

God in the Marketplace...He Means Business

by H. James Hulton III

Ten years ago, Dennis and Megan Doyle of the Welsh Companies, a commercial real estate company in Bloomington, became founders of the Christian marketplace movement in Minnesota. God showed them to become early implementers when they began a prayer evangelism to pray for businesses in trouble within their own sphere of influence. They also recognized an apparent disconnect between pastors and business people in the pews. A wall existed between Sunday Christians and Monday Christians.

Then in 1998, they established the Harvest Evangelism Conference, a major fund raising event in Argentina. Since then, God has been doing something for business people in the way of Christian partnerships in Argentina and throughout the Twin Cities marketplace. "When Christianity under girds the marketplace, it can only bless a community and the affect is positive," says Megan in a recent interview. "There is honesty and integrity when the rule of Law is applied and obeyed," she further noted. She indicated that, in the world marketplace, the economy in most countries is in the forefront of people's minds unless the country itself is at war. It is the most important business concern of everyone on earth. The wealth and poverty of nations rise and fall with the country's level of faith. This is why 24 of the world's 25 richest countries have a Judaic-Christian under girding. And for more than two thousand years, the Bible has reminded us that our work remains a calling from God Himself to reflect His Kingdom in the workplace. The Rev. Billy Graham once said "I believe one of the next great moves of God is going to be through believers in the workplace."

But what has God been doing in the marketplace since this time? How has He taken His power to increase His presence in the business community in the last six years? What has evolved to spread the message further into the marketplace?

Throughout the last decade, a number of major ministries have formed in the Twin Cities region: Campus Crusades, Navigators, Search Ministries, Kingdom Oil, Priority

Associates, Nehemiah Partners, and Twin Cities Coalition of Apostles. Their umbrella organization, the Twin Cities Workplace Ministries, provides a point of contact serving the Twin Cities workplace by equipping followers of Christ to actively engage in marketplace transformation. These fellowships have been formed purposely to be strategically used for the Lord. Moreover, Minneapolis has become the only city in the US where ministries have banded together on such a scale to reach business people in the marketplace. And KTIS Radio at Northwestern College broadcasts radio spots sponsored by Twin Cities Workplace Ministries aimed directly at the marketplace.

Ministries such as Kingdom Oil in Minneapolis and Search Ministries in Edina have a covenant relationship to work together to minister to the Twin Cities marketplace. In the last seven years they have created a unity in the region to do five things together: honor each other, pray for each other, invest in each other, seek the Kingdom together, and lift up messages together to God. While neither are church organizations, they provide a place for business people (believers and non-believers) to go to learn more about Christianity in His world. Kingdom Oil, a Christian community foundation, provides the opportunity for community investment initiative partnerships between the public sector, education, and private businesses. The Kingdom Fund has 9 portfolios of mutual funds and programs for prayer, worship, leadership, information, and youth & family. Search Ministries, an outreach and search for significance for business settings, is a frontline for adult evangelism and training discipleship in the Twin Cities. Search sponsors such programs like “Rise with the Guys” with the Minnesota Vikings, “Straight Talk,” and “Open Forum” for small groups. Search ministers to seekers and non-believers alike and makes referrals to Kingdom Oil for those who need their guidance. The two ministries joined together recently to host 450 business leaders from across the Twin Cities at a “Straight Talk” business breakfast at the Golden Valley Country Club. The featured speaker was Gov. Tim Pawlenty, a Kingdom Oil minded leader.

This is a demonstration of what God is doing across the marketplace at-large. But what is He doing, if anything, inside individual firms to make His presence known to company employees? An example of this movement in the Twin Cities can be found at Medtronic,

a Minnesota Fortune 500 company. Last June company management officially approved a program for employees and corporate leadership called CERG (Christian Employees Resource Group) to be a part of its overall program known as Work Force Inclusion (WFI). It had to pass a rigorous screening process with a mission, vision, purpose, practice statements, organizational structure, accountability, and annual budget. CERG is one of seven resource groups which include programs for women, blacks, Asians, and gays/lesbians.

CERG Chairman Bill Farrell, a company engineer, became a Christian in the marketplace and was aware of a small group of Christians gathering at Medtronic, but did so without the recognition of being a Medtronic resource group. This small group's meetings were intentional, believable, and appealing to Farrell in a way which was different than the church he was regularly attending. He noted that he became a "focal point for this group, a movement of God, to get the vision of CERG presented to company leadership." An organization plan was set up to include a mission statement and budget, and in October 2003 CERG began operations with only 100 employees involved. As of this writing, 350 employees are members. Employees of faith represent the largest, fastest growing resource group in Medtronic's 55-year history. Farrell also noted that "Two years ago, only about 90 American companies had anything like CERG. Today, over 900 companies have Christian resource groups." He added, "Being a Christian in the marketplace is challenging because of countless opportunities to compromise our Christian principals and then justify our actions as necessary to meet the rigorous demands of the business and marketplace. CERG exists primarily to encourage fellow Christians to be more faithful in the marketplace and to glorify God with contributions at work.

Organizationally, the CERG mission is: "To strive with excellence at achieving the Medtronic mission by encouraging, educating, supporting, and demonstrating Christian principles in the workplace." Activities and events that CERG sponsors must be cleared through the CERG advisory board and approved by the Director of Work Force Inclusion. Specific committees include events, finance, advisory, and prayer teams.

Other activities include CERG Care for counseling and cell groups consisting of small groups with a specific focus to help other company employees.

What is the future of ministry in the marketplace? Our attitudes about work and our attitudes toward the people around us at work are a reflection of how well we understand how much God really is a part of our daily work. We often see our relationship with God clearly when we are in church or at a Christian gathering. But we are not entirely clear about our relationship when we are in the workplace. However, God wants us to see that our relationship with Him gives purpose and fulfillment in our work as we walk with Him in the marketplace.

According to Jeff Siemon of Search Ministries, “the vast majority of Christians see their lives holistically, without division between being Sunday Christians and Monday Christians.” Believers know they are making a difference in the marketplace. They will help to establish new resource groups inside the walls of companies like Coca-Cola, Sears, AT&T, American Airlines, and the Centers for Disease Control. However, it is important for church pastors to understand and embrace the marketplace ministry movement of God. To bring about any long term effect, we must create a national dialogue among church leaders about making workplace ministry a higher priority. The church should consider a paradigm shift in its thinking. And any such visions must begin from the top with a change in thinking and belief among our nation's CEOs, leading pastors, theologians, and church growth experts. It is a fast growing reality, not only in corporate America, but throughout the world where Christians see themselves as the salt and light in a global marketplace, known today as the extended church.

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