

The Aim and Development of New Faith at Work Initiatives

(Background paper for a presentation to the 2004 Faith@Work Forum, Citizen Building, Ottawa, by Frank Jones, September 18)

Does Christ want us to grow in our faith in the workplace? Does He want us to know His teachings that are relevant for the employed? Most would answer both questions in the affirmative. The purpose of this paper is to add to our accumulating knowledge and experiences by the following means: first I summarize some relevant biblical teachings, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, as it relates to employed Christians, and then I relate this knowledge to my experiences with faith at work groups during the past year. Finally, some practical conclusions are summarized so as to assist others and to invite comment, suggestions and criticism. Some key resources and their uses in faith groups are also noted, and these may receive more detailed study in the future.

The Priesthood of All Believers: A Doctrine for All Employed Christians

In an address to this forum in 2002, I had noted that Christians have up to 15 opportunities a week to share their faith and encourage one another: five lunch and ten coffee breaks. Actually, the *New Testament* doctrine of the priesthood of all believers requires that we work with Christ at all times and in all places, implying that we witness by our manner of work as well as directly with Him in our work breaks. The doctrine comes mainly from the Lutheran and Calvinist branches of Protestantism, though it has many similarities to the notion of the laity described extensively in Roman Catholicism. The doctrine is clearly defined in the *NIV Thematic Reference Bible*, A. McGrath editor (with J. I. Packer on the editorial board), and the verses cited below are only the main ones supporting this doctrine. The doctrine has

four aspects. First, whatever our occupation, we work so as to reflect the holiness of Christ.

*but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."
1 Peter 1: 15-16*

We are to offer spiritual sacrifices in all we do:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. Romans 12:1

In his commentary on the Bible, Matthew Henry comments on this verse from the standpoint of sanctification, a related doctrine – of course we cannot in our work be quickly and perfectly satisfactory to God, but over time the Holy Spirit sanctifies us:

We receive from the Lord every day the fruits of his mercy. Let us render ourselves; all we are, all we have, all we can do: and after all, what return is it for such very rich receivings? It is acceptable to God: a reasonable service, which we are able and ready to give a reason for, and which we understand. Conversion and sanctification are the renewing of the mind; a change, not of the substance, but of the qualities of the soul. The progress of sanctification, dying to sin more and more, and living to righteousness more and more, is the carrying on this renewing work, till it is perfected in glory. The great enemy to this renewal is conformity to this world. Take heed of forming plans for happiness, as though it lay in the things of this world, which soon pass away. Do not fall in with the customs of those who walk in the lusts of the flesh, and mind earthly things. The work of the Holy Ghost first begins in the understanding, and is carried on to the will, affections, and conversation, till there is a change of the whole man into the likeness of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness.

Moreover, as the priesthood we are to intercede for others, our colleagues and supervisors, before God:

*Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men
1 Timothy 2:1*

Finally, as the priesthood of believers, we are to represent God before others:

*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20
(all quotes are from the New King James Version)*

These are high standards, and obviously unattainable on our own, but approachable with the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, and the encouragement and support of other Christians, and those most accessible and acquainted with our situation are some of our colleagues at work.

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers applies not only to paid work but also to our volunteering and work at home, and indeed to all our leisure and other time as well. The doctrine implies that we can read and learn much from the classic portrayals of the ordained ministry: for example, *The Reformed Pastor* by Richard Baxter, *The Country Parson*, by George Herbert, and perhaps the best one, *The Christian Ministry*, by Charles Bridges. Another classic, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence is also very relevant. The classic prayers for the employed presented to the *Faith at Work Form* (see WWW.CCRI.CA) last year are further aids to consult. An excellent detailed description of the Biblical conduct in the workplace is given by Paul Minear in “*Work and Vocation in Scripture*” (chapter 1, *Work and Vocation: A Christian Discussion*, Harper: N.Y., 1954.). This whole book is an especially valuable resource because it was developed by Christian scholars over a period of three years and it covers practical and sociological aspects of the doctrine, as well as

biblical aspects. One final implication of the doctrine applies to the Church: it should support and leverage all who feel summoned to serve God in their work: paid, volunteer, or work as a homemaker. Usually, the emphasis is on supporting only those who work in church or for the church, leaving many to find their support elsewhere.

The Size of the Priesthood of All Believers at Work in Canada

How many in the workplace consider themselves as part of the priesthood of all believers? How many know about their high calling, let alone live by it? With the data available to us, the closest approximation we have is not very close at all: those employed considering themselves to be both very religious, and worshipping weekly. Our data indicate that about one in twenty employed people in Canada are in this category (968 thousand out of 16 million in 2000, 6.1%). This suggests that even in small workplaces of fifty employees there should be two or three employees inclined to gather in His name, to encourage and support each other in a workplace ministry. Employed women are slightly more inclined than men to be both very religious and weekly worshippers – 6.8% versus 5.4%. Probably few realize or understand the radical summons to the priesthood of all believers. Probably few have heard it explained in their churches. Yet the explanation of this doctrine may be the single most important step in renewal. We have a long way to go: in Statistics Canada, probably a relatively active organization in terms of faith groups, only about one in 100 attend faith groups, and only one in 500 lead them. Let us remember: the best vitamin for Christians is B1, even in the workplace.

Faith at Work as Lay Chaplain, University of Ottawa,

1. The evolving role of the Lay Chaplain

For over a year I had met with Chinese students, new Christians and seekers, in the *Spiritual Resource Centre* of the *University of Ottawa*, between the Native Student and Gay Pride rooms. Seated around a table, I used the Bible and related books to help them improve their English. On Mondays a friend, Priyan Pererra, visited to give a Bible study, and on Tuesdays Pastor Mike Linnen visited for a similar

purpose. At last we had found a home on campus, after having been asked to leave the campus six months earlier because of our use of the Bible.

But other Christian groups used the open area too, and it was often quite hard to hear because of all the laughter and excited talk. So last November I asked if our Chinese group could meet in the Chaplain's office, and to my surprise I learned that it was empty three days out of five each week – the Roman Catholic Chaplain used it one day a week, and the Orthodox priest one other day. Moreover, the Muslims were arguing that they should have access to the office when it was empty for their prayers, and this request was hard for the Director of the *Spiritual Resource Centre* to decline. So she welcomed our request, only asking that I be called a Chaplain. After getting the support of our students and pastors, I offered to occupy the room for two and a half days a week and to develop new programs for the students. We should not feel too sad for the Muslims because they are the only club on campus that has its own house to meet in, and the Chaplain's office has always been intended only for Chaplains and their guests. After three weeks in the office I invited our strongest new Christian, Liping Zhang, to use the room on Friday mornings, as Mandarin Chaplain, and she agreed, together with her husband Kevin Chen. This meant that the office would now be almost fully occupied, and we had a fourth Chaplain.

The big challenge though was to make the room friendly and helpful for the spiritual development and support of students, and to attract busy students. To attract students a poster was developed and posted at various sites on campus. It was actually very small, and attached to half an envelope containing mini-posters for students to pick up and take away. Some *Campus Crusade for Christ* students were quick to discover these and requested time in the office, for they had no other good place to meet, so their activity was added to the poster. I often met with them during their Bible Study and am impressed by the quality of the prayer, witnessing experience, and discussions. They drew from six to nine students a meeting, filling the small room completely. The ESL practice using the Bible, and Bible studies for Chinese students, were opened up to all students, from January to

March 04, though only Chinese attended. Programs were prepared for Wednesdays on Christian leadership, and on morning prayer, but these were largely ignored by the students. The poster at that time appeared as follows:

PRAYER & BIBLE STUDY +

Mondays, Tuesdays & Wednesdays:

Silent Prayer & Bible Study, 10:00 am - 11:00
Morning Prayer Service, 11:00 am - 11:30
ESL Practice Using the Bible, 11:30 am - 12:30
Evangelical Bible Study, 12:30 noon - 1:00

Tuesday Afternoons:

Christian Leadership Lessons, 1:30 pm- 2:30
Silent Prayer & Bible Study, 2:30 pm - 3:30

Wednesday Afternoons:

Campus Crusade & Chaplain, 1:00pm - 2:30
Encouraging each other, 2:30pm - 3:30

Fridays: Mandarin Bible Study & Encouraging each other,
11:30 am - 2:00 pm

Chaplain's office,
Uni - Centre, Room 319

Come to Me all who are weary... I will give you rest
Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute
God so loved the world that he gave his only Son
Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete

... Inquirers welcome anytime

On the reverse of the take-away posters appeared a mini Bible study, or words of wisdom, such as the following:

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES? HOW SO?

This is one of the hardest sayings of Jesus:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you – Matthew 5:43-44.

How can this be humanly possible? First, by knowing that "love" does not mean the feeling, but the loving actions:

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. 1 John 3:17-18

But even loving actions are impossible without the Holy Spirit: *"If you love Me, keep My commandments. "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. John 14:15-17*

By loving deeds, you can change your enemy into a true friend: the loving feeling may come too! Ask and you will receive, John 16:24 NKJV

This particular Bible study was intended partly for some Muslim students interested in our program, and they were indeed interested, though it seemed mainly in order to gain a foothold on the use of the office, though they had usually been very polite in their advances. For example, shortly after I moved in, I was visited by Muslim women who

asked if the office was open for private prayer to anyone, and I said it was indeed. Later, two came back and said they wanted to pray, and I said that that was fine, but I would request a short Bible study be held before prayers; they then left. The next week I was visited by a man who asked to use the room; on learning that he was Muslim I mentioned the Bible study, and he stayed for a study on Salvation, and asked many questions. One question was – how can one be both confident and humble? I said that if we were guided by the Holy Spirit and knew the truth of God, we would be both confident and humble, knowing that none of the truth came from our own intelligence independent of God. He did not stay for prayers though, and I invited him back any time, the meeting being very cordial. Other Muslim students asked to use the room, but did not stay when they learned that a Bible study was requested. When asked if they knew the room was only for use by the Chaplain, and that they needed permission of the *Spiritual Resource Centre* Director for entry, they denied any knowledge of this, and claimed they had no place to pray. One time a woman came to the room while I was away at the washroom, locked the door behind her, and began her prayers. When I unlocked the door and found her praying I could do nothing but let her finish, and then asked if she knew that entry was by invitation only; she denied knowing this. She said she was merely looking for a place to pray, and did not notice the sign on the door, indicating it was the Chaplain's office. All this happened during my first two months, and I found it irritating, but also a sign that something important must be happening in the room to warrant so much attention. So I opened the door more widely to make it more inviting, and the result was a lull in the visits by Muslims, though they continue to pass by the door and peer in on their way to pray on the nearby stairs, and occasionally to ask for entry to pray. I now refer them to another prayer room that is available on campus to any faith group, and to the Muslim house, if they do not want a Bible study.

Some students have visited the Chaplain's office for counseling. My role in such cases is to listen much, then refer to the wisdom of the Bible, being as specific as possible, and pray for God's support and guidance. Francis Schaffer at l'Abri in the Swiss Alps used a good

formula: listen for 55 minutes, and advise for five each hour. When someone would commit their life to Christ, he would open the windows, turn up the volume on his record player, and play the Hallelujah chorus.

What would the future hold? After my first four months I was ready to consider possibilities. I decided to offer more programs designed to help the students, both Christians and seekers. For example, we have advertised workshops on fasting, leadership, and worry over exams, and relationships, but there was no response to these initiatives. In the business world it often takes many patents before a winning one is found, and we can learn much from this fact, for we know the students have great spiritual needs that are unfilled – we merely have to learn how to most effectively connect with them. Leadership development is emphasized by the Mandarin Chaplain and the *Campus Crusade for Christ* students. Secondly, there are several different Christian groups on campus but they operate independently and ineffectively; ways may be found in the future to coordinate activities, beginning perhaps by mutual advertising and a shared outreach table. Prayer, persistence and patience are needed, as in any new endeavor. Thirdly, an Internet talk group for university and college chaplains might be formed with the aim of sharing experiences of methods that work and do not work: such a scheme is now working well in Ottawa for faith leaders in the workplace – we moved ahead on this, see below. Fourthly, I pray to learn God’s purpose for our campus, and the Chaplain’s office: one enthusiastic visitor, Columbia Washington, suggested this, and it fits in with what is recommended in *The Purpose Driven Church*. The best way to attract students seems to be by personal invitation from friends.

At the end of the first term, I had to admit that each week, after 2 ½ days with students, I felt tired and happy, but also very thankful to God for the great privilege of serving Him in this new ministry. I was thankful too for the support of Pastor Mike Linnen and my church and friends, both Christian and non-Christian.

2. Term 2: May to August in the Chaplain’s office

We closed our first four months on a high note, a good start. Two of our students were baptized and one of them had depended heavily on the Chaplain and Pastor Mike Linnen, because his job had prevented him from attending church on Sundays. Another student decided to become a Christian, after being introduced to Ray Comfort's Titanic analogy of the journey of life, and the movie, *The Passion*; he immediately began evangelizing, beginning with his parents, who were puzzled, however, by Christ's saying that He brings not peace but a sword. Another new Christian found great support in our Bible studies as her husband would not let her attend church. She offered to help promote this kind of ministry, and put together a list 65 e-mail addresses of chaplains in Canadian universities and colleges.

This list was used invite Chaplains to join a network, as explained in the covering letter:

Dear fellow chaplains,

We have compiled a list of Christian chaplains (or their e-mail locations) from university and college Web sites, 65 or so, and you are one of them. The idea is to form an informal association of evangelical Christian chaplains, in which we could exchange ideas on how best to reach inquirers and Christians with the good news of Jesus Christ (students, professors and staff), in "burning zeal and love". Would you be interested in such an exchange? If not, please let me know and indicate if you might like to join in the future.

Also, do you know of any chaplains who are not on our list (alphabetic above to help you) but who might like to be; if so let me know and I will add their names. Our first list is limited to chaplains in Canada, though it need not be of course. As for a statement of belief, I would suggest that of IVCF:

- a. The unique, divine inspiration, and entire trustworthiness and authority of the Bible.
- b. The deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- c. The necessity and efficacy of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for the redemption of the whole world, and the historic fact of his resurrection.
- d. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the work of regeneration.
- e. The consummation of the kingdom in the “glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”.

Thank you for your time.

Yours in Christ, (Dr.) Frank Jones, University of Ottawa, 6 June, 2004

This letter prompted no replies, nor did a second letter announcing our plans for the September term. But only one Chaplain dropped out of the network, so there may be some interest. We will try again to support and encourage by this means.

Returning to our own work, in early May a Visiting Scholar (Mechanical Engineering) from China accepted Christ, and the way this happened is instructive. She had been our most faithful student and seemed an honest seeker, with many questions. She said she had appreciated the fact that we had never pushed her to become a Christian, and that she found our answers to her questions very clear and helpful. One day she showed up for a lesson, but when no one else arrived I asked her if she would help me review the appropriateness for students of the booklet *Peace with God*. This is the best introduction to the *Four Spiritual Laws* that I have found. We spent much time reviewing the meaning of each point, and at the end I asked if she felt ready to accept Christ; she said she was and we prayed the commitment prayer together. She was the first of about five visiting scholars in our classes since 2001 who have become Christians. One Sunday I took her to the church of her new friend, Pastor Mike Linnen; this was only the second time she had ever been to church. The first thing she noticed was a large picture of a tree, showing the roots nourished by Bible study, church friends, prayer, and other nutrients, and the apples on the tree labeled as peace, joy, hope, faith, self-control, patience, and other good things, so I explained this. It was Pentecost Sunday. As a part of

the sermon the importance of baptism was stressed, and I later explained to the visiting scholar the importance of joining a church and fellowship. We visited this church again before she returned to China in July, and she was impressed by the joy and friendship she encountered.

The second term (May to August) was a slow one with few students visiting, though we continued our program each week. We learned that we would have to give up the Chaplain's office one day a week beginning in September, on the request of the Orthodox priest, who had seniority. He is a key reason why the university has a Chaplain's office at all, so I was and remain very supportive of his work. Then in August we learned that the Mandarin Chinese couple would be unable to continue their Bible study, as the leader had accepted a post as part-time professor of Economic Science, and her husband had entered a PhD program in Mechanical Engineering. We should feel blessed that the office is still used for the Lord over twice as much as a year ago, over four and a half days a week. For those displaced, there is always more work to do for the Lord if we just ask, and I conclude with some thoughts on this subject.

First, here is a list of tentative lessons learned from my brief experience as Chaplain, and then a note on our book groups.

1. A major role is to support and encourage Christian groups on campus, along with individual visitors.
2. The groups we support can help us by bringing new students into the office for Christian training, friendship and encouragement.
3. Helping students and visiting scholars with their English using the Bible or related resources is one way of forming good friendships, of introducing Christ to non-Christians, and of helping new Christians to grow.
4. Serious students are very busy with their studies so that programs for them have to be no longer than an hour or so, and of high quality.
5. Bible studies need to be loving, well-taught and theologically sound, designed to meet the essential spiritual needs of students.

6. Take-away spiritual food is very important for inquirers: first time visitors are usually given a *New Testament* along with an introduction to it. Rowat Deeks of the Gideons supplies *Testaments* free to us and occasionally visits. Next, they may be given *The Book of Hope*, supplied by Palm Tree Ministries, with its 23 short chapters explaining Christian essentials along with Biblical passages.
7. Learning how to use more advanced Christian resources also seems important, both for inquirers and new Christians. We have regularly used Alan Scholes' *What Christianity is all about: How to know and enjoy God. The NIV Thematic Reference Bible*, A. McGrath editor, is also an excellent resource; we teach the students how to research any of 2000 themes in the Bible. We often give out both to students who have learned how to use them well.
8. Occasionally a disputed doctrine can be a source of disruption or concern to some students; if so it is good to determine if it is a conviction or persuasion-level belief (Scholes is excellent on this subject), and then to review the main interpretations if it is a persuasion-level belief. It seems important to avoid argument, which only serves to raise doubt in the minds of some.
9. An informal association with a nearby church allows parishioner students to invite inquirers into their church for Sunday services, and thus complement the work of the Chaplain. Our Chinese Christians are quick to invite seekers to their cell-group meetings and to their nearby church.
10. Being open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit is very important, in choosing what to study, with what resources, and how to study, by being patient and kind to all, for example.
11. Special care and kindness needs to be extended to those who seem opposed to a Christian ministry.
12. Some ministries seem good in theory but not in practice. There was no response to our offer of a Morning Prayer Service, leadership training, workshops on fasting, and some others as well. Perhaps the timing or advertising was not right. Also, while only one of 65 chaplains was not interested in the Chaplain's network, no others have offered to contribute to this so far. Some

new programs take time to take root, however, and this may be an example.

13. Often the most meaningful part of our work is the prayers with students, specifically tuned to their expressed needs. The Chaplain needs his own pastor to pray for him and his ministry as well.

The fact that some students have become Christians at university, while others grow in the knowledge and love of Christ, suggests that the university, though a very secular environment, is a place where ministry remains very important, because spiritual needs persist. The biggest single challenge for the Chaplain and committed Christian is to learn how to best reach students with the Good News, and to help them to deepen their faith and commitment.

Faith at Work in the form of Book and Study Groups, at the University of Ottawa and Statistics Canada

Our Tuesday book group for professors and others at the university seemed to weaken over the past couple of years, owing to the loss of some of our most scholarly members. Since I joined the group in 2000 we have met at the ***Father and Son's Restaurant*** for breakfast from about 8:15 to 9:45. In the past year we have studied ***Early Christian Doctrines***, by John Kelly, ***To Empower People: From State to Civil Society***, by Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus, and most recently ***The Confessions***, by St. Augustine. In a typical meeting we begin with informal conversation, order breakfast, say grace, eat our breakfast, and discuss a chapter of the book, under the direction of a prearranged leader. Usually there are five to ten present, though when I first joined in 2000 there were over 12 attending each week. I have noticed that most of the others lead better than I do, and also that there was need for an organizer, so I have done more organizing and less leading recently. The discussions are sometimes quite intellectual and beyond my understanding, but usually quite stimulating.

Our *Classics Book Club* at Statistics Canada meets on payday Fridays at noon, in the library, R. H. Coats Building. This club began in order to attract inquirers of Christianity, since faith at work groups tend to ignore inquirers. The idea was that each Christian participant would be required to bring a friend who was an inquirer. But this seemed unfair to some Christians who would be unable to do this, so the requirement was dropped. A new development, though, was to invite two retired women to join the group, and this added to the quality of the discussions. As well, this shows how a workplace faith group can reach out to nearby residents. Our book during the past few months has been *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence, and this has led to many discussions on how this might be done, and how workplace stress might be overcome. Before that, we studied Stott's *Basic Christianity*. Rather than rotate the leadership, this group seems to function best with just one leader: preparation time is limited among many employed, so I lead. Attendance is only three to six. This group benefits from the presence of warm and caring mature Christians and those who are at home with informal prayers; our meetings usually begin and end with a prayer.

It may be noted that the university and Statistics Canada book groups have some similarities, but also some big differences. Both emphasize the Christian classics, books which might appeal to non-Christians as well as Christians, though neither has so far attracted non-Christians. Both reach out to persons beyond the workplace. Neither group has many members. And while prayer is important in both groups, only the Statistics Canada group addresses individual concerns. Concerning other differences, one group is more intellectual, attracting mainly men, while the other is more caring in tone, attracting men and women about equally. Only the Statistics Canada club has been attended by new or renewed Christians. This club meets in the workplace, and may be observed in action through big windows by non-Christians, while the other meets in a restaurant and is observed by patrons, mainly students, and waitresses, some of whom are Christian. In one group the leadership rotates, while in the other one person assumes the leadership each meeting. Finally, only the university group

has spawned another club, one that may or may not have a future of its own.

And what is possible in the future? Often over our breakfast at the *Father and Sons* we complain about the news of fresh assaults on the traditional family and on Christian faith and belief. It seems almost every week we are blind-sided by news that is disappointing to Christians. This past week, for example, a huge television audience heard Prime Minister Martin taking the Lord's name in vain (for which he later apologized), and then later we learned that the Manitoba Supreme Court has decided to redefine marriage to include two persons of the same sex. Our grumbling over such news has led us recently to form of a new group, one that would respond in the popular press to some of the negative trends in our culture, a ***Christian Issues Club***. The idea is to meet once a month to discuss a letter or short article that each of us has written, and to encourage each other in this endeavor. We commit ourselves in this way for two reasons, the account we must soon give to our heavenly father, and, to quote Richard Hooker, "... *that posterity may know we have not loosely, through silence, permitted things to pass away, as in a dream.*" We hope to respond politely and prayerfully, in some depth, including perhaps an interesting point of gospel, fact, theory or history, so that the public is helped to see a Christian alternative to the prevalent secular ways of seeing and discussing issues. We would contribute on subjects in which we are relatively well informed. The truth of the Bible on matters of faith, conduct and salvation will be assumed. A handy resource for this effort is John Stott's, ***Issues Facing Christians Today***.