



Evangelism is not Working - WHY?

By Mark Greene

A ringing call to get church into workplaces for the sake of ministry and God's Word.

Evangelism is not working.
But it could be...

Here's a riddle:

When is the Church not the Church?
When is a Christian not a Christian?
When is a minister not a minister?
When is the Spirit not the Spirit?

The answer to all four questions is essentially the same - the workplace.

Amongst all the huff and puff, wailings and gnashing of teeth about the state of the Church, one central fact has been overlooked... the bulk of church-generated initiatives have nothing to do with the way people spend the bulk of their waking hours. That's why over 50% of evangelicals have never heard a sermon on work... not one. How can we possibly pretend that the Church is supporting its people where they are when the vast majority have no support whatsoever for the way they spend 60 or 70% of their waking lives? And if it's true that most people think their work is spiritually inferior to the pastor's and the missionary's, if it's true that most people have very little idea why their particular work as secretary, bricklayer, stockbroker, housewife, engineer might be of significance to God, then it's also true of evangelism.

In today's church evangelism is singing outside in the streets, it's events, it's acting in shopping malls, it's inviting friends to seeker services, it's developing relationships with our neighbors, it's evangelism programs, it's lots of things. But one thing it isn't - it isn't about equipping the people of God to think Christianly, live Christianly and share Christ right where they are. The one place people are not actively encouraged and equipped to make a difference is the place many people spend 50, 60, 70 percent of their waking hours. The one where Christian and non-Christian have to meet. The one place where the playing field is even, where Christian and non-Christian are subject to the same corporate culture, may have the same boss, the same pressures...the one place where the non-Christian can actually see the difference that Christ can make to a life - not for a couple of hours over dinner but over a couple of years for twenty, thirty, forty, fifty hours a week. The workplace.

Are many ministers inadvertently letting their zeal for evangelism and their desire to build a strong local church distract them from asking how God might want to use their people outside the local context? There is a danger, I believe, that we will view church members exclusively in terms of how they can contribute to the local household of God rather than how they might also contribute to the growth of the kingdom of Christ, wherever he has placed them. And there is a danger that we will become too focused on getting non-Christians into church to hear the minister rather than into the kingdom of God by hearing the word.

The Church has done its research. It has concluded that fewer and fewer people know even the basics about the claims of Jesus, and so we are encouraged to build bridges to the unchurched, to go to the fringe and beyond, told that we need to learn to speak their language. Indeed we do. But the thrust of the response is to send us out on the highways and byways, to neighbors who on the whole we don't know very well and don't spend that much time with. Meanwhile back in the workplace, the average Christian has already built bridges and crossed them, has already developed relationships and already speaks their co-workers' language. Warm contacts. Are we encouraging people

to go and fish in pools and puddles when they are often sitting on a lake full of fish? The person who knows them well doesn't live next door, they work at the next desk.

We need to put the word not only on the street but into the workplaces of nations. After all, that's where you are and that's where the non-Christians are. As you know, workplaces are filled with all kinds of people, with all kinds of problems - illness, fear of redundancy, adultery, grief, confusion, purposelessness, promiscuity, ethical conundrums, criminal negligence, racist hiring policies, dirty tricks and so on. People who need salvation. Oh, that we would encourage one another to see these little 'villages' and 'towns' as our mission fields. What a difference that would make to so many people - to be released into confident ministry just where they are. Nehemiah, Joseph, the Exodus midwives, Naaman's servant girl, Daniel, Ester, Lydia would have approved, I'm sure. After all, when it comes to witness in a pagan environment the Bible is very clear - leave it to the workers.

Mark Greene is Executive Director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. Licc.org. He is author of *Thank God it's Monday*, the video *A Vision for Workplace Ministry* and *50 Ways to Support the Workers Without Going Insane*. Used for non-profit teaching purposes only.