

Ministers-at-Work

*The Journal for Christians in
secular ministry*

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Editorial

In the first lockdown, 38% of workers said lockdown had had a negative impact on their wellbeing. And now we are in our third lockdown, with, as I write, little clarity about endpoints.

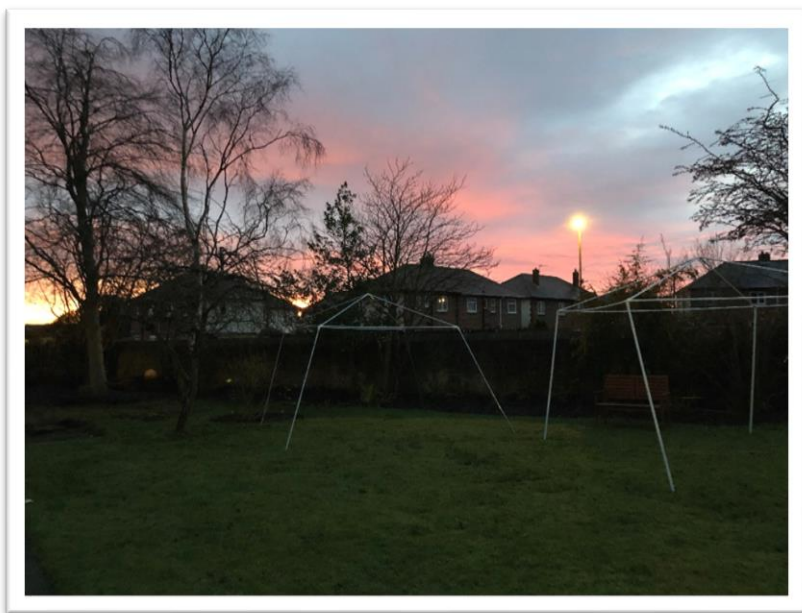
In these winter days, lockdown feels especially hard – and the rising tide of death which we hear about on our news each day feels inexorable... but it seems that tide may be about to turn – even if slowly – and we seem to be progressing well in delivering the vaccine too.. There is, genuinely, light ahead.. light in the darkness...

However, as the light increases, what will we see? Working at home is becoming more difficult for many – especially women - as home schooling continues. More people seem to be at work now than was the case in March or April last year, as workplaces designate themselves as ‘COVID-safe’. But some report anxieties about spending too much time in a ‘COVID safe’ office. Meanwhile, others feel increasingly vulnerable in struggling businesses, hit by the on-off nature of lockdowns and tiering in recent months. Particularly in low paid jobs, too few are willing to self-isolate if someone else might step up to their job. Then there are whole sectors such as performing arts and hospitality where even some of the strongest players are near to drowning. And meanwhile, key workers (the definition morphing in and out of government guidance – but certainly among them workers in health and social care, and teachers and other school staff) continue to deliver, sustaining each other often on the edge of exhaustion... Our members are amongst those affected in almost every area.

Wellbeing at work seems to be a theme to which we should pay attention as 2021 opens ahead of us. In this edition of *Ministers at Work*, two pieces from our new Theology Discussion Group are included, which focus on rest. I would welcome more contributions exploring any or all of the issues.

This journal also includes a thought provoking examination of how Christian ministry might be expressed through software development, and information on some exciting forthcoming events, notably our Day of Reflection on Career, Calling and Vocation in February. I hope to see you there – and if it stimulates any contributions to our next journal, do let me know! Meanwhile, stay safe – and stay well!

Pauline Pearson



Blesséd Code: How Christian ministry might be expressed through software development: James Handley

In the world of the SSM and MSE, it seems all too easy to compartmentalise our activities. I am an ordained minister in the Church of England, and I am also a professional software developer, and these two spheres do not have a lot of overlap. This article outlines a possible aspect of how the diaconal and priestly ministry to which I was ordained might be expressed through my work as a computer programmer (and by extension to other professions.)

By way of background, my job involves writing human readable text (“source code”) which a computer translates (“compiles”) into machine code, which it can run (“execute”). So for example the code:

`a = a + 1`

would be compiled into a set of instructions which will take the number stored in a (e.g. 5), add one to it (i.e. make it 6), and store the result back in a. Exactly the same result could be achieved by the following, much harder to understand, code:

`a = (100 / 10) + a - (√1) - 23`

The point is that — as with any language — there are multiple ways to express an intention or notion, and hence opportunities for simplicity or obfuscation. This turns out to be crucial, as we will see later.



Ministry at work

There are several options for addressing the question of being an ordained minister in a secular workplace. Formal chaplaincy is one, although in my case ministry is neither my job nor my function. To use my time at work for ministerial activities when I am being paid to develop software would not only be inappropriate, but dishonest [1]. I am no more paid to proselytize or offer pastoral care than I am to browse Instagram or play Candy Crush.¹

¹ There is some nuance here. Providing pastoral support for a colleague may improve their performance, and hence still generate a return for the business.

At the other extreme, I could principally express Christian ministry through activities at church, while generally witnessing at work and perhaps seeking evangelistic opportunities. Somewhere in the middle, there is the path of the MSE – see Lees [2] and Vaughan [3], amongst others. In that model, the language of presence is key — we “are” in the workplace, and that in itself is a ministry.

Alternatively, one could seek “sacred” work; jobs which could be considered to align closely with the gospel agenda — like running a foodbank, or being a doctor or a teacher. One can also fairly easily align “servant” roles like judge, policeman, politician, waste disposal, gardener. Even when the work is not inherently “sacred”, the product/result might be. In my field, work-as-ministry could be writing worship software or a church management suite, or even producing something like pornography filters or online grooming detection.

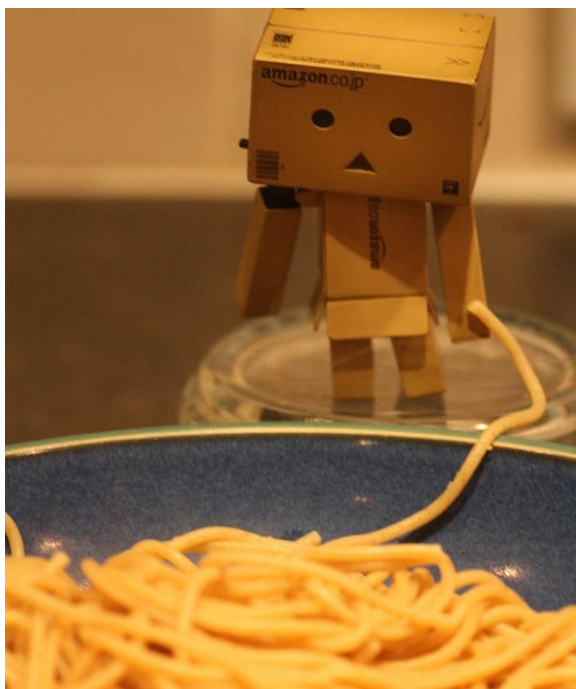
But what of the Formula 1 mechanic, or the investment banker, or the shop assistant? With a bit of theological footwork you can talk about the value it adds to society, such as generating wealth,² or providing entertainment, or indeed simply our God given mandate to work. In my specific case, the software I develop can help reduce carbon footprint through operational efficiency gains, which aligns with our stewardship of creation.

² Which, so the theory goes, helps everyone in society?

However I find myself not fully satisfied with this “generic” priesthood, where the work I specifically do doesn’t really seem to matter too much.

Blessing and curse

At my work, we have a positive organisational culture — high levels of transparency, trust, encouragement, cooperation, and low levels of passive aggression, sabotage, negativity, secrecy, politicking, and so on. However, a fellow software developer at work recently mused that ‘If you consider the culture of the code, then that’s a different story — it can be negative, opaque, it’s passive-aggressive, ...’



This notion was something of a revelation to me. He is absolutely right though — source code does have a “culture”, and I don’t just mean the resulting piece of software. As we saw in the introduction there are choices around how code is written, and hence what culture is embedded within it. Source code can be helpful and co-operative; easy to understand and maintain, so you can have confidence that changing one bit here isn’t going to break something over there. Or it can be obstructive and difficult. A spaghetti tangle, where it’s almost impossible to understand the logic, and you can be pretty sure that changing one bit is going to have a completely unexpected side effect in an apparently unrelated part of the system.

It is nothing new to suggest that code can be good or bad — but if you see it as embodying a culture, then you could say it becomes a potential means of blessing or a means of curse. Easy to work with, or difficult and obstructive. The language of blessing opens up a door to start to draw in priestly ministry. Jim Francis helpfully draws out of the Ordinal three distinct strands for priestly ministry: “bless”, “reconcile”, and “nurture” [4]. Might blessing, reconciling, and nurturing also apply to software development?

Whose code is it anyway?

Another colleague pointed out that the code I write is not “my” code. I don’t own it — it is the company’s Intellectual Property, and it will probably have a lifespan beyond my employment there. It is likely that it will not even be me who

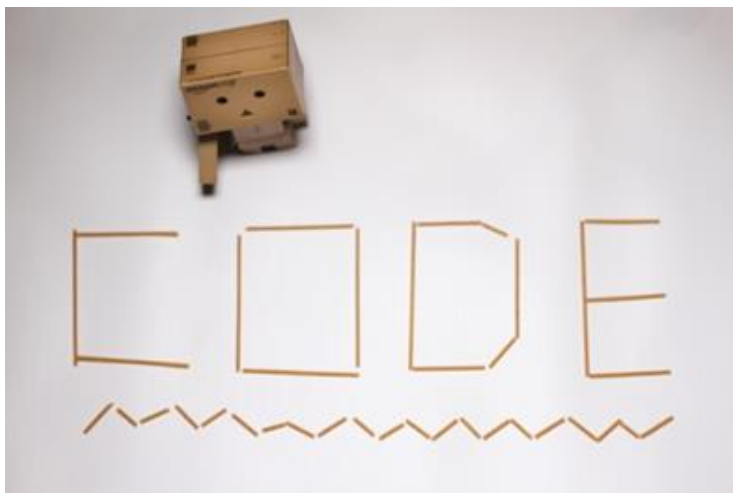
is the next person to work with it. From this, I realised that a principal way that I interact with my colleagues (and indeed our customers) is through the code I write. If I write code

badly, this causes pain for my immediate colleagues, as well as those to come. On the other hand, if I write code well, this can be a source of blessing to my colleagues. They can pick up what I have written; easily understand what it is doing, and why I wrote it that way, and make whatever modifications they may need to.

It is at this point all these thoughts collide — that part of my calling is to be a blessing; that computer code has a culture; and that one of the main ways I interact with my colleagues is through code...

Blesséd code

Might it be that I can exercise a priestly ministry at work by



writing blessed code? I don't mean consecrated, I mean code that it is a means of blessing. I mean my work bringing pleasure to others; beautiful, well crafted, and elegant code that is a blessing to work with. Conversely, code could be “cursed” —

again not hexed, but rather a curse to work with, bringing pain and torment. I have certainly seen enough of that code in my career. But even “cursed” code can usually be “saved”. It can be re-written or refactored into blessed code — and might this in turn be a picture of reconciliation and redemption? If we are working to create a blessed environment within which to be joyful and fruitful in our labour, that is something of the Kingdom of God, surely? It’s like turning a scrapyard full of stinging nettles and old tyres into a garden or allotment; bringing order out of chaos and life out of death. I’m not sure that it’s any different for code.³

Closing Thoughts

Let us first be clear that every Christian — whether employed or not, whether ordained or not — should be asking themselves these sorts of questions. Another way of expressing it might be ‘In what ways am I participating in the *Missio Dei*?’ However, I do think that being ordained and in secular work brings it into sharper focus; similar to the way the ministerial priesthood brings into focus the royal priesthood of the whole church.

Secondly, there is a danger of being over spiritual, and that what I’m describing is nothing more than doing a good job. However if our output at work forms part of our relationship with those with whom we work, then I think it is potentially fruitful to at least reflect on it in terms of ministry.

³ In conversation with the Bishop of Ripon, she highlighted the re-wilding movement, and that our neat and ordered gardens do not necessarily fully reflect God’s glory in creation. This does beg the question of what “re-wilded” software might look like?

Thirdly, while we have been concentrating on source code, the end result (i.e. the piece of software itself) can also be blessed — a joy and blessing to use — or the opposite. Blessed software in this sense is also potentially a ministry to both our customers, and our technical support team.

Finally, this doesn't only apply to software. If you write protocols or instructions, which have to be understood and followed by others in the organisation, the same principle applies. If you run the IT network, or if you're in charge of the laundry — all of these things, and potentially many more, can be the basis of a ministry to colleagues, a means of blessing and of advancing the Kingdom of God.



References

[1] Antony Hurst. Rendering unto Caesar. An exploration of the place of paid employment within the framework of Christian belief. Churchman Publishing Limited, Worthing, 1986.

[2] John Lees. Self Supporting Ministry. A Practical Guide. SPCK, London, 2018.

[3] Patrick Vaughan. Speaking for themselves. In Peter Baelz and William Jacob, editors, Ministers of the Kingdom. Exploration in Non-Stipendiary Ministry. CIO Publishing, London, 1985.

[4] James Francis. A reflection on MSE. Ministers-at-Work, (152):26–32, January 2020.

Rest: Notes from a CHRISM Theology Discussion Group - November 2020

Led by: Peter Selby - Notes by: Julian Blakemore

Context

Rest is a prominent theme throughout the whole of scripture: God rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2.2); Jesus took time out to rest after a period of intense activity (Mark 6.31); rest is something to be aspired to (Matt. 11.28-30); rest is a blessing for those who've died in the Lord (Rev.14.13).

How does rest fit into God's economy?

The importance of rest is implicit in creation. Sabbath rest is the end of the creative process after all the work is done. Karl Barth saw the Sabbath as primary and work following from it. What is rest – is it simply not working? Is it about spending time in the Lord, moving consciously into the presence of God? Rest is a mark of salvation, e.g. Israelites



find rest after being freed from slavery. In the same way, Sabbath rest can be seen as freedom from what you have to do during the rest of the week. Rest is something that contributes to our wellbeing but if we see it as something we have to achieve, there's a danger of making rest a work in itself rather than something we relax into. The distinction between work and rest is not binary, it's more complex than that. It's

really a question of what life is for? Work, rest and leisure are all part of the equation – we have to get the rhythm and balance right (see for example Sabbath Rest by Mark Scarlata). God's creative purpose leads us to think about how we enable ourselves to be creative and help others to be more creative. Everything is linked to the incarnation and bringing in God's kingdom.

How does rest fit into the world in which we find ourselves?

In the UK, the Working Hours Directive states that people should not work more than 48 hours a week on average - normally averaged over 17 weeks – although people can

choose to work more by opting out of the 48-hour week.

Rest does not have to be taken as a whole day. If we think of days being in three parts – morning, afternoon and evening – rest could be spread over different days at different times of day.



Living in a 24/7 culture can make it difficult for people to switch off. Nevertheless, even pre-pandemic, there were signs that things were starting to change, with an increasing emphasis on work-life balance and employees in certain sectors being encouraged to work from home on a regular basis. These changes, whilst often driven by commercial rather than altruistic interests, can benefit employees, e.g. by saving time from not having to commute to work, and having the opportunity to spend more time with family or pursuing their own activities. It feels as though the pandemic has accelerated these trends. It was interesting that during lockdown, when people were allowed to exercise for an hour a day, many more than usual could be seen out walking. There is now much more emphasis on people taking responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

Time, and how we choose to fill it, has become much more commoditised. The challenge is how do we control our time rather than being controlled by other people's demands on our time. Parts of society have become quite sophisticated in the way they use time; rather than stopping doing something, they use time in a different way, e.g. by pursuing hobbies, interests, or social activities, which has fuelled the growth in the leisure and entertainments sectors.

The world view of rest is pleasure and leisure as a counterpoint to work. Work is a use of energy and rest is about re-energising ourselves. In this view, the presence of work is equally important as the presence of rest. However, for those who are out of work or facing unemployment, not having work is a source of stress that can lead to desperation about how they are going to put food on the table or pay the

bills. Life can also be full of hardship for those who have work but are in low paid jobs. They don't have the finances to 'buy-in' to leisure time, whereas those working in better paid jobs are able to value their rest and use money to make it quality time.



How does rest feature in our own personal economies?

We have certain basic needs as human beings – air, food and drink, clothing and shelter, sleep and rest. How much rest is required varies from person to person. It is said that change is as good as a rest. Climbing a mountain can be exhilarating but is also tiring – is that rest? Someone who works all hours on three jobs finds 'rest' in the contrast between the jobs and the people encountered. Amongst actors, at any point in time 80% are not in work. They are said to be "resting" but are really unemployed.

A day off for stipendiary priests is encouraged but what about MSEs? It is different when the workplace is the main context of

ministry. What counts as work and rest can become blurred and lead to double-counting of time. If you enjoy everything you're doing, the blurring of lines can become less important. When our primary calling is to the workplace, what happens in the parish is limited. Accepting this can be liberating (see for example Sustaining Leadership by Paul Swann). It is important for MSEs to model 'rest' for people. Ideas suggested for MSEs to consider were:

Make a 'Sabbath rest' on one day a week.

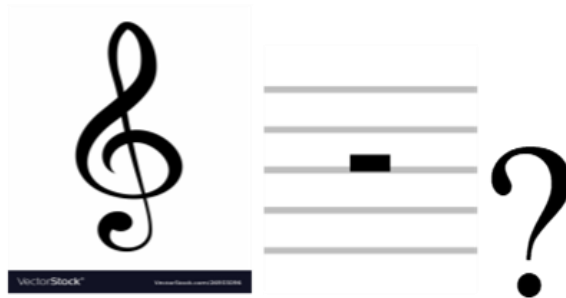
Limit work and keep hours under control.

Learn to say 'no' to the church.

Keep some Sundays free.

When on holiday, make yourself uncontactable.





Rest

Written by a member of our Theology Discussion Group, Eric Knowles, following the discussion on Rest. Eric was prompted as a result to write a thought piece for the newsletter of the choir that his wife belongs to. Eric has kindly given his permission for us to also publish this here.

For those who can't read music, and there are many who can't, and also for those who can but have forgotten, that's the sign on the music sheet that says there should be silence. It's the moment that a composer says 'stop'. It's as if he (or she) is telling us that if you stop at this point it will allow the music that you've performed to take effect. It lets people digest what has gone and anticipate what is about to happen. It says to everyone just wait a moment something good is about to happen. So it fills us full of expectation. It's useful to the people providing the music, the performers, as it gives them a break to draw breath, which is rather essential. It tells players, like our pianist, Ron, he's been working hard and now he can take a rest albeit a brief one.

There's a story of a man at home who went to answer a knocking on the door. He was met by a very smartly dressed individual. There was a very impressive car parked outside, The picture was of a very successful business man. "It was suggested by your friend John that I came to see you about an investment opportunity I offer. For a £5 investment you can sit and relax for the rest of your life."

"Wow, tell me about it."

The man stepped to one side and revealed an armchair with a £5 price ticket.

That is a picture that generally comes to mind when someone says; "You need to take more rest." But that is not necessarily what is required. When we talk about rest what do we really mean? The other day Valerie and I took our little dog up to the top of the Herefordshire Beacon. We came back home feeling refreshed. It had given us new impetus. We were



physically tired but we felt well rested. A friend of mine ran his own Company. He travelled abroad a great deal giving lectures and providing consultancy. When he was in his late 70s his wife said to him “John, why don't you retire?” “Retire to do what?” he asked. “Retire from work and do something you enjoy.”

“But”, said John “I enjoy what I'm doing.” Work was not a chore to him. No more so than climbing up the Herefordshire Beacon. It invigorated him. It was not stressful.

Now in another part of our society there are many at the moment who have no work at all. If they are actors who are out of work they might say that they are “Resting”. Yet if you chat to them you will find that they regard their situation as worrying and stressful. That worry and stress may be just as great as some of the situations they met when they were employed. So resting may not be simply a question of not doing anything. The original version of the proverb, “A change is as good as a rest” may have been “Change of work is as good as play”. Which could have been the response to “All work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy.”

At the moment a lot of us are well out of what is known as our comfort zone. We have been forced away from what we usually do so we are looking for a change of work. We are looking for something to do that is different from our “normal” life, that which “normally” occupies our attention. Some are finding it hard to accept because we are trying to find alternative employment for our minds and bodies. Some are taking more exercise, others are doing jig-saws, model-making, gardening or cooking. We are trying to find something

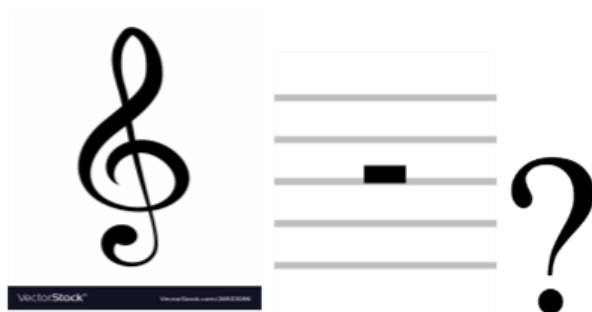
new that will help us to feel relaxed and take away what may be stressing us.



Claude Debussy once described music as “The silence between the notes”. To him the pause with nothing happening was what really made his music effective. All the work he had put into the rest of the work rested on the silences he inserted. That's how vital he regarded that element of a composition. Our rest is what gives meaning to what has taken place and purpose to what is about to happen. That may well be the absence of busyness, of doing. But it may equally be the doing of something that is different. Maybe the benefit of silence in music is not so much the silence itself as the contrast it provides.

We are not made up of three distinct elements but are an integrated whole that comprises body, soul and mind.

The state of one element has a direct effect on the rest. So whatever form it may take, it is essential for each of us to.....



Mentors

Do you feel on your own in your situation / job / diocese? Do you think you might benefit from connecting with a mentor? Or have your experiences as an MSE given you a wealth of insights which might support someone else newer to the role? If you fit either of these and would be interested to look at opportunities for informal mentoring, please get in touch with a committee member, and we will get you connected!



Books and bits

Love @ Work - 100 years of the Industrial Christian Fellowship. (2020) Ian Randall, Phil Jump and John Weaver

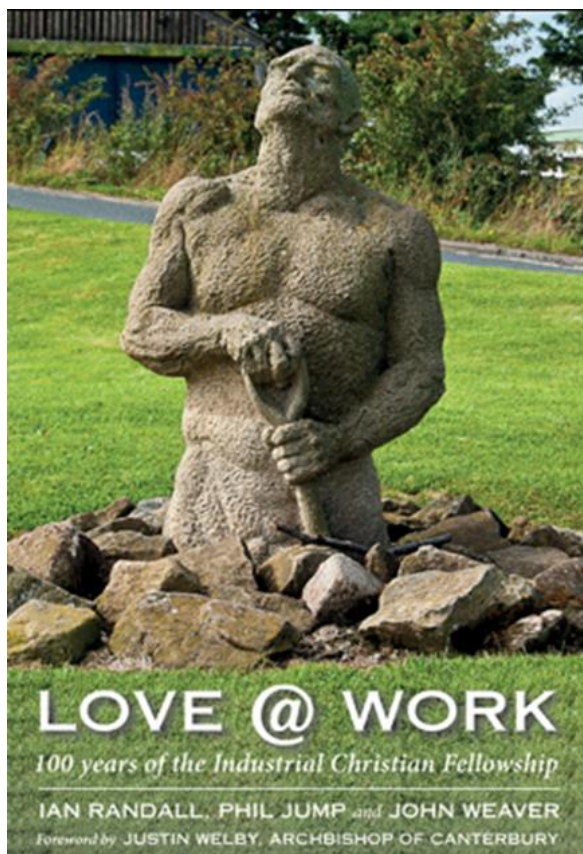
ISBN 978-1-913657-01-7 Price £14.99

E-book 978-1-913657-16-1

'If finding God in our churches leads to us losing Him in our factories, then better we tear down those churches, for God must hate the sight of them.'

Love@Work is a history of the Industrial Christian Fellowship, which celebrated its centenary in 2020. The ICF is a national ecumenical organisation, which was developed by the famous

World War One chaplain, Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy – ‘Woodbine Willie’ – who worked tirelessly for Christian values to be demonstrated in the workplace and for all workers to have the freedom to grow into the fully human beings God planned them to be. This book charts the highs and lows of the organisation from missional, social and theological perspectives, and looks at its ongoing work today.



ICF has persisted in urging us to make straight the way of the Lord. I commend this book,' writes Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury in the foreword to this new book, written by Ian Randall, Phil Jump and John Weaver to mark the centenary of ICF.

It is a comprehensive history of this significant organisation, formed when a Mission joined a Union to become a Fellowship, which has always helped people in the workplace to understand and live out their Christian faith. The book describes the highs and lows faced by ICF over the last hundred years, and explores the lessons and challenges of the past for developing a clear integration of faith and work in contemporary contexts. Combining history, sociology and theology, it is a fascinating study of the influences that affect our understanding of business, management, employment and community. It is essential reading for all involved in discipleship and mission today in a world that is changing beyond recognition.

Printed by Darton, Longman and Todd (DLT) it is available from their website, www.dltbooks.com or ICF's online bookstore.

Forthcoming Events

COVID-19 changes:

COVID related changes continue. Please note these dates and details in your diary – we shall post more details on our website and social media.

Reflective Day: Career, Calling and Vocation

The 'Reflective Weekend' will now take place as a virtual day conference on Saturday 13th February led by Gill Frigerio, on Career, Calling & Vocation. What do we mean by the term 'career'? Is it compatible with seeing work as a calling? Within the wider landscape of 'faith at work', calling can help us consider which work we do as well as the way that we do it.

Gill Frigerio, a career development coach and educator working at the University of Warwick, will lead us in a day, with on- and off-line space, to consider the issues of calling and career from a perspective of Ministry in Secular Employment. The day will include input from Gill, small and whole group discussion and activities to enable us all to consider the role of calling in our own and other peoples' working lives. There will be time for a reflective activity away from the screen as well as some which we are guided through as a group – and some social time afterwards!

Gill is currently working on a Doctorate in Education, conducting action research looking at career and calling for Christians at work. She hopes that attendees might agree to her using their reflections during the day to contribute anonymously to her research. But if you would rather not do this, that is no barrier to full participation.

Gill is a lay Anglican, with a commitment to MSE, and also works as a Spiritual Director, discernment adviser and is on the national Setting God's People Free advisory group.

The day will be on Zoom from 09.30 – 18.00, with appropriate breaks, and social time. The structure of the day will be as follows:

Session 1 Career and Calling (and its MSE relevance)

Gill will provide an orienting introduction to the day and lead us in discussion of how ‘career’ as a concept can be understood, drawing on recent past, contemporary contexts and looking to the near future. To help us do this we will draw on some consideration of a key transition point in our own work and educational journey, and discuss the things that influenced us.

Session 2 Calling or Falling

How does the career development world use the idea of vocation and calling?

In this session Gill will present some of the main ways in which careers work embraces the idea of calling and we will discuss how useful that is for the majority of working lives, with some activities to try or review.

Session 3 Call me

Following an introduction we will each go away to work in quiet with reflections on our own experience of calling and a discernment exercise.

This will lead into a break for lunch; followed by a discussion in pairs of that reflective exercise.

Session 4 Calling all the people

Coming back to a full group, here we will relate what we have discussed to our own working lives and ministry and see how we can bring in theological understandings of calling and work.

Session 5 Calling, work and mission

Transforming working lives: We will bring together the themes of the day to consider how calling and career can invigorate our mission. What does this mean for our own calling, and for the mission of the whole of God's people?

Followed at 17.00 by a "Meet in the 'bar'!" for those who would like to stay on for a social time at the end of the day.

Registration will cost £10. Please register on Eventbrite before 31st January if possible, at:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/chrism-virtual-reflective-day-career-calling-and-vocation-tickets-131672968393?aff=ebdssbeac>

or use the attached flyer.



Other meetings

We plan to organise other virtual evening meetings on Zoom in the interim, as those attending recent meetings have fed back very positively. Please put the evening of 21st April 2021 into your diary when we hope (subject to confirmation) to hear from Hugh Williamson about research on his father and the contemporary European worker priest scene. Further details will be posted on our website and circulated on social media.

AGM and Summer Conference

Later this year, we are looking forward to our AGM and Summer Conference 'Making New Better' hopefully to be held in real life at Sarum College, Salisbury between 16th - 18th July 2021. A keynote address will be given by Professor John Goddard OBE, PhD, FAcSS, Emeritus Professor of Regional Development Studies at Newcastle University who is currently working on ways to change institutions to better reflect the needs of the communities they serve and in particular to facilitate their recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.



CHRISM Theology Discussion Group

This Discussion Group, which is open to all CHRISM members, provides an online forum where we can reflect on and discuss the theological aspects of our work. We meet monthly by Zoom for an hour and a half. Recent topics have included The Importance of our Work to God and Us, Rest, and What is Work?

Our next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 20 January 2021 at 19.30 when Revd Mike Rayner will be leading our thoughts on the theme of Justice at Work.

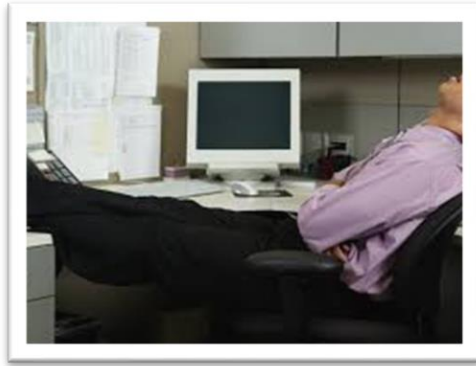
Looking forward, another date for your diary is Tuesday, 23rd February at 19.30 when our discussion will be led by Deacon David Clark on his book The Kingdom at Work Project - a communal approach to mission in the workplace.

If you are interested in joining this group and would like to be added to the invitation list and receive Zoom links for future meetings, please email me at

rev.julian.e.blakemore@gmail.com and I will send you details.

We look forward to welcoming you.

Revd Julian Blakemore



And Finally.....

Knocking the zeds out?

Lying there crashed out

vulnerable

catching up on time lost

in the busyness - business?

Of life

Time out - time alone

almost unwatched, with no responsibilities

hammering out sleep.

CHRISM is on Facebook, 'Ministers at Work':

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/129656640430436/>

and LinkedIn, at:

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=3756477>

CHRISM is the National Association of CHRistians In Secular Ministry

for **all** Christians who see their secular employment as their primary Christian ministry, and for those who support that vision. To further this aim, CHRISM publishes a quarterly Journal, releases occasional papers and organises an annual retreat. Conferences are held regularly and worldwide links pursued.

CHRISM welcomes members, both lay and ordained, from all Christian denominations, encourages them to be active within their own faith communities and to champion ministry in and through secular employment.

If you would like confidential support as an MSE, please contact any member of the Committee (see inside rear cover)

Further information may be obtained from the Secretary or the Journal Editor.

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.txt, .rtf, or .doc format) should be sent to:

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www.chrism.org.uk

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