

Cross-Cultural Ministry in the Marketplace

Last year I was invited to be a co-panelist at a conference dubbed Live Called that was organized by several mission organizations.¹ Hundreds of fresh graduates and young workers (mostly of Asian descent) from various Toronto churches packed Knox Presbyterian Church to worship, learn and share challenges and opportunities of being Christian in our time. Participants were grouped according to work interests or professions (e.g. education, business, healthcare, technology, the arts and media), eager to learn what it means to live the Christian faith in the business world. Our conversations touched on discerning one's vocation; work as worship; responding to brokenness and reconciliation; workplace ethics; and resources for exploring vocational stewardship.

The marketplace (or workplace) is one of the many arenas where we can fulfill our common calling to witness to the ways of Christ through the talents and gifts that God has apportioned to each of us. Various types of work or service are performed in the marketplace and they impact our social, economic and political life. For many of us, a significant portion of our waking hours is committed to exercising our spiritual gifts, pursuing a career and building a network of relations – a great opportunity to fulfill God's mandate to participate in His work of transforming the world by living as 'salt' and 'light' (Matthew 5:13-16). Given the challenges we face in today's society (e.g. corruption, a hyper-consumerist culture, growing inequality, declining family and community relations, increasing diversity, the impact of advances in technology), our places of service need to hear and experience Jesus Christ—Good News!—and to strive to shape our communities to live Kingdom ways and flourish under His reign.

I was once asked: How has God used your work to respond to brokenness and make an impact for His Kingdom? I shared the story of a job applicant who impressed our hiring team. On top of his skills, we appreciated his candour and humility as he shared his work experience. I proceeded to have his background checked before offering him the job. It was company policy not to hire anyone who fails the pre-employment checks. To my disappointment, the credit background check came back to me with a negative rating. I set his file aside and did not act on his application until 2 days later when I felt prompted to read the negative report again. I noticed that the highlighted "problem" occurred more than five years ago. A similar "problem" occurred much earlier than that. I also noticed that his record had been clear for the last 5 years. Connecting this with insights gleaned from the interview, I concluded that this negative report could be the reason why, other than in short-term casual positions, he has not been gainfully employed in the last few years. I "knew" that this person needed a chance to start fresh and set a new (clean) record. I discussed the negative report with him. In our conversation I briefly shared about my HR background and my Christian worldview. Sensing the Spirit's prompting (and defying company policy!), I offered him the job. Nearly 2 years later, he was recognized as a model employee for his outstanding work ethic and performance.

¹ November 17, 2018, Live Called conference, Knox Presbyterian Church in Toronto, organized by Missions Hub.

“As my Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). The redeeming work of Christ continues through us, His Spirit-empowered people. We serve as the Josephs and ‘Josephines’, Daniels and ‘Danielles’, Esthers, Lydias, Pauls, Peters, Timothys, Ruths, Nehemiahs of our time. Proclaiming Christ could mean verbally sharing the Gospel, but it could also mean taking a stand against unethical practices, defending the weak, caring for the environment, producing work of high quality, exercising just leadership, building friendships, mourning with those who mourn, extending hospitality to newcomers, praying for co-workers, serving the vulnerable, and so on. In more secular contexts where we are not able to speak about Christ, our actions may be the “only Bible others are able to read,” as the expression goes. The Christian life comes with risks, and so we serve boldly as Christ's ambassadors, performing 'priestly' acts through our work, each according to one's spiritual gifts as we participate in Christ's transforming work in the places where we are sent. That means exalting God everywhere--beyond Canada, as some are called to missional opportunities overseas. In whatever ways we can point to Christ and His reign, we must do so with integrity, which means to live holy (whole) lives. Central to our witnessing life is the constant pattern of living out the Good News so that others will notice, that they might know God our Father through His Son, Jesus Christ and the Spirit, and give Him glory. And so to the oft-repeated question, “Where are the sent ones” or “Where is the church,” people of all nations might joyfully answer, “They are here!” Thank God for His church! Praise and glory to God!

Equipping for Cross-Cultural Ministry

- Regular Bible study: Engage in weekly study with a small group, and daily on your own private time.
- Regular journaling: Writing down our thoughts as well as what we hear from God contributes to growth in spiritual discernment. This helps us to discover patterns in God's communication with us (and yes, God has always been into this “messaging” thing long before the advent of technology). It also enhances our capacity to “see” people and situations beneath surface level, leading to greater understanding and sound decision-making.
- If called for more focused ministry work, take formal seminary training to be adequately equipped as a Christian worker in the field.
- An intercultural ministry course or program is essential (no longer an option in 21st century world) to better understand and engage today's multicultural context.
- If called to serve a particular people group overseas, register with a church and/or missionary agency for support and formal orientation to equip oneself for effective ministry in that culture.
- Work with a mentor who is way ahead in spiritual maturity, wisdom and experience.
- “Double listening”: Listen for God and listen to the ‘other’ and what's going on in our part of the world. In our time, our encounter with the different other happens almost daily! Nearly every major city in the world is a diasporic mix of peoples from all nations. Listening involves learning about the other person's story, including hopes and dreams. How does our encounter with other people fit in

God's story? In what ways can we demonstrate our love for neighbour? Do we truly see the other person as someone who is "wonderfully and fearfully made" (Ps 139) in God's image, rather than a project to be worked on?

- Pray always, and be thankful in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:16-18).

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