

Introduction to the Reading WELL Centre by Susan van Beveren

Revd. Susan M van Beveren, M.I.M.A., WELL Chaplain/Consultant is based in Reading for an Anglican Initiative of Programmes & Support Services for Work, Economic Life and Living (WELL) centre on 17 July 2003.

Introduction

Susan introduced herself as the Reading WELL (Work, Economic Life and Living) chaplain. Susan explained she had spent 11 years in Melbourne and 4 years in Amsterdam. Her background is primarily as an industrial chaplain (ordained priest) but she also trained in organisational change and development consulting. Being married with two sons, her previous roles have included chaplaincy and consulting for numerous business in Melbourne, Australia and the KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, the Netherlands. Now, Susan is with the WELL centre, being fully funded by the Anglican Reading Deanery.

Brief overview of Industrial Chaplain and WELL

Susan based her talk about the role of Industrial Chaplaincy on the passage in Isaiah 61, linking to the concepts of industrial mission and liberty etc. While this passage was Christ's mission call, it is also a good ministry text for work and economic life. As God's representatives, we are to engage people, grasp opportunities and take up new ways of ministry of bringing work and church together - breaking down the barriers that exist. The WELL is a meeting place for faith and work, bridging the secular and sacred divide. The WELL centre wants to bring together people with church/theological and business tuition and background. It is where business skill and Christian faith need to meet - WELL supports that, and has a genuine concern for business ethics, people and sound practice.

Two key ways

There are two key ways of doing Industrial Mission: (1) a pastoral response, involving listening, counselling, and care for people in the workplace (which is the most commonly understood task); (2) prophetic engagement - of being the critical friend to an organisations and reviewing the practices etc.. (This includes exploring what being ethical means - authenticity of being, walking the talk or not; and needing to ensure it actually happens. Ethical business is then about drawing people into that authenticity, with a wider impact).

Well centre

The symbol of the well – having a ripple effect, ties into the philosophy of the WELL, being a centre of the community, where people meet. There is Biblical precedent, with the water being life giving and life changing: a place of refreshment.

Church networking

This is on an ecumenical basis: preaching, teaching and pastoral ministry in Reading churches, collegial networking through CTIR, RCN, etc.

Networking

Includes supporting other chaplaincy groups, be that in a formal or informal manner, including the hospital, prison, defence etc, and developing interfaith dialogue.

Business Networking

Exploring partnership possibilities, engaging current business issues, working with organisations on Corporate Social Responsibility & Policy Issues and Developing Business Networks

This can be working, visiting, supporting or coordinating an expanding group of ordained and qualified lay ministries. This includes workplace Chaplaincy and counselling, pastoral employee assistance programmes, organising consulting projects – it is about being there, and knowing what it going on there, and not being an off-line psychologist group. A Chaplain is primarily being there to listen. But there is the potential to tip over to prophetic from the overall issues that could be picked up from the pressure points identified from walking the floors. This permits the creative release of the resources required for the activity by the lay people rather than just stipendary clergy or industrial chaplains.

Counselling and consulting services

This includes developing a referral network of professional specialists - pastoral counsellors, career development Counsellors, professional mentors, Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Doctors, Therapists etc - a medical stream. Sometimes this may be a way into an organisation that leads onto the on the floor work of the traditional industrial chaplain work.

Education

This will include developing practical ministry skills and theological reflection, parish consultations and workshops, monthly forum with Christian and Business people speaking, training courses and conferences and academic research and debate. Say that a particular group wanted a series of four sessions on a particular subject then WELL would facilitate its delivery. People are looking to this from the business community as well as from the church community. The WELL would also act as a signpost for other events relevant to this area of work. Lastly, Susan said she expected doctoral thesis work to come out of WELL.

Support services

These will include developing and resourcing Christian thought and spirituality, workplace Christian groups, prayer and study groups, work and family discussion and support groups, retreats and away days. In addition, developing clusters to support people. Examining the Impact of suspending work for motherhood or redundancy as other examples. Incidentally, retreats may appeal to Christians for whom a CU group is not applicable.

Misunderstandings

One key misunderstanding can be that a chaplain is only concerned about bringing people to Christ - proselytisation is not part of the WELL centre brief, and for some people that is all they can see and wish to do. However, the WELL centre looks broader, to say the Faithworks charter as an example, being committed to excellence in the community. There is also a code that Industrial Chaplains have to work under that includes having to work with all people regardless of their faith. The chaplain is

there for everyone, being there due who I am and what I believe but for you as a loved person I come for you. The chaplain is not to impose but permit expression and make space for employees to share their concerns as they wish to - being committed to serving others.

We should be willing, all of us, to embody who we are in Christ, including in our work - always being willing to give a reason as why we have our hope. Remember that God is in the world and at work in the world of work and we stand on holy ground. So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth from all nations.

The session then split into groups who were asked to consider the needs of the workplace, the WELL response and what understanding of God to make us do that response.

Needs:

- Pressure
- Stresses and deadlines
 - Reflection
 - Security
 - To fill a void
- Relationship & fellowship
 - Understanding
 - Someone to listen
 - Christ
 - Loneliness
 - Work and life basis
- Lack of purpose and significance
 - Shared vision

Practical / working life response:

- Christian counsellor / pastoral care worker
 - Listening ear time out
 - Space support right environment
 - Happy workers are more productive
- Affirmation of Christians in the workplace, life in all its fullness

Theological Understanding:

- Love
 - Patience
 - Willing to listen
 - Gratitude thankful for work
 - Non-judgemental
 - No secular sacred divide to get over
- Loving our neighbour, life as worship, compassion and wholeness