

Chapter 4

Mission & Outreach

At *Made to Flourish*, we speak about faith, work, and economics (FWE). Outreach and missions provide many opportunities to address the “E” in that acronym. We define economics as “the moral and social system of value exchange.” Many churches interviewed have ventured into this area to help “the other.” However, the approaches to missions and outreach vary widely in terms of how they play out.

Jay Slocum of *Jonah’s Call* has a unique approach to outreach and missions. *Jonah’s Call* does not have an outreach and missions budget per se. When people ask Slocum, “Why don’t you give more to outreach?” he responds, “We give all of our budget to outreach.” What does he mean by this? If their people aren’t making the city flourish through their work, then they’re failing. Slocum explains:

“We may not be getting a lot of credit because we run a food bank, but we have people positioned in their careers as architects or teachers or lawyers or legislators or stay-at-home moms who are doing important work.”

Slocum is trying to get parishioners to realize that, in the words of Lester DeKoster, “Half of our work is you forming the world, and the other half of our work is the work forming you.” In other words, our work does double duty. It forms us into being more Christ-like and we form our world through the agency of our work. It is the latter that Slocum is equipping his congregants to do.

Like-Minded Partners

Jeremy Lile is pastor of City Hope Church, a new start up church. In order to maximize their resources, they have pursued partners who are committed to like-minded efforts, like dignity-affirming work. Drawing from the ideas of John Perkins of CCDA that “dignity isn’t something that you give someone or take away from them,” one of the couples at City Hope described a passion to “feed the hungry and to make food security a reality in the city.” All of this led to the starting of “an open-choice food pantry.” As the description implies, people have choice in the groceries that they select at the food pantry. It’s almost like assisted grocery shopping. Plus, the shoppers and those who help them share a meal together! This table meal creates a sense of community, and people now show up and say, “I don’t even want groceries this week; I just want to be together as a community.” This has taken time because most helpers only see their role as benefactors; people who give things away. Now they are seeing the usefulness of sitting at a table with people and getting to know their story and relating to them. Lile spoke affectionately of a regular shopper who had been looking for work. When Lile saw him, he asked him how his job search was going. The man replied:

“I just got a temp job, but I think it could develop into something long-term. Man, thank you guys so much. If it weren’t for this place I probably would have lost my apartment because all my money would have gone to food instead of rent. It’s helped me get by for these past five months as I’ve been searching for work.”

Lile continued to tell us about the profound impact the shopping program has had on people’s lives.

“I’ve heard a lot of similar stories of people just saying thanks. It’s not the typical image a lot of us have of people on welfare. It’s often people who have just fallen on hard times because of the economic downturn and they needed that little extra boost. What I love to see is sometimes the people that are in line serving and hosting the guests jump out of line because their number gets called and now they’re going through the line because they need a little help, too.”

When we asked Lile to tell us about a church member who has imbibed and lived out faith and work theology, he told us about Brandon, an auto mechanic.

Brandon is the one of the top mechanics in Akron, Ohio. Brandon experiences the creativity of God in working on vehicles, seeing how intricate they are and how wonderfully they’re made. And he senses the brokenness of the world because he’s constantly working on broken things! Yet—Brandon is painfully aware that, as a bluecollar worker, he doesn’t always get the respect extended to people in white-collar professions. And Brandon knows that people only come to him when there’s a problem. Yet I’ve seen Brandon really affirmed in his position. Brandon was promoted to the role of shop foreman and has had opportunities to change the culture of his workplace. Formerly employees walked around the garage with their heads down. Now people walk with their heads high, a transformation achieved in part by affirming the work that they do. As Brandon felt his work affirmed, he, in turn, affirmed the work of others.

Newer churches like City Hope Church are not the only ones seeking partners to do outreach and missions. More established churches like Christ Community Church also see the value of partnering with like-minded friends. To that end, Christ Community Church has teamed up with Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, a church located in the urban core of Kansas City, Missouri. Nelson says that faith, work, and economics theology played a pivotal role in the partnership from the beginning. This is wise because for many churches located in the urban core, economic justice and equality is a central concern. Outreach and missions for Christ Community Church has involved hosting a conference with the theme of pursuing “Common Good” for the wider Kansas City metropolitan area. Speakers such as Greg Forster, Director of the Oikonomia Network at the Center for Transformational Churches at Trinity International University, and Brian Fikkert, founder and President of the Chalmers Center at Covenant College, have been invited to speak on the topic of faith, work, and economics. Fikkert shared a new vision for alleviating poverty at the 2015 Common Good Conference.

When we asked Nelson to share a story of someone deeply impacted by the theology of faith and work, he recounted the story of a business leader.

This business owner was designing his corporate headquarters. During the design phase he and his leaders started to think through not only how to treat their employees, but also the very spaces in which they would work. In particular, he thought through how his faith would shape the workplace itself and its design. He’s deeply invested in a seamless faith, in his family. He wants to create a virtuous company with fair and equal policies and practices. But he’s asking, ‘How does my faith speak into my corporate headquarters in terms of the architectural space, structure, and how it’s designed?’ He’s allowing the gospel to speak into every aspect of his life, personal and professional.

Nonprofits Make it Less Complicated

Many pastors found that the most effective way to promote faith and work integration was by starting a nonprofit. For example, in Woodlawn, located on the Southside of Chicago, Pastor Brad Beier told us that the unemployment rate is about 23%. So, as Beier led an effort to restore an old dilapidated building—formerly an old pool hall for hustling, prostitution, and drugs (that would later serve as the worship center)—people off the streets were invited to do meaningful work. Beier said that their mantra was, “If you want money, or if you want help, we will give you work to do.” It became apparent that one of the best ways to serve their neighborhood was by giving people meaningful work. Seeing the promising results of this initiative, Beier then started a nonprofit economic development ministry called Hope Works.

Hope Works is focused on economic empowerment. It serves as an on-ramp for participation in the ministry, relationship-building, and discipleship. Striving to give people good, dignifying work has not been without its challenges. Many people off the street expect cash after working and not a paper check. However, they’re seeing promising results. Beier recounted a story about a young man who has been with him for four years. The man did construction work for about six months before visiting the church and is now a member of the church. Another worker was dating a woman at the church but was also hustling and selling drugs. He was hired after visiting the church and continued coming. Eventually he was baptized and joined the church. On Father’s Day of that same year, this man said, “I can’t believe that I am celebrating Father’s Day in a church with my family! I was hustling and selling drugs and you got me pounding nails and sweating and getting dirty and doing hard work. It’s really difficult, but I’m enjoying it now.” Living Hope Church (and Hope Works) is establishing a reputation on the Southside of Chicago. Once some college students were asked to canvas the neighborhood and hand out flyers. When they returned, Beier asked them how it went. They reported hearing comments like this from neighbors: “I got a job through Hope Works.” Another guy said, “Oh yeah, that’s my church, and they helped me with my employment.”

Pastor Stan Archie, and Christian Fellowship Baptist Church, created an organization called the Community Impact Center. This center works with homeless male veterans and increasingly with women veterans. Partnering with Hope Faith Ministries of downtown Kansas City, they work with homeless people who struggle with drugs and alcohol addictions. Recently, Community Impact Center staff have identified and targeted neighborhood laundromats. There they pay for people’s laundry and listen to their stories to assess how the church can serve them in concrete ways. With great excitement, Archie said, “Down the road they want to launch an urban version of Made to Flourish!”

Living Hope and Christian Fellowship Baptist Church reminds me of something that Pastor Reading, of United Evangelical Free Church (Seattle, Washington), said at the beginning of our interview. “Quit trying to be the best church in the city that competes with other churches. Be the best church for the city, so that if you were to shut your doors, the city would mourn.” That’s a good mandate for any church. Is your church competing or are you striving to be the best church for the city?

A Café : Prison-to-Work Training Ground

Joe Tucker is Executive Director of a nonprofit known as South Street Ministries. They run a community café called The Front Porch Café. This café is located one block from the Summit County Jail. Tucker said, “We’re one block from a couple of other institutions that house inmates. And we’re also in a neighborhood that was a local hub for a lot of recovery meetings.” Many of the workers at the café, in fact, come from backgrounds of incarceration, addiction, or poverty. Having workers with such backgrounds has been quite helpful; they’re adept at distinguishing fact from the fiction. “Running such a ministry,” Tucker says, “takes discernment.” He explains, “So, a café staff member may say to a patron, ‘Hey, man, this one is on us today. And since you’re having a rough day, let’s sit down and talk. Here’s some eggs and toast.’ However, if someone steps through our threshold and says, ‘Hey, I’m looking for something to eat. I need something.’ The conversation may go like this to discern if the person is a hustler or if the person genuinely needs assistance:

Café staff: “Sorry, we don’t give money out loosely. If we don’t know who you are, you could be hustling us. Would you help us clean the restroom for a bit today? And then we can get you a meal afterwards.”

Patron: “No, I’m good today. I’ll go somewhere else.”

Café staff: “Okay, I guess you weren’t that hungry after all.”

Tucker said they have a lot of those interactions, and often they are preceded or followed by prayer. A lot of folks frequent the cafe enough that they know what’s going on. “That’s the ministry philosophy behind it,” explains Tucker. “This practice separates the wheat from the chaff. It shows which folks are really ready to do the right thing versus the ones looking for a quick fix or quick money.”

Sometimes Tucker and the staff will allow people to volunteer for a season for a variety of reasons. For example, the café has folks who volunteered to get a job reference. For someone like this, a café staff member might say, “Volunteer at the café for a few days. We’ll give you meals, and you can take tips home. If you’re a good worker, we’ll write you a good reference.” Tucker added, “If we don’t have a reference point for your workmanship, we won’t recommend you to an employer. So often volunteering at the café is a test.” Doing volunteer work is a great opportunity to see if the worker will show up on time and demonstrate integrity. It can all lead to gainful employment elsewhere.

The café’s philosophy is working. The success has created a “good problem.” They routinely lose their best employees because they move on to better jobs. Tucker and others were acutely aware of this problem because all of a sudden the food stopped being as good as it was before! The café, as a result, has had to tweak its philosophy and practice a bit to keep some of these “good stones.” However, they still make room for people in need of work. “If someone crosses the café threshold and is just really trying to look for a job and discouraged” Tucker said, they

still “help them out with that process.” Still sometimes patrons just use the café as a public restroom or for the public phone or to use their tables and markers to write their cardboard signs. “Regardless, the cafe’ staff will love on them,” says Tucker.

Entrepreneurship: Walking with the Old and Young

Many churches are addressing the “E” in FWE by coming alongside and assisting those interested in being entrepreneurs. For instance, Mullins’ past work includes an entrepreneurship initiative with the Uzbek refugee community. He connected entrepreneurs from his church with refugee entrepreneurs to help to start new businesses. The goal was for these startups to financially support the refugee entrepreneurs and their families. This effort was supplemented by providing English and citizenship classes.

Pastor Ward teaches entrepreneurship courses at GordonConwell Theological Seminary in Boston, Massachusetts. From one class, 40 businesses were proposed and 30 of those 40 proposed businesses are still vibrant and running today! To help maintain that vibrancy, Ward and other mentors meet with these entrepreneurs every quarter.

At Abundant Life, and in place of the traditional VBS, Ward’s church sponsored a *BIZ Camp*. Here, young people, like his son, were taught how to develop business plans. Seasoned business leaders served as “sounding boards” to help these aspiring teenage entrepreneurs fine-tune their business plans and, eventually, launch new businesses. Ward’s son’s small business was so wildly successful that he put the local vending machines at his school out of business!

Tabernacle Community Church sponsored The Youth Entrepreneur Leadership Program. In this program, middle school students were exposed to entrepreneurship teaching for seven weeks during the summer. Pastor Lindsay wanted to show these students that God has called us to be creators and to reflect His image as a creator. During the summer, these students developed business plans and presented them to local entrepreneurs in a “Shark Tank” style environment. Although missions and outreach is the least penetrated and developed area at Jefferson Assembly of God Church, Pastor Duncan is beginning to think about bringing small business development into some economically depressed neighborhoods. This is especially needed because people with limited resources, such as an unreliable vehicle, must drive 20 miles or more just to get to work. The church has also been looking at a program called “Strengthen Families” to help family units in these depressed areas. Duncan envisions using the principles in Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert’s book, *When Helping Hurts*, to foster far-reaching, long-term change.