

## **Faith in the Workplace**

by  
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An unlikely group gathers together early on a Thursday morning for breakfast at Walker's Family Catering in Oklahoma Borough. They bow their heads, say grace and eat a scrumptious meal. They then bend their ears to hear a featured speaker. Guest speakers have included State Senator Melissa Hart, School Superintendent Dr. William Kerr, Dentist Dr. Annette Merlino and business owner Calvin McCutcheon. Speakers have also included working mothers, teachers, clerks and retirees.

The topic of discussion is faith in the workplace. Sponsored by the Apollo Area Ministerium, Pastor Darrell Knopp orchestrates an ensemble of Christian faiths which include Baptists, Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians and others.

The breakfasts are not your ordinary religious experience. There are rarely stunning testimonies although Dr. Merlino's missionary voyages to remote parts of the world are a fascinating exception. The talks do not usually appeal to emotion. Instead they appeal to the good sense and reason evoked from faith.

What is always present in these talks is the one characteristic which personifies the people in western Pennsylvania - genuineness. Through this genuineness words hold meaning. There are no gimmicks, buttons or bumper stickers just old fashioned example and strength of character.

The real, heartfelt articulation of faith at work that we hear is a refreshing reminder that the important things in life need to come before the urgent things in the course of our busy days. In addition, its just plain great to see different faiths gathered together for one purpose.

The aggregation of different Christian faiths in the earnest pursuit of Truth can sometimes be a sticky proposition in light of the many doctrinal differences that exist. However, the faith in the workplace theme enkindles a remarkable unity. Almost all believers can agree that faith lived fully means a faith that is central in everything done including work. In addition there is generally agreement that true faith constantly changes us and requires us to strive for excellence in everything including work.

It may seem curious to some that work would be a faith topic. But I would suggest there is no topic that more profoundly captures the faith experience. Work after all is something most of us do. It's something where many of us spend a great deal of our waking hours. It's something that some of us worry about and maybe even gripe about.

The Anglican writer C.S. Lewis often viewed faith in terms of attitude and motivation. He suggests that there is no switch that goes on when we walk into the church or when

we walk into the office or mill. If faith is real then we walk into either setting exactly the same.

In 1891 a document from my faith tradition entitled "Rerum Novarum" (On Capital and Labor) was published. It is an encyclical that denounces socialism, upholds private ownership and perhaps most importantly, affirms the right to dignity of all working people. Although it is interspersed with the cultural mores of the late 19th century, its applicability remains. At each breakfast, I think about the wisdom of this timeless document. It fascinates me that people of different faiths echo many of the same words. The theme of justice and respect for all employees is an important reminder for me that work is an extension of church.

Maybe these breakfasts capture a small glimpse of Heaven. Maybe it is how the Spirit moves in a little area of the world. Maybe saints aren't really extraordinary people but ordinary people that work hard scratching out a living as best they can while giving glory to God.

Someone once told me that the greatest testimony is not to have one. It is the testimony that quietly goes about its business without having to say a word. These breakfasts are often like that - no flash. However they have been a pleasant surprise and a source of unlikely inspiration. Perhaps a key component to Christian unity is not arguing out our theological differences but rather putting our shoulders to the wheel together as we complete the task at hand.



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