

Eric Laudenslager

Equipping Marketplace Ministers for Unity: The Need for Ministry Leaders to Model Interdenominational Partnership

Abstract:

In recent decades, the marketplace ministry (MPM) movement has made significant progress. A predominant theme in the current discussion is a focus on how to support *individuals* in their place of work. While this renewed attention to supporting laity is an important change, it should be asked whether strategies that focus on the individual alone reflect the pragmatic needs of MPMs or the role models put forward in the NT. This paper will review a case study of a MPM team and how a team based approach contributed to the longevity of the ministry. It will then examine the responsibility the NT places on spiritual leaders for modeling healthy partnerships and conclude by providing a practical model for how to gain experience building interdenominational partnerships.

Keywords: marketplace ministry, unity, partnerships, interdenominational, lay ministry, Ephesians 4:1–16



Eric Laudenslager (eric.laudenslager@asburyseminary.edu) is an adjunct professor of Greek studies and a PhD student in Biblical Studies (New Testament emphasis) at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Introduction

If we were to prioritize our preaching based on the cumulative hours spent on a particular human activity, *work* would be at the top of the list. However, secular work has not always received its homiletical and theological due. In recent years, there has been a revival of interest in faith and work which has led to many discussions about *marketplace ministry* (MPM). A predominant theme in the current discussion is a focus on how to support *individuals* in their place of work. While this renewed attention to supporting laity is an important change, it should be asked whether strategies that focus on the individual alone reflect the pragmatic needs of MPMs or the role models put forward in the NT. In this paper, I will share a testimony of a team-based MPM in corporate America. This case study demonstrates that a partnership-based approach was essential to the long term success of the ministry. However, building these partnerships presents challenges. In the marketplace, MPM teams are made of coworkers, who may come from a wide denominational background. This requires marketplace ministers who are skilled in working with Christians from diverse theological perspectives. As churches are considering how to train and support their laity, this need calls upon churches and theological institutions to model biblically healthy interdenominational partnerships. The NT pattern is for spiritual leaders to be moral exemplars for the people they lead. This includes modeling the type of relationships MPM leaders will need to foster in their places of work.

This paper will review major themes in the current discussions about MPM. I will then share a team-based MPM case study and examine major principles learned from this example.¹ These principles will then be examined in light of the instructions in Ephesians 4 for spiritual leaders to train laity. The MPM movement has expanded into numerous areas. Thus, a variety of definitions and titles exist.² For the purposes of this paper, MPM will be defined as ministry activities (e.g., Bible study, prayer groups, or service projects) that are organized within a secular company by employees of the company. This type of MPM should be distinguished from Business as Mission (BAM) which seeks to use business as a direct means of Christian influence (e.g., forming a business with Christian values). My focus will be on those who are seeking to work within a secular company to mentor and encourage disciples of Christ.

A Turbulent Partnership: A Brief Survey of the Sacred-Secular Divide

A desire common to all humanity is to live an integrated life where the reality of one's faith and the labor of one's hands work side by side (Miller 2007: Introduction). However, whether one engages the marketplace as a working professional or as professional clergy, everyone finds that combining faith and work is not a simple partnership. Career growth, kingdom purposes, ethical dilemmas, and other secular pressures all compete for attention. Samuel Lee's reflections on the challenges of *entrepreneurial church planting* (ECP)—a mission strategy which seeks to reach the unchurched through Christian-managed businesses³—illustrate the all too familiar tensions and pitfalls:

Consideration of ECP also demonstrates that a combination of business and church planting has the potential for problems. A focus on multiplying profits may reduce the attention to church planting, produce a poor witness, and result in a decline in spiritual interest. In contrast, focusing primarily upon church planting results in a division whereby the business merely becomes a platform for church planting such that the business is not valued for its inherent good, thus resulting in shoddy work. (2021: 16)

No matter the intent, whether mission or career, there is a gravity that pulls the sacred and the secular apart, and the easy path is to let them go their separate ways. Eric Cooper, who has pioneered methods for integrating business and Christ's mission, similarly observes "there is an instinctive partitioning of life, a sacred-secular divide, that defines the work we do for the church as sacred, and the work we do for the marketplace as secular" (2021: 24; cf. Stevens 2006: 2–4). It is an old tension, and it is worth reflecting upon some of the forces, particularly the ecclesiastical ones, that have contributed to the divide.

It would be an error to assume that we arrived at this juncture exclusively from the modern pressures of the world. This dichotomy is neither recent nor purely secular. In various periods of history, the church has theologically ensconced the divide between the sacred and the secular.⁴ The outcomes of such a mindset are predictable. Those in positions of official spiritual leadership are highly respected, resources are invested in their development, and their contributions are valued in Christian community. We affirm people who express a calling to full-time

spiritual work, they receive dedicated training from respected specialists, and they are formally commissioned unto their task. But the converse is not true. Spiritual leaders—who are appointed to train the laity—have not historically provided the same affirmation, training, and commissioning for lay believers to serve Christ in the marketplace. Additionally, full-time spiritual leaders—who may not have extensive experience working in a secular environment—can struggle to pragmatically bring scriptural truth to bear on the realities faced in the workplace.⁵ Thus, without practical theological instruction and demonstrations of support from one's local church, it is expected that lay believers would feel unequipped for the challenges they face in the marketplace (Forster and Oostenbrink 2015: 3).

But while the sacred-secular divide and its frustrations may run deep, the situation is far from bleak. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, significant changes began to be made within the church. In fact, it would be difficult to overstate the amount of theologizing, research, conferencing, and publishing that has been devoted to the topic of MPM in recent decades. Numerous volumes with a holistic focus on theology and practice have been written.⁶ These address issues as diverse as the inherent value of work, the kingdom purposes of work, work as a means of serving God, and closing the lay-clergy gap. Focus groups have been commissioned to examine the comprehensive needs for marketplace ministry.⁷ Training programs are being developed for both church and university settings.⁸ Both churches and parachurch ministries are exploring creative and entrepreneurial methods of involvement in the marketplace beyond traditional pathways of evangelism.⁹ Theologians, academic institutions, parachurch ministries, churches, and experienced marketplace ministers have heard the needs of lay Christians and responded with admirable zeal. Their efforts have laid important theoretical, methodological, and pragmatic foundations on which the marketplace ministry movement will be able to build for many years to come.

Are Lone Trailblazers the Way Forward?: Reflecting on Our Current Vision of MPM

As this movement is rapidly developing in many directions, it is important to reflect on its trajectory and consider opportunities for refinement. The organizational character of marketplace ministry is one such area. Numerous questions arise when we begin to consider the structure and relationships of MPMs. Is the marketplace minister a lone

catalyst or do they serve with a team at their place of work? Should marketplace ministries seek collaborations, or should they aim for a degree of independence? If partnerships are ideal, then what principles should undergird those relationships to maintain common doctrine and focus? Conversely, if independence is important for agility and missional clarity, then how is the ministry sustained over the long term without the resources and synergies that come with teams and partnerships?

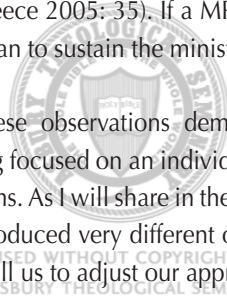
Presently, there are several trends in how these organizational questions are conceptualized. First, the minister is characterized as an isolated individual seeking to influence their company. For example, R. Paul Stevens envisions the marketplace as “a mission field, an arena where the *individual believer* may, in appropriate ways, share her or his faith” (2006: 88; emphasis added). While there is much to commend from this perspective, Stevens’s emphasis on the individual minister is notable and continues to be a theme in his exemplars of marketplace ministry. In one case study involving a consultant who was developing, of all things, a *community* formation program, Stevens writes “*he [the consultant] developed a process of community-building that involved identifying core values both corporately and individually*” (2006: 97; emphasis added). Elsewhere, Stevens encourages those who hold significant offices within their company (e.g., a business owner or VP) to use their influence to direct the overall course of the company towards kingdom values (2006: 2–4, 78–99). This conception of the marketplace minister is analogous to encouraging other types of Christian professionals to serve as chaplains, Bible study leaders, or evangelists where they are employed. In each of these examples, the minister is envisioned as someone with agency over their working environment and who independently has all the necessary resources to influence their workplace for Christ.

This strategy is understandable: most churches or organizations supporting MPM are focused on the particular marketplace minister they have contact with. It is not common for churches to consider how their members interact with other Christians outside of the scope of their ministry. But it should be questioned whether models whose predominant focus is on a single person reflect a biblical understanding of ministry and the full diversity of gifts within the body of Christ. Paul’s long partnership with Priscilla and Aquila is a ready counterexample (Acts 18:2, 18; Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19). Their bond was ethnic, financial, and spiritual.

But while exceptional, such a partnership was not unusual. It was typical for Jewish and gentile groups to form their own associations and for like trades to build *collegia* which supported their mutual success (Keener 2014: 2720). Within this complex bond, Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila found a way to balance all the competing pressures and needs of the Greco-Roman world and the Church. Indeed, Paul labored to never be alone in his pursuits. Even during team conflict and betrayal, Paul continued seeking ministry partnerships (Acts 15:36–41; 2 Tim 4:9–16). His pattern challenges us to consider whether our models should be focusing on marketplace ministry *teams* made of coworkers rather than *individuals* who are trailblazers.

When we consider the long term lifecycle of MPMs, there are additional disadvantages to placing too much emphasis on the individual minister. Building a healthy ministry within a company can be a long process—especially when we consider the secular pressures or other priorities that demand attention. If MPM is more marathon than sprint, then these ministries face an immediate challenge to maintaining consistent leadership: extended tenure is uncommon in the modern workforce. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that children born in the early 1980s held over eight different jobs between the ages of 18 to 32.¹⁰ This implies that when young adults are entering the full-time workforce with energy and zeal to minister, many of them will only be able to influence their company for a few years. If our vision for MPM is focused on the individual, then these ministries will only be short-term mission projects at best. Ministries that require more time to develop (e.g., regular Bible studies, prayer ministries, or service groups) are out of reach. Even in unique situations where a gifted trailblazing leader has made significant gains in a short time, the MPM could suffer considerable setbacks when they leave if there is no one to fill their shoes (Preece 2005: 35). If a MPM has formed a long-term vision, there must be a plan to sustain the ministry in the context of regular employment turnover.

Collectively, these observations demonstrate that our strategy needs to move from being focused on an individual minister to considering marketplace ministry teams. As I will share in the following MPM testimony, a team-based ministry produced very different outcomes and encountered unique challenges that call us to adjust our approach.



An Unexpected Team: A MPM Case Study

Between 2008 and 2019, I oversaw a marketplace ministry team that started as a small group of dedicated Christians and which grew to a complex organization serving several divisions of a large corporation. The ministry began as a few Christian friends who met regularly for Bible study and prayer. The group represented a variety of denominational backgrounds. Over the course of ten years, the small gathering multiplied and became an informal network which eventually became an official organization with several hundred members, regular Bible studies at different sites, weekly prayer meetings, and service events. As the group began to mature, a constitution was established with defined beliefs, principles of operation, and vision for the ministry.

One of the components that developed over time was the leadership team. In the beginning, I oversaw an informal partnership of spiritually mature Christians who were highly invested in the ministry. Each one contributed their own unique abilities and passion for Christ. As the ministry began to grow, it became necessary to define roles more concretely: one leader was appointed to coordinate events and service projects, one oversaw marketing and materials, one oversaw Bible studies, and one led prayer meetings, while others provided wisdom and general oversight. It was no small wonder to us how God provided such a diverse set of gifts and talents all within our place of work. But we came to learn that we were not the only ones. In various sites across the whole company, similar groups had been developing, and after ten years we began networking and building partnerships with the other marketplace ministry teams.

Towards the end of my tenure at the company, the leadership went through a significant evolution. At the time, we did not fully grasp that these changes were a defining moment for the longevity of the ministry. In a quiet moment of prayer, the Lord impressed upon me that it was my time to decrease so God could increase. As it stood, the ministry was entirely too dependent on my oversight. I was currently overseeing all teaching and decision making. Under the compulsion of the Spirit, I was charged to reorganize the leadership team so that it could function independently of me. This compulsion came with a sense of urgency to complete this transition within the next year. At the time, none of us knew that I would be transitioning out of the company in the near future.

Over the next twelve months, I passed on as much of my pastoral, seminary, and leadership training as I could: we reorganized the authority

structure so that the leadership team was less dependent on my role, and we discussed principles and processes for strategic planning, vision casting, and organizational leadership. In one year, we were functioning well in the new structure. Responsibilities had been delegated and there were back up leaders in every position. At this time, my company made a series of strategic changes, and my position was eliminated. My twelve-year employment had come to an end and with it so had my role in leading this ministry. With the little time that we had, the leadership team and I gathered in a conference room to say goodbye. I told them I was proud of them, placed the baton in their hands, and charged them to continue using their gifts as they had this past ten years. My time was over, but the ministry was not, and the Lord would prove it the very next day. The ministry had a large activity planned, and everything operated smoothly; the leadership team was fully functional in my unexpected absence. The leaders readily accepted their responsibilities and led with courage. My departure would not be the last challenge this team would face, but the ministry kept going. In a recent reunion, the team shared that all the major components of the ministry continue to this day.

The Fruit of Teams: Principles Learned from Team-Based MPM

In each season of this MPM, different challenges presented themselves, each with the potential to bring things to an end. However, at each juncture, the ministry continued to grow. In reflecting upon this journey, six important principles arise that were foundational to our long-term success.

1. **Team-based MPM leads to more holistic ministry.** By combining different giftings together, the MPM was able to offer a greater diversity of activities than one person could facilitate. Those who excel in encouragement could catalyze, those who are competent teachers could lead Bible studies, those who are full of compassion could pray with others, those overflowing with visual creativity could get the word out, and those seasoned by experience could provide discernment.
2. **Team-based MPM increases the scope and reach of the ministry.** Working within a large company, it was possible to serve a significant number of people. But delegation was necessary to ensure that every branch received its proper due. It might be possible for a full-

time Christian worker to be a circuit rider, but a full-time electrical engineer will not be able to do the same without compromising the quality of their work. By multiplying ministers, the burden is more easily shared, and work, life, and ministry balance is more feasibly maintained.

3. **Team-based MPM safeguards the ministry's and the minister's longevity.** Turnover is inevitable in the job market, and one does not always get to choose the terms and timing of their departure. Having leadership backups is therefore necessary. But having a deep bench provides value beyond succession planning; it supports the long-term health of the ministry team. Balancing a full-time job and a highly active volunteer ministry in your workplace is physically and spiritually taxing. Distributing the workload protects against volunteer burn out.
4. **MPM teams do not choose each other.** In a full-time ministry context, organizations have a lot of control over who they hire, and thus they can be highly selective about their leadership team's theology, denominational background, and personality. In an MPM, one's potential ministry partners have been chosen by the company and the sovereignty of God.
5. **MPM teams must be highly skilled in interdenominational partnerships and conflict resolution.** This principle extends from the previous one. Depending on the diversity of the region, both the leadership team and the members of the MPM could potentially come from a wide cross-section of denominational backgrounds and with that diversity there is significant potential for unhealthy disputes. However, denominational differences are not the only source of conflict. MPMs will face numerous ethical dilemmas which will contribute their own pressure on the ministry. Infighting—for any reason—would be disastrous for the future of an MPM. Secular companies have a spectrum of tolerance for religious activities in the workplace. If significant employee conflict arises from religious activities on the job site, more sensitive employers may sanction the ministry. MPMs must excel in diplomatic and peaceful relations with themselves and their company.
6. **MPM leaders require both prior leadership experience and ongoing training from local churches, seminaries, and ministries.**

A characteristic of every member of the leadership team was that they were significantly involved in their local church and/or had church leadership experience prior to serving on the MPM team. But further investment in their growth was necessary. Several conduits supplied training for the leadership team. I received leadership training from my local church and my seminary, and I was able to pass these lessons on to the other leaders. Seminary leaders and ministries also offered leadership development opportunities.

One theme found in all of these observations is that *the MPM leader is not alone*. God had assembled a talented and diverse leadership team to serve God at that company. MPM inherently required Christians to serve with other Christians outside of their own church. But fulfilling this plan of partnering together required intentionality. When we began, there were few examples of interdenominational teams that we could look to as role models. Many of the principles we learned were developed ad hoc. Here is where seminaries and churches have the opportunity and the responsibility to aid MPMs by modeling healthy, theologically sound, interdenominational partnerships. We will turn now to a biblical precedent for spiritual leaders to set the example of biblical unity.

Function Follows Form: Called to Model Unity

Ephesians 4 is a unique text that articulates the relationship between lay ministry and the unity of the body of Christ. It is also a transitional text that sets the stage for the lengthy paraenesis that will occupy the rest of the epistle (Lincoln 1990: 221; Witherington 2007: 283; Thielman 2010: 251). Here Paul weaves together the practical and the theological: Christians are called to live in a manner consistent with their calling in Christ by eagerly pursuing unity consistent with the nature of God (4:1–6). This unity is not to be confused with homogeneity; God in his victory has generously distributed unique gifts to all individuals in the church for their mutual benefit (4:7–11; Lincoln 1990: 224–225). These gifts will strengthen the church in truth, fortify it against false doctrine, and join its members together in reciprocal blessing (4:12–16). Unity is the fruit of these diverse gifts working together. Theology and practice, body and members, leaders and saints, Father, Son, and Spirit are all to be one. A sacred-secular dichotomy is antithetical to the heart of Christianity.

The body of Christ as described by Paul inverts the adage from architecture: *form follows function*. Rather, the *form* of God, his nature, precedes and defines how the body of Christ is to *function*: we are to imitate how God relates to humanity and how God relates to himself. The opening exhortation to walk (περιπατέω)—how the body functions—is a repeated rhetorical feature that draws the hearer’s attention to the central theme: “the hallmark of the *ethic* in Ephesians is *the imitation of God* in Christ in terms of truth and love. This ethic ... is the heart of the five walking ... sections” (Long 2013: 299; cf. Lincoln 1990: 243). The Father’s love for his people through Christ defines how all Christians are to love one another (Eph 4:2, 32). God’s people are also called to imitate a heavenly relationship: the Trinity. The singular nature of the faith is founded on the singular nature of the Father, Son, and Spirit who, while being separate and each performing a unique role, are still one God. A divided body—no matter how diverse its constituents—is antithetical to the very nature of God, and therefore cannot complete its proper function. Christian ethics may thus be understood as a combination of *applied soteriology* and *applied monotheism*.

Division, immaturity, and growth can likewise be understood in the same theological categories. The distracting and disruptive influence of false doctrine divides God’s people and sends them wandering in circles (περιφέρω).¹¹ Immature Christians (νήπιος) are susceptible to such contention. Therefore, the body of Christ must grow (αυξάνω) into a mature adult. Boys and girls must shed spiritual childhood, because it is women and men who resist heresy. The Lord’s plan for developing his body is to generously provide spiritual leaders. The *descent* of Christ (Eph 4:8–10) is variously understood, but wherever or whenever it may be, the intent of the reference is to emphasize the results of the *ascent*: the Lord has triumphed over the powers of death, and on his return, he brings the spoils of his victory to generously distribute (Lincoln 1990: 244–247; Thielman 2010: 269–273). The list of gifts is similar to those in Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12, but this list is unique in its focus on gifts related to spiritual leadership and the proclamation of truth. What then is the purpose and function of these leadership gifts with respect to the other parts of the body? Paul offers here one of his most detailed expositions of the relationship between Christian leaders and laity: leaders are to *equip* the saints (πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων; Eph 4:12). The call to train the saints is thus essential to the long-term health of the body, and therefore we must think carefully about the purpose and definition of this sacred duty.

Of these two questions, the goal of *equipping* in v. 12 is the more fiercely debated: are Christian leaders equipping the saints for their own service, or is equipping, the work of ministry, and the building of the body the sole prerogatives of Christian leaders? The answer to this question rests on how one interprets the relationship of the three prepositional phrases: (1) πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων (2) εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, (3) εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. If all three are understood to be coordinate or in apposition then these labors are the parallel purposes of the leadership gifts in v.11. In support of this view, Andrew T. Lincoln argues that the difference in prepositions (πρὸς and εἰς) is not sufficient to indicate a distinction between the first and second phrases and that the immediate context is focused on the ministry of church leaders (Lincoln 1990: 253–254). Others have argued that the structural differences in the phrases suggest they are not parallel but communicate a chain of events: leaders gifted by God train the saints who build up the body.¹²

If v. 12 only describes the works of the leaders in v. 11, then the saints are merely passive recipients of their ministries (Barth 2008: 479–480). This understanding is inconsistent with the focus of the passage: it both ends and begins with the theme of the whole body of Christ (4:1–2, 13–16). Indeed, such a reading would only fortify the sacred-secular divide: as Markus Barth writes,

This interpretation has an aristocratic, that is, a clerical and ecclesiastical flavor; it distinguishes the (mass of the) 'saints' from the (superior class of the) officers of the church. A clergy is now distinct from the laity, to whom the privilege and burden of carrying out the prescribed construction work are exclusively assigned. (Barth 2008: 479)

Thus, it is both syntactically and thematically consistent to treat the second phrase as the purpose of the equipping and the third phrase as the outcome of equipping the laity: the edification of the Body of Christ.

With the goal of equipping in view, we must consider the possible definitions of καταρτισμός. The frequently considered options are to restore, to complete, to prepare, and to train (Lincoln 1990: 254; Larkin 2009: 78; Barth 2008: 439). Ernest Best eliminates the last option because it would only apply to the gift of teacher and pastor, and he settles on *prepare* because the context is discussing how leaders develop laity.¹³ However, there is no reason to restrict the act of training only to teachers and pastors,

as speaking the truth (ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ) applies to the whole body of Christ (Eph 4:15).

There is yet another possibility that has not been fully explored. Καταρτισμός may have political connotations that would be salient in the Ephesian cultural context. Thirty miles to the south of Ephesus is the city of Miletus which was readily connected to it by commercial sea routes. Herodotus records that two generations before Miletus became the pride of Ionia, the city suffered from factional strife (Herodotus, *Hist.* 5.28–29). Therefore, the Milesians appointed the Parians to make peace (καταρτίζω).¹⁴ Upon arriving and surveying the situation, the Parians used the following method to bring order and productivity to the region:

Seeing the Milesian households sadly wasted, they said that they desired to go about the country. They then made their way through all the territory of Miletus, and whenever they found any well-tilled farm in the desolation of the land, they wrote down the name of the owner of that farm. After travelling over the whole country and finding only a few such men, they assembled the people immediately upon their return to the city and appointed as rulers of the state those whose lands they had found well tilled. *This they did in the belief that these men were likely to take as good care of public affairs as they had of their own*, and they ordained that the rest of the Milesians who had been at feud should obey these men. (Herodotus, *Hist.* 5.29.1–2 [Godley]; emphasis added)

Individuals who were examples of running their own affairs well were asked to bring peace and productivity to the region. The pattern outlined here is the same that Paul requires when appointing elders (1 Tim 3:5). In fact, both Paul and Herodotus use the same terminology (ἐπιμελέομαι: to care for or have oversight over). Thus, whether Paul intends καταρτισμός to communicate that leaders will teach or prepare, it is historically plausible that he is using double entendre which is immanently relevant to a discussion of maintaining unity and the healthy growth of the community: *only practitioners of peace are competent to build up a unified body.*

Some may object that the character of the leaders in Ephesians 4 is not directly in view. Three observations may be given in response. First, using a political analogy related to rulers is consistent with the themes of Ephesians and maturing body analogies in political discourse (Long 2013: 299). Second, the theme of being an exemplar is found so regularly in the

writings of Paul that it is difficult to imagine how this would not be in view at least secondarily (Ti 1:6–10; 1 Cor 11:1). Third, the whole theological-ethical logic of the passage is *function follows form*. If the unity of God is the form and the bond of peace is the functional aim, then how can the body of Christ reach that goal under the leadership of cantankerous guides? The theology of the NT is that “[the] fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by the ones producing peace” (Jas 3:18).¹⁵ Spiritual leaders must be exemplars of the unity they expect the body to grow into.

Practice, Practice, Practice: An Example to Consider

My simple proposal is that MPMs require partnerships, and it is the responsibility of spiritual leaders to model biblical partnerships. But how churches and theological institutions pursue this bond of peace across denominational lines is a challenging dilemma. The outspoken purpose of any teaching leader is to ground their students or congregations in the theology of their denomination (Tudor and Simion 2021: 128, 139). Indeed, the very ethos of Ephesians 4 is that unity is founded on theological content. A child becomes distracted because they have not developed the theological discernment to tell friend from foe. Mature spiritual leaders have the experience to know the difference (Heb 5:14). Thus, the solution cannot be found in the spirit of our modern era, which invites us to become agnostic about every biblical principle. To those weary of conflict, it is an enticing offer. But it must be recognized for what it is: another gust of wind turning the church in circles. Unity will not be found in vacating theological convictions but in having a clear view of who the Lord is and what defines our common faith.¹⁶

It would be unwise to offer a simple, tidy solution, but if discernment is the fruit of experience, then perhaps one way is for leaders, the mature, to practice biblical partnership. On this point, I commend an example from my experience at Asbury Theological Seminary. When applying to be an adjunct professor, I was asked to articulate my theological convictions on a series of issues central to Asbury’s mission. On these points, I explained where we agreed, where we differed, and why I thought this partnership was feasible. The leadership at Asbury agreed that it was viable for me to teach as long as I stayed within certain parameters. In being transparent about our theology and defining the scope of our partnership, both Asbury and I were able to proceed without violating our convictions.

This open dialogue allowed us to build trust and establish a relationship that has been fruitful. Herein lies a model that could be implemented in numerous situations by using the following steps:

1. Have each leader in the prospective partnership define their top five to ten theological convictions.
2. Trade lists with the other leaders and respond to each of their theological convictions with one of the following answers:
 - a. We are in complete agreement.
 - b. We are mostly in agreement, but I see no barrier to our partnership.
 - c. I have a different perspective, and I still see potential for us to work together. But I have questions.
 - d. We are not in agreement, and it would be difficult for us to proceed.
3. Meet to answer questions and discuss the scope of this partnership.

Often there is much anxiety about finding the wrong partners, and therefore we make no attempt. The consequence of never trying is our ability to work with others atrophies. It would be far better to give ourselves the Christian freedom to explore potential collaborations. Even if the result of the initial inquiry is that the prospective partnership is unviable, all parties involved now have a better understanding of their own limits and have grown in their ability to dialogue with others. The process outlined here does not guarantee the formation of a team. It does, however, put theological truth at the center while still fostering creative thinking about opportunities for teamwork that would have gone undiscovered by comparing denominational names alone.¹⁷ At minimum, it is a respectful way to practice the kind of dialogue that every marketplace minister will face.¹⁸

Conclusion: Go Find Your Team

The marketplace ministry movement has made incredible advances. Innovative ministries are being developed in all corners of the world. Those called to spiritual leadership must continue to reflect on its direction and how they can equip their laity for success. Consider the following hypothetical scenario of two young professionals entering the full-time workforce. Melany is a young entrepreneur who attended Asbury University. Her coworker, Amy, also studied business administration, but at

Boyce College. They both are people of studied conviction and earnestly desire to share Christ with their co-workers. Upon graduation they began working at a large firm in Lexington and by happenstance are seated next to each other. When Melany meets Amy she notices a copy of Tim Keller's *Every Good Endeavor* on her desk, and conversely Amy notices that Melany has a copy of Ben Witherington's *Work: A Perspective of Kingdom Labor*. This opens the door for some conversation, but they are uneasy because they are intimately aware of the disagreements between their denominations. Both trust in the authority of God's word, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit; but they have never worked with each other's churches and do not consider potential avenues for partnership. Over the first year, they develop professional camaraderie and occasionally pray for one another. After two years, Melany accepts a promotion and Amy takes a position at another company. On Amy's last day, they reflect on how nice it was that God provided a fellow Christian in the office and even some enjoyable theological sparring matches. But it does not occur to either of them what other possibilities could have been.

How many times has that scenario been played out? Was there no room under the banner of one faith, one Lord, and one baptism to do more? What if instead, both women were able to recall specific examples of partnerships their pastors and Bible college professors had built across denominational lines, and were able to ask those leaders for practical advice about how to proceed? In our churches, we are accustomed to associating with those that fit safely within our spiritual and traditional comfort zone. But MPM rarely provides such a luxury. If spiritual leaders can model biblically healthy partnerships, it opens a world of possibility for our places of work. The Lord of the harvest, who is always true to his word, will provide co-laborers, and it is the responsibility of his leaders to teach others how to go and find them.



NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT COPYRIGHT PERMISSION
OF ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

End notes

¹ This article is dedicated to the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ who served with me in marketplace ministry: this is your story.

² For a detailed taxonomy of the varieties of MPM, see Samuel Lee, *Faith In the Marketplace: Measuring the Impact of Church Based Entrepreneurial Approaches to Holistic Mission*, ASM 53 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), 23–28; for a general overview of the diversity within the MPM movement, see David W. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), ch. 1. The diversity within the MPM movement is perhaps due to the nature of work itself. For a review of the sociological and historical complexities of defining work, see Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 7–14.

³ For an overview of the distinctives of ECP compared to other innovative ministries, see Lee, *Faith in the Marketplace*, 26.

⁴ Cf. Miroslav Volf on Aquinas (*Work*, 69–70), Ben Witherington III on Luther (*Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011], 25–27), and John Jefferson Davis on the interpretation of the Great Commission (“‘Teaching Them to Observe All that I Have Commanded You’: The History of The Interpretation of the ‘Great Commission’ and Implication for Marketplace Ministries,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 25 [2001]: 65–80).

⁵ For a simple case study of the challenges laity face in finding pragmatic counsel and equipping, see Kara Martin, *Workship: How to Use Your Work to Worship God*, (Midview City, Singapore: Graceworks, 2017), 52; For an analysis of lay perceptions of equipping, see Dion Angus Forster and Johann W. Oostenbrink, “Where is the Church on Monday?: Awakening the Church to the Theology and Practice of Ministry and Mission in the Marketplace,” *In die Skriflig* 49(3) (2015): 3.

⁶ Martin, *Workship*; Kara Martin, *Workship 2: How to Use Your Work to Worship God*, (Midview City, Singapore: Graceworks, 2018); Cooper, *Missional Marketplace*; Witherington III, *Work*; Volf, *Work*; Stevens, *God’s Business*; Gordon Preece, *Marketplace Ministry: Occasional Paper No. 40*, eds. Timothy Liu and Wong Siew Li (Lausanne Committee, 2005).

⁷ In the 2004 Lausanne Forum for World Evangelization, Issue Group 11 was dedicated to marketplace ministry (Preece, *Marketplace Ministry*, i–iv); In South Africa, the Call42 group investigated the need for marketplace ministry (Forster, and Oostenbrink, “Monday,” 1–8).

⁸ Lausanne produced a comprehensive outline of topics and resources for training programs (Preece, *Marketplace Ministry*, 69–82). Kara Martin has created a holistic equipping program for churches with goals and mentoring plans (*Workship 2*, 124–234). Colleges and universities are developing marketplace ministry curriculum for students entering the secular workforce, see Kevin Selders, “To the Ends of the Marketplace,” *CT* 64 (2020): 83–92; Amy L. Sherman, “The Cutting Edge of Marketplace

Ministries: How Businesses Are Doing More Holistic Ministry Than Ever," *CT* 56 (2012): 47.

⁹ For an example of networking and church training for MPM, see Sherman, "The Cutting Edge," 44–47. For an overview of BAM from an active practitioner, see Cooper, *Missional Marketplace*, 185–196. For a comprehensive treatment of ECP, see Lee, *Faith in the Marketplace*, ch. 2.

¹⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *The Economics Daily*, "People born in early 1980s held an average of 8.2 jobs from ages 18 through 32," www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/people-born-in-early-1980s-held-an-average-of-8-point-2-jobs-from-ages-18-through-32.htm; cf. Selders, "Marketplace," 88.

¹¹ MGS, s.v. "περιφέρω."

¹² William J. Larkin suggests that if the phrases are parallel, τῶν ἁγίων would more appropriately be placed after the third prepositional phrase (εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ *τῶν ἁγίων; *Ephesians*, BHGNT [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009], 78). However, "for the building up of the body of Christ of the saints" would make a redundant phrase which is rather florid compared with the rest even if v. 12 is intending to describe the ministry responsibilities of different groups (i.e., leaders and laity). Frank Thielman suggests that the addition of the definite article in the first phrase alone sets them apart (*Ephesians*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic], 278). This argument is sounder because it would be grammatically feasible and even elegant to add an article to the second and third phrase. The decision to leave the article out thus suggests a clear choice was made to distinguish between the elements.

¹³ Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 395. However, Best does not maintain this conclusion consistently: "The root [διακονία] is often used by Paul of his preaching ministry ... both within and outwith the church ... and this would correspond to the work of the evangelist (v. 11); yet there is no reason to restrict preaching to church officials" (*Ephesians*, 396).

¹⁴ MGS, s.v. "καταρτίζω." There is clear morphological and semantic overlap in the verb and noun form of the root.

¹⁵ Author's translation.

¹⁶ This contrasts with perspectives that interpret the mystery of the Trinity (i.e., one God in three persons) as a warrant for partnerships without clear theological agreement; cf. Sandra Beardsall, Mitzi Budde, and William P. McDonald, "Space for the Other: Ecumenical Shared Ministries," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 54 (2019): 155–157.

¹⁷ Evidence suggests there is more enthusiasm for interdenominational partnerships at the grassroots level; cf. Samuel H. Reimer, "Lay Cooperation in Canada: Catholic and Mainline and Conservative Protestant Attitudes Toward Interdenominational Cooperation," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 41 (2004): 240.

¹⁸ Intentionality is often the most difficult step in developing interdenominational partnerships; cf. Tudor and Simion, "Interdenominational Networking," 134.

Works Cited

- Barth, Markus
2008 *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*. AYB 34A. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Beardsall, Sandra, Mitzi Budde, and William P. McDonald
2019 "Space for the Other: Ecumenical Shared Ministries." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 54: 151–167.
- Best, Ernest
1998 *Ephesians*. ICC. Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark.
- Cooper, Erik
2021 *Missional Marketplace: Finding Your Everyday Work in God's Eternal Plan*. Plainfield, IN: The Stone Table.
- Davis, John Jefferson
2001 "'Teaching Them to Observe All That I have Commanded You': The History of the Interpretation of the 'Great Commission' and Implication for Marketplace Ministries." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 25: 65–80.
- Forster, Dion Angus and Johann W. Oostenbrink
2015 "Where is the Church on Monday?: Awakening the Church to the Theology and Practice of Ministry and Mission in the Marketplace." *In die Skriflig* 49(3): 1–8.
- Keener, Craig S.
2014 *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 15:1–23:35*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Larkin, William J.
2009 *Ephesians*. BHGNT. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.
- Lee, Samuel
2021 *Faith In the Marketplace: Measuring the Impact of Church Based Entrepreneurial Approaches to Holistic Mission*. ASM 53. Eugene, OR: Pickwick.
- Lincoln, Andrew T.
1990 *Ephesians*. WBC 42. Dallas, TX: Word.

- Long, Fredrick J.
2013 "Paul's Theology in Greco-Roman Political Context." Pages 255–309 in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*. Edited by Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill.
- Martin, Kara
2018 *Workshop 2: How to Use Your Work to Worship God*. Midview City, Singapore: Graceworks.
2017 *Workshop: How to Use Your Work to Worship God*. Midview City, Singapore: Graceworks.
- Miller, David W.
2007 *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Preece, Gordon
2005 *Marketplace Ministry: Occasional Paper No. 40*. Edited by Timothy Liu and Wong Siew Li. Lausanne Committee.
- Reimer, Samuel H.
2004 "Lay Cooperation in Canada: Catholic and Mainline and Conservative Protestant Attitudes Toward Interdenominational Cooperation." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 41: 223–246.
- Selders, Kevin
2020 "To the Ends of the Marketplace." *CT* 64: 83–92.
- Sherman, Amy L.
2012 "The Cutting Edge of Marketplace Ministries: How Businesses Are Doing More Holistic Ministry Than Ever." *CT* 56: 44–47.
- Stevens, R. Paul
2006 *Doing God's Business: Meaning and Motivation for the Marketplace*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdemans.
- Thielman, Frank
2010 *Ephesians*. BECNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Tudor, Mihaela-Alexandra and Denise Elaine Burrill Simion
2021 "Culture, Structure, and Rational Interests in Interdenominational Networking: A Case Study of Romanian Orthodox Seminarians." *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 42: 124–141.
- Volf, Miroslav
2001 *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Witherington III, Ben

2007 *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles.* SRC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

2011 *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.



NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT COPYRIGHT PERMISSION
OF ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY