that they relied on leadership material developed by their organization or well-known Christian leaders (e.g., John Maxwell).

Some ministries, like Leader Impact, design their faith communities so that they will be attractive to both Christian and non-Christian leaders who are interested in personal, professional and spiritual development. Other faith communities primarily appeal to Christians.

The implicit expectation of this kind of ministry is that Christian leaders who participate in these faith communities or events sponsored by these ministries would then transition into meaningful conversations about the Gospel over coffee with the non-Christians who attend.

Mentoring. According to research conducted by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, "young adults who want to grow in their understanding of and reliance on Christ are typically not interested in a list of tasks or disciplines. They need people to walk alongside them for the sake of faith development. This often takes place through small group interactions and mentorship" (Penner 2011, 53).

In this study, I discovered that Mentorlink is the only national ministry focused on mentoring. However, there is a huge opportunity in Canada for mentoring leaders in the church and in the workplace. According to the respondent, when mentoring is part of

the DNA of Christian leaders, mentoring takes off with or without supporting structures. The respondent suggested that most structured mentoring programs fall apart because of the costs of maintaining a program, the challenges of retaining a leadership team for the program, and that people can get lost in the system (author interview 2019).

Hands-on Missional Participation. Some Christians are more fulfilled in using their hands and minds to serve God's kingdom on the local or foreign mission field. The engineering and medical professions have recognized this for many years and created opportunities for practitioners to serve on short-term or long-term mission trips.

An emerging field of missional participation is occurring in the technology sector. In Canada, FaithTech fosters communities where information technology professionals can gather for a weekend and develop software or applications for Christian organizations. Similar faith communities are arising in the UK and the US. One participant indicated that being part of a group like this is more attractive than a workplace Bible study.

In some cases, people do not need a workplace faith community, but they have a desire to creatively embark on mission consistent with the way that God has gifted them. Often these people require some form of direction and an environment to participate in a mission. For example, I am currently working with an architect who is motivated about the opportunity to design a building for a new church concept. A hand-on missional worker uses their talents to teach job search skills at a center for homeless and recovering addicts. Another individual who has not been helped to find a way to use their gifts spends their time discussing relocating the support pillars of their church lobby.

Advocacy. Workplace ministries that focus on a specific sector (e.g., labor, law, medicine) see a vital part of their ministry as advocating for Christians in their profession, in addition to providing soul care and spiritual development opportunities. The Christian Medical and Dental Society (CMDS) is active in the Canadian legal issues around end-of-life care and abortion. This ministry attracts serious evangelicals and serious Catholics who are concerned with the direction that medicine is moving, are seeking to do a more effective job of exercising faith in the clinical environment, are looking to preserve the Christian ethos of medicine and dentistry in the academy, are concerned to preserve the Judaeo-Christian roots of medicine for the next generation of practitioners, or who want to equip the next generation to be ready for the world they are stepping into which is quite different from the world of thirty years ago.

A significant theme discussed in CMDS faith communities and one-on-one discipleship conversations are the ethical issues facing the medical profession. These include questions such as “what should a medical professional do when a patient requests medical assistance in dying (MAiD) within the rules specified by Canadian legislation?” One respondent indicated “that they have found that the evangelical church is not grounded well in a theology of suffering or a biblical understanding of stewardship of life and has not formulated a good response to a culture of death” (author interview 2019). Not having found satisfactory or sufficient answers in the evangelical community, they have turned to the Catholic community, which has written extensively on the Moral Principle of Legitimate Cooperation with its recognition of the occasional necessity for “mediated cooperation with evil” in our daily lives (Rubio 2017 96).

Realities and Opportunities for Workplace Contexts in Canada

A local pastor shared with me that there are business practitioners in his congregation who would leave his church if the church could not find a way for them to use their gifts, or to see a connection between their gifts and their work. This challenge to the pastors and to faith and work communities can be addresses when we know the realities and opportunities for workplace contexts in Canada. This is what this section seeks to address.

Workplace Ministry for Self-Employed and Small Businesses

Approximately 15 percent of the workforce in Canada is self-employed. Another 23 percent works in establishments with one to nineteen employees (Statistics Canada 2016). This includes both private establishments and local establishments of national chains (e.g., banks, national food chains, national retailers). See Figure 1 for the percentage of workers according to the size of the establishment in Canada.

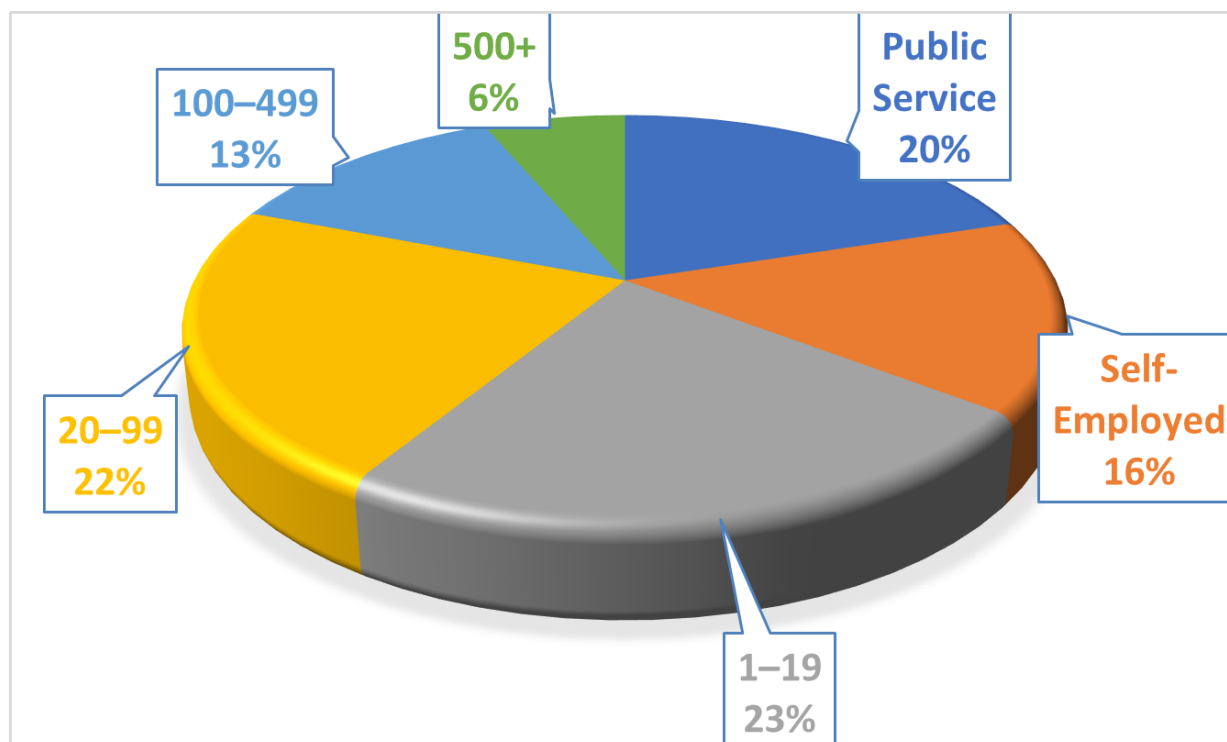


Figure 1 – Percentage of Workers by Establishment Size in Canada

Workplace ministries for the self-employed and small businesses rise and fall on their ability to recruit a local leader. Sometimes small business owners start entrepreneurial faith communities within their church. One of the primary drivers for small business owners to attend a local faith community is networking. The primary barrier for self-employed and small-business owners attending these faith communities was time and cost. Taking two hours (15–30 minutes travel each way plus 60 minutes for meeting) of non-revenue generating time to participate in a workplace ministry activity is challenging. One self-employed individual who was struggling to get his business off the ground commented that the \$20 luncheon fee that one local organization charged was not within his budget (author interview 2019).

Opportunities for workplace ministry with self-employed and small-business owners are mentoring and providing connections to missional activities that require the employment of skill they already possess.

Workplace Ministry for Organizations of 20-99 Employees

Many of the leaders of organizations with twenty to ninety-nine employees (23 percent of the workforce) face the same challenges to participating in a workplace faith

community as entrepreneurs and small-business owners. Some leaders or executives of these organizations may generate sufficient revenue to offset the financial commitment of participating in membership-based leadership ministries like Convene or Corpath. These leadership ministries compete against secular leadership communities (e.g., Mastermind, Tek), leadership coaches, and the pressures of the workplace. Employees from these organizations typically would have to travel to gather with other believers, which is a barrier to participation. One opportunity in this space is for the company to invest in a part-time chaplain or spiritual care person.

Workplace Ministry for Larger Organizations

For larger organizations, a gathering of executives and frontline employees in the same workplace faith community typically does not occur, because they deal with different workplace issues. However, some workplace ministries (e.g., LeaderImpact) have developed an effective model for workplace ministry with executives in these organizations. In some companies in the US (Google, Facebook, LinkedIn), workplace faith communities are part of the offerings of company-sponsored or acknowledged activities under the banner of diversity or Employee Resource Groups (Tanenbaum 2014).

There are several challenges for faith communities for frontline employees gathering in larger organizations. First, they have to form a leadership team within the workplace that can gather individuals, lead discussions, and shepherd the faith community. Once a leadership team has been formed, the next hurdle is to identify who the Christians in the organization are and to invite them to join the workplace faith community. Another challenge is providing physical access behind locked doors to guests from adjacent companies.

Desire to participate in a workplace faith community does not always lead to participation. One respondent noted that “30-40-year-olds are not joiners—being a good parent means having kids in three or four activities each. They are so busy making sure their children are getting all these good things that they have not found a good time to connect with other Christians in their profession” (author interview 2019). This highlights the need to explore other patterns to connect with people who do not fit the model of meeting for a meal and Bible study.

In some cases, Christians are unable to participate in a workplace faith community because they are so busy keeping their head above water or have become quite stretched in their work and family activities that they do not have the capacity to participate in what for them appears to be just another religious activity.

On the other hand, one respondent commented that business leaders and doctors are attracted to workplace faith communities because “the church looks to them as leadership pillars which makes it hard for them to be vulnerable [in a church life group] and to say I’m not sure this workplace issue is black and white” (author interview 2019).

Opportunities for workplace ministry in large organizations include having Christian executives encourage their frontline employees to start a workplace faith community, mentoring of new hires, training gifted “shepherds” in the workplace on how to care for their colleagues, and leveraging the renewed interest in spirituality at the workplace.

Need to Connect in Workplace Ministry

Most workplace ministries in Canada make an assumption that individuals participating in these ministries have the gifts, capacity, and skills to engage in evangelistic conversations with their non-Christian coworkers. This may not be a valid assumption if non-Christians do not know which of their colleagues are Christians. A 2015 study from the UK discovered that only seven percent of people in the workplace know somebody in their establishment who is a Christian (Barna 2015, 18). In fact, a recurring theme in this study was that Christians in the marketplace cannot identify their Christian colleagues.

This lack of capacity to identify and relate with other Christian colleagues is also evident among faith and work communities. In this study, I discovered that there were at least thirty different faith and work communities in Calgary, most of whom were not aware of each other. Local pastors may have heard of some of the national ministries if somebody in their congregation participated or if they were financially supporting the ministry. Such realities indicate an opportunity to create a network or eco-system bringing together the various faith and work ministries.

Opportunities for Further Research

This research raises several questions that are important for us to understand with regards to the future of workplace ministry in Canada. Here is a list of thirteen questions:

1. What is a financially sustainable model to multiply workplace ministry? Specifically, is the banner of spirituality an open door for workplace ministry?
2. What is the role of leadership coaches and leadership development in workplace ministry?
3. Why do some individuals whose lives reflect an integration of faith and work not connect with workplace ministries?
4. What are creative and effective methods of offering workplace ministry for those who have the desire to participate but are unable to due to the nature of their work (e.g., entrepreneurs and those in the informal marketplace) or due to other commitments?
5. What is a simple evangelical theology that speaks to the challenges created by the demoralization of work (Santoro 2011, 1)?
6. What language does the church need to use as a result of the shift in work from being covenantal to contractual?
7. What is the language that needs to be used when discussing the gospel in the workplace?
8. What are the contemporary ethical challenges of navigating the workplace in a fallen world and what is a simple evangelical theology for these?
9. What percentage of non-Christians in Canada know a Christian in their workplace (ideally by establishment size)?
10. What is the effectiveness of the various workplace ministry models in terms of evangelism?
11. How do we connect the need for laborers within workplace ministries with people in the pews who are looking for ways to use their gifts and do not feel qualified to work in the nursery or serve coffee?
12. What is the impact of workplace faith communities in the local church?
13. What role will workplace faith communities have in the future of the church in Canada?

Conclusion

In 1992, some men who had been involved in the Faith and Work Movement in Ontario for over forty years published a book about their experiences and other articles on their perspectives of the “why” and “how-to” of faith at work (Milliken 1992). Twenty-seven years later, a handful of faithful individuals passionate about the gospel and the workplace continue to labor in the faith and work movement. Despite their best efforts, they still only touch the lives of less than 0.05 percent of the workforce. In 2001, Fortune Magazine concluded in an article that “we simply can’t know whether today’s ad hoc efforts to integrate faith and work will coalesce into something bigger and more powerful, with long-lasting effects, or whether they will fizzle” (Gunther 2001, 58).

To honor the legacy of these individuals passionate about the gospel and the workplace models of workplace ministry, we need to explore a new language and produce new materials that resonate with unique demographics of the workplace of the 21st century. These materials need to be accessible in the language of tradespeople, retail workers, entrepreneurs, and professionals. Such effort requires the workplace, the assembly, the agency and the academy to join together to dialogue and develop these new models and materials. Professionals with theological training and successful careers in the corporate world or as entrepreneurs are an underutilized resource. They can participate in or lead these dialogues, since they understand the unique cultures of the church and the workplace.

In his paper on workplace ministry prepared for the Lausanne 2010 Cape Town summit, Willy Kotiuga reminds us that the way forward is through “a renewed passion that can come only through prayer and the moving of God’s Spirit” (Kotiuga 2010, 8). Zephaniah reminds us that our righteous Lord is within the city and within our workplaces (Zeph. 3:1-5). Through prayer and the moving of God’s Spirit, we can frame in community the future of workplace ministry in Canada and be a witness to the workplace regarding the wonder of a covenantal relationship with God and the ability of God to substantially heal all aspects of work life.

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