

Jeannine K. Brown  
Professor of New Testament, Bethel Seminary  
**Work with Purpose Grant Report (August, 2013)**

## **1. Overview of Project Implementation**

The Work with Purpose Grant I received was used to develop materials for the Senior Integrative Seminar course (GS798) taught from June-August, 2013. Specifically, the funds allowed for collaborative writing of a case dilemma on the topic of ministry, work, and vocation and for the development of a media lesson on Philippians and engagement with society.<sup>1</sup> The goal of these learning activities was to increase awareness and potential commitment to leading and communicating with congregations on the topic of work as vocation. This particular course was chosen for its strategic place as a capstone course with senior-level students already in leadership in ministry (primarily church) contexts.

Both the case dilemma and the media lesson were used with students in a single week of the GS798 course. The case—which I developed in collaboration with Jennifer Woodruff Tait—was the basis of an online forum discussion, in which the students analyzed and strategized from the angles of Bible/theology, leadership/formation, and ethics.<sup>2</sup> After the case, the students listened to the media lesson on Philippians. Both learning activities were then evaluated by means of a brief survey (see USB) intended to gauge their awareness and commitment to Work with Purpose themes (results below).

## **2. Summary of Case Forum Discussion:**

The following student insights, which emerged in the case discussion, are particularly relevant to the project's goal. First, students picked up on the "sacred/secular" divide implicit in the case dilemma.

"There does seem to be a divide between "sacred and secular" going on here when I would argue all of life including our "secular" jobs can be sacred jobs if we allow them to be and allow Christ to use us in those places."

"...is there a ethic at the church of dualism? Is our work life supposed to be separate from our life as believers?(the answer should be no) Does the church believe ministry can done outside the walls of a church? Or do they believe that the only place ministry can be done is in connection to the church? Is this view predominant in the whole church of just youth ministry? Is there an ethic present that people" go to church" rather than they "are the church"? I know this is a common issue within the church at large and I wonder if some of that type of construct might be being played out here...."

"We set people up for all sorts of dualistic and non kingdom like ideas and thus segmentation of ethics (how we view and interact with people outside of the church on Sunday am) when we promote these views...."

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<sup>1</sup> All materials related to this report are included in the accompanying USB drive.

<sup>2</sup> The complete transcripts of these three discussion threads are included on the USB drive.

Second, students were quick to pick up on the lack of realistic expectations for lay leaders who have rich, full-time jobs and busy lives exhibited by some of the pastors in the case. This insight pressed into recognition of human finitude and need to acknowledge human limits.

“I know that in my church, when we think about developing others to do the task of ministry, we tend to think that this means that they need to serve my ministry capacity at the same level as I do with the same amount of time and thought as I do. Which is highly unrealistic. One, I am paid full time to think and plan about this. Two, they are not. They work somewhere else and their time is a limited resource. So, how can this really balance out unless the pastor has sensitivity to the value of time[?]”

“The average member of the congregation would spend 40-50 hours a week at work and commuting, 56 hours a week sleeping, 16 hours a week eating, 4 hours a week attending a traditional service, 14 hours a week getting ready for bed and work. This allows 28 remaining hours to "date" your spouse, spend quality time with children, take care of the car, cut the grass, do the laundry, handling the shopping, paying the bills, putting kids to bed, and dare I even say "have a personal quiet time?" And Karen is suggesting that 16.8 of the remaining 28 hours be carved out to volunteer in a ministry!?! Come on Karen, get a life and live it.”

“When I was young and in ministry, I didn't have a clear understanding of the vocational world. I remember in my leadership when dealing with my volunteers how I would get frustrated with them because it didn't seem that they were given the right amount of time to the ministry. I sort of had this, if you are following Jesus, then why shouldn't you mentality. I had no idea about their own personal and family values. All I saw was the success of my ministry without even knowing that the strong push on time commitment was what the ministry really needed in the first place. I, like Karen, have pulled a trigger in expectations on my leaders without fully understanding the situation that it may cause. Then what we see happen as we can increase the expectation without the need being present is the law of diminishing returns taking place.”

“I was wondering if Karen will burnout before her volunteers burnout on her. Just a thought. She doesn't seem to be in touch with what life is really like. She reminds me of a boss who demands more and more from his/her employees yet never gives in on either more pay or vacation/rest. Employees will work longer and harder- but they need to taste the rewards of their efforts! Karen seems to be treating her volunteer staff like paid staff. That combination never works.”

Third, as they pressed into conversations about realistic expectations, some students offered the insight that lay leaders seasoned in life and work/vocation, family, and community experiences offer something more valuable than quantifiable hours “put in.” They offer maturity and wisdom that is of great value to the church.

“Similarly, these "elders" have lots of responsibilities that a younger individual may not have - obligations to organizations, community commitments, family commitments, etc. Certainly a young person in their 20's can have these obligations

too, but if you look at most community boards, organizations, etc there are a lot of empty nesters doing the work (at least in my community).”

“The good news about this team of ministers is that they are not all the same age. I notice the younger two (Karen and Victor) are quite ready to pass judgement on the volunteers for their limitedness. This makes sense because [the] younger ministers are at a point in their development where their energy is high for performing and working and focusing on "success." That energy is needed in every human endeavor that will sustain itself. But, another need for any successful, sustainable endeavor will be the input of the more seasoned human lives, and that is what the other ministers have to offer in this scenario. They have had more time to fail, suffer, restart things, and juggle complicated lives that the younger team members have not (apparently) had. Their voices are needed right now, and it's unfortunate that the lead pastor does not feel compelled or able to nurture the more seasoned points of view in a way that all parties are able to hear them better.”

Finally, students interacted with Ephesians 4 (as this was referenced in the case as a key lens for the church's understanding of ministry), which speaks of pastors and leaders given to the church “to equip [Christ's] people for works of service” (4:11-12). There were arguments made for viewing these works of service as (a) more than delegated grunt work (rather, “shared ownership and leadership in church decisions and projects”); (b) more than inward focused church ministry (includes “acts of service directed toward others in the community”); and (c) involving the care and formation of lay leaders in the church (the pastor in the case demonstrated “a failure to ministry to her adult volunteers”). The following student captures the outward focus of “works of service” well.

“...one other final thought that I have on the case is the concept of what is understood as Ephesians 4 ministry look like. When Karen drops that Paul tent-making deal on the church, it felt like to me she was manipulating people into serving within her ministry only. This seems to me the opposite of what Paul may of been doing. I am curious to know exactly what Martin's missiology looks like out of Ephesians 4. Is this for those in the church to simply serve those in the church? Or is it a tent-making gig to be self-supported to be able to reach those outside of the church? This seems to be a missing clear component.”

### **3. Student Survey Results Summary**

In the week following the case discussion and media lesson, students were asked to complete a brief survey. Ten of the nineteen students participated in the survey. A summary of the survey responses is provided here.

1. How much had you thought and/or taught in your ministry context about work as vocation (i.e., the ministry people exercise through their jobs) prior to the discussion last week?
  - a. None-1
  - b. Little-0
  - c. Some-2
  - d. Often-7

2. How likely is it that you will teach on this topic in the future based on last week's case and/or media lesson?
  - a. Not Likely-1
  - b. Possible-4
  - c. Likely-4
  - d. Very Likely-1
  
3. List any areas for reflection or questions that have emerged from the engagement on the topic of vocation last week (a listing of words or phrases is adequate):
  - a. "Using "tent-maker" in the context of pushing for additional volunteer engagement." [assumption that they might now be careful *not* to do this]
  - b. "One of the biggest reflections questions for me is thinking of how to talk to those working a "regular" job about jobs and ministry from my place of "privilege" in relation to this relationship. I honestly feel as though I lack credibility to speak into this area of others lives because I get paid to minister."
  - c. "Creative cohorts. Accountability structures to help motivation. What does discipleship look like[?]"
  - d. "Prayerful community that has internal trust and is building on that trust is required to deepen engagement on the topic of vocation."
  - e. "It started me thinking how often we as ministry people see the time spent by volunteers as their ministry and not their vocation[s]. We have had this discussion many times at church, but still is a prevalent attitude keeping secular and sacred separate."
  - f. "Vocation, volunteers as lay ministers, Sabbath."
  - g. "What is work, Sabbath goals, dynamics of gender in leadership, when staff is or is not connecting with volunteers on all channels, maximizing volunteerism."
  - h. "I once ministered in a church where there was an idea that each member had to be involved in ministry within that specific church or they weren't fulfilling an obligation to serve. Even those who served in ministries outside the church, were expected to serve in the church as well. I also served in a church that was on the other end of the spectrum believing that ministry is living a life of service no matter where God puts you. So I have seen this played out across a spectrum. My main reflection (take away) from the case was again the need for emphasis on why we serve, not just that we serve. I am a strong believer right heart motivation for service sustains longevity and avoids burnout."
  
4. Feel free to provide any additional feedback on the case, our discussion of it, or the media lesson:
  - a. "I enjoyed the discussion. It is close to my heart as a missionary to people in the marketplace. I didn't think of it so much as a narrowly vocational case study as much as one on the dynamics of volunteer engagement and leadership."
  - b. "Too important to not discuss."
  - c. "I was hesitant to be too hard on the youth pastor in discussion, because we didn't have a huge amount of knowledge of her life. I have come

against attitudes of judging our time commitment to our commitment to “ministry” as I find it misleading.”

- d. “It was a great case study, very well done and very thought provoking.”

#### **4. Final Evaluative Comments**

Reviewing the survey and discussion forum interactions, this project elevated the issues of work as vocation with the students. The interest in the topic for class discussion and the powerful reflections offered—both in the forum and in the survey—indicated lively and insightful engagement that will inform students going forward around the topic and its various issues for ministry inside and outside the walls of our churches.