RELIGIOUS LEADERS AS FACILITATORS OF MEANING MAKING

SANDRA F. SELBY

Abstract: Drawing on four decades of experience as a leader in a Fortune 500 company, social services, and the church, I call on religious leaders to be facilitators of meaning making in a world that is changing at a bewildering rate. A post-modern, post-Christian, diversifying world with accelerating global connections, struggling economies, and increasing stratification has challenged religious and secular institutions alike. In this context, religious leaders can facilitate meaning making by bridging the "Sunday–Monday gap," connecting the daily experience of those they serve to deeper sources of meaning. Inherent in this challenge is addressing the reality of women's leadership issues in the workplace and in today's changing contexts.

Meaning Making

The "Sunday–Monday Gap"

A primary challenge faced by religious leaders today is in bridging the "Sunday-Monday gap," connecting the life of the church to the daily lives of its parishioners. The church is called to participate in God's transforming work of reconciling love by embodying an alternative vision for the world: one of welcome, wholeness, compassion, and hope. Its leaders, in turn, are called to empower people to imagine how that alternative vision can be lived out within and beyond the four walls of the church. Central to this calling is facilitating the process of meaning making, helping others to make sense of their experience by connecting it to a deeper purpose. Yet, faced with declining membership, the church increasingly

Sandra F. Selby is Associate Pastor at Furnace Street Mission, Akron, Ohio, and a doctoral candidate at Methodist Theological School in Ohio

seems focused on its own internal issues, while people are struggling to find meaning in their lives. The gap from Sunday morning worship to Monday morning reality is widening.

David Miller, author of *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement*, writes:

> Many who are Christians complain of a 'Sunday-Monday gap,' where their Sunday worship hour bears little to no relevance to the issues they face in their Monday workplace hours. Though notable exceptions exist, sermon topics, liturgical content, prayers, and pastoral care rarely address—much less recognize—the spiritual questions, pastoral needs, ethical challenges, and vocational possibilities faced by those who work in the marketplace and world of business.[1]

The church does, of course, value the commercial marketplace to some extent. Business processes, language, and measurements have permeated religious institutions, with the success of parish clergy increasingly measured by instruments from the world of business. Yet, as Miller suggests, the interface between the church and the marketplace is often a one-way exchange: the church appropriates management tools from business for its own use while offering little insight or support to those who work in business day in and day out. Miller views the inattention of clergy and religious professionals to the workplace as arising from "an insufficient theology," one that lacks "a contemporary theology of work." He quotes Miroslav Volf's *Work in the Spirit*:

> Amazingly little theological reflection has taken place in the past about an activity which takes up so much of our time. The number of pages theologians have devoted to transubstantiation—which does or does not take place on Sunday—for

---

[1] David Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10.

instance, would, I suspect far exceed the number of pages devoted to work that fills our lives Monday through Saturday.[2]

The inattention of the church to the realities of the workplace leads many who work in business to lead compartmentalized lives. In *The Congruent Life*, C. Michael Thompson describes how this compartmentalization can happen:

...model[ing] itself after the institutions of the prevailing commercial culture, [the church] increasingly borrows its structure, its procedures, and even its bottom-line measures of success from business, losing all the while its ability to stand outside the dominant culture as a prophetic and inspiring voice. Working people who enter its doors seeking a more congruent life often simply find themselves in the same spin of activity, conflict, and intrigue that marks their experience of the workaday world—chairing committees, raising money, and attending endless meetings just as they do at work. They're fed the same food they eat of necessity every day on their jobs, with not so much as a side dish of the meaning, hope, and purpose for which they came.[3]

Miller, Volf, and Thompson speak to my own experience. During my twenty-five years in industry, not once did I hear from the pulpit or in adult education classes any reference to the challenges of the workplace where I spent most of my waking hours. The church did little to help me see how Sunday morning related to the reality of the workplace in which I found myself the following day. As a woman, I found this Sunday–Monday gap especially problematic, because I worked in a male-dominated company that embodied what William

---

[2] Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), as quoted in Miller, 89.

[3] C. Michael Thompson, *The Congruent Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 27.

Kondrath calls "the power-over/power-with impasse" that functions within many institutions. He writes:

> Though some women clearly identify with and function according to the male model of power-over structures, those who identify as female are more likely to attempt to share power, ensure that everyone's voice is heard, be comfortable with ambiguous situations, and avoid unilateral stands that lead to win/lose conflicts. They are more likely to initiate and sustain processes that involve dialogue rather than debate.[4]

As a woman valuing relational, "power-with" dynamics, I struggled to claim my voice within a male-dominated culture that "[valued] differences in terms of better than or less than."[5] This struggle became part of the deeper challenge of bridging the Sunday–Monday gap to make meaning of my experience in the workplace.

Experiencing the gap

They came to my office at the corporate headquarters of a Fortune 500 company in rapid succession, the company's director of security, followed within the hour by the director of medical services. There was a problem: they had learned of my plans to travel to rural Haiti with a group from my church. The chief of security came armed with a sheaf of papers including a travel advisory from the U.S. State Department. "Haiti is a dangerous place," he said. "You must not go there." Next came the company's medical director, a physician who began by listing the diseases that were then prevalent in Haiti: AIDS, polio, elephantiasis, hepatitis, and any number of tropical viruses. "Haiti is a cesspool," he said. "You must not go there."

Why this sudden interest in my travel plans? The previous week, the conversation among a group of

---

[4] William Kondrath, *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2008), 173.
[5] Kondrath, 172.

company executives traveling on the company plane had turned to August vacation plans. The usual variety of beach and golf trips were mentioned before I said, "I'll be going to Haiti on a mission trip with my church." "Why would you ever want to do such a thing?" "You're crazy!" my colleagues exclaimed. Someone senior to me in the group apparently decided it was not only foolish but dangerous for me to go; hence the visits from the security and medical folks. No one thought I should go on the trip. Except Lee. As chief financial officer of the company, Lee was two levels above me. He was also active in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints at the state and national level. Lee called me to his office and asked, "Why do you want to go to Haiti?" "When the opportunity arose, I felt called to go there," I responded. "Then you must go," Lee said, "I'll support you in this, and when you get back I want to hear all about your trip."

I went to Haiti in August 1989 and returned safely without having contracted any of the diseases listed by our medical director. Shortly after my return I showed Lee my pictures and told him stories from the trip. From that time forward Lee was a mentor to me, someone who modeled how to integrate one's faith with one's work. In a Fortune 500 company Lee was a religious leader, one whose beliefs carried over into his work in a way that formed a community of faith beyond his church. Unfortunately, a few months later I was transferred to another part of the company, leaving me with little contact with Lee during my remaining years there. He remained a mentor, though from a distance.

Four years after my trip to Haiti, I was with about a dozen others gathered for dinner at a private dining room in the Ritz-Carlton in Scottsdale, Arizona. The group consisted of executives and their wives. As usual, I was the only female executive in the group. President Clinton had just launched an initiative to reform health care, and the senior executive among us had asked what we thought about it. Two other women and I argued that the lack of health care for millions of Americans was an issue

of justice, but we were drowned out by a chorus of executives saying, "Do you know what that would do to our taxes?" At that, an inner voice said, "I can't do this anymore."

Sometime later I sat in a conference room in Maui with the global leadership team that included fifty men and me. The financial projections for the year were looking grim, and people were worried they wouldn't get their bonuses. "Well," the president said, "you all simply have to take costs out of your businesses. If that means getting rid of people, so be it." But there wasn't much time to discuss it further that morning; the meeting was being hurried along so that people could make their tee times. So the word went out to the business units to reduce headcount. And the inner voice said, "I can't do this anymore."

During this time I became increasingly active in my church and held several positions in lay leadership. While my mentor Lee helped model how to bring one's faith to work, my church offered little guidance. I was living the life described by Thompson, being "fed the same food" at church: meetings, income statements, and balance sheets, "with not so much as a side dish of the meaning, hope, and purpose for which [I] came."[6] I was struggling to find meaning in my work, and my inner voice was confirming that struggle.

Women in Leadership

Part of the struggle, I know, came from being a woman working in the male environment of the industrial corporation that I had joined out of business school in 1981. For the next eighteen years I was "the first woman" in any job I held and one of only a few female executives within the company. Thirty years after I joined that company, the title of an October 2011 *New York Times*

---

[6] Thompson.

article by Phyllis Korkki read, "For Women, Parity Is Still a Subtly Steep Climb."[7] Perhaps there is some solace in knowing that in the last thirty years the "steep climb" that I and my female peers faced in the early 1980s can now be described as "subtly" steep. After ten years of steady increases, the number of Fortune 500 senior executive positions held by women has remained the same as in 2005, at about fourteen percent, despite the fact that "women in the United States now collect nearly 60% of four-year degrees and they make up nearly half the American work force."[8] In the article Ilene Lang, the head of Catalyst, a not-for-profit group that focuses on women in the workplace, attributes this stagnation to "'entrenched sexism' that is no less harmful for being largely unconscious...social norms...are so gendered and so stereotyped that even though we think we've gone past them, we really haven't."[9]

Lang goes on to describe a phenomenon that characterizes my own experience and that of female friends and associates in corporations, academia, health care, the church, and not-for-profit agencies. Lang, says Korkki, "describes a corporate environment that offers much more latitude to men and where the bar is much higher for women. In her view, men tend to be promoted based on their promise, whereas women need to prove themselves multiple times."[10] Early in my business career, a man who had been my manager told me that I had been passed over for a promotion for which he admitted I was the most qualified candidate because "for me to put a woman in that job [in 1983] would have been perceived as very risky, and at that time in my career I wasn't prepared to take that risk." He gave the job to a less-

---

[7] Phyllis Korkki, "For Women, Parity Is Still a Subtly Steep Climb," *New York Times*, October 9, 2011.
[8] Korkki.
[9] Korkki.
[10] Korkki.

qualified male candidate. Thirty years later it seems that women still are perceived as a risky bet.

Korkki contends that we women don't help ourselves because we lack some of the "societal skills" that help men move up the organizational ladder. One of those is self-promotion. Executive coach and leadership expert Peggy Klaus told Korkii that women tend to praise others while understating their own contributions. "'Then they get really angry when they get passed over for the bonus and the promotion."[11] The McKinsey Leadership Project published in 2008 by McKinsey & Company concluded that "many [women] think that hard work will eventually be noticed and rewarded. That can indeed happen—but usually doesn't."[12] The dilemma of losing out on promotions because of not wanting to self-promote is a result of what Carol Gilligan, in her research on the development of girls, calls "a loss of voice."[13] In describing this phenomenon Kondrath writes,

> When the power is unequal, girls begin to lose their voice and go out of authentic relationship with their values, their ideals, and their history, but they keep trying to maintain the semblance of mutuality in relationships where the other or the culture is bullying them, and of course it doesn't work.[14]

In the two situations from my own work experience that I mentioned earlier, my inner voice that said "I can't do this anymore" was expressing the extent to which I felt alienated in the workplace from my own values and ideals. Because I did not feel empowered to express those values and ideals, I found that the inner voice fell silent.

Recognizing that women face particular challenges in the workplace, McKinsey undertook the Leadership Project "to learn what drives and sustains successful

---

[11] Korkki.

[12] Joanna Barsh, Susie Cranston, and Rebecca Craska, "Centered Leadership: How Talented Women Thrive," in *The McKinsey Quarterly* (4) (2008): 46.

[13] Kondrath, 160.

[14] Kondrath.

female leaders"[15] in hopes that the findings would provide valuable information that would help women at McKinsey and elsewhere advance their careers. From their interviews, other research, and a study of academic literature, McKinsey developed a model of "centered leadership [that provides] a well of physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual strength that drives personal achievement and, in turn, inspires others to follow." While the model applies to men as well, McKinsey believes that the model is especially suited to the experiences and needs of women.[16] In particular, the model addresses what McKinsey found to be distinguishing characteristics of women in the workplace: the dual roles, for many, of "motherhood and management" that can be a significant drain on energy; and, the tendency of women to experience "more emotional ups and downs more often and more intensely than most men do."[17]

The "centered leadership" model includes five dimensions: meaning, managing energy, positive framing, connecting, and engaging. While the study does not indicate that women in religious organizations were among those interviewed, in my own experience these dimensions apply to the demands of leadership in a range of organizations, including the church. In McKinsey's model, meaning derives from happiness, using one's "signature strengths," and purpose. The linkage between happiness and meaning derives from the work of Martin Seligman and others around positive psychology, which defines "a progression of happiness that leads from pleasure to engagement to meaning." Meaning, according to Seligman, results in higher job satisfaction and productivity and, says McKinsey, may also include a sense

---

[15] Barsh, et. al., 36.
[16] Barsh, et. al.
[17] Barsh, et. al.

of transcendence that contributes to a "deeper sense of meaning."[18]

These findings echo the results of "A Study of Spirituality in the Workplace," published in 1999 in *MIT Sloan Management Review*. Scores of people working in a corporate setting were asked, "What gives you the most meaning and purpose in your job?" The answers work against the stereotypes we often hear, as the following factors, in order, were identified as giving people the most meaning and purpose: (1) The ability to realize my full potential as a person; (2) Being associated with a good or ethical organization; (3) Interesting work; (4) Making money; (5) Having good colleagues; serving humankind; (6) Service to future generations; (7) Service to my immediate community.[19] People want to integrate their deep values with their professional life. These findings reveal several linkages to McKinsey's identification of meaning as a cardinal dimension of centered leadership. The Sloan article reveals something else related to meaning: people feel able to express their intelligence and their creativity in the workplace, but they do not feel able to express their feelings. As a result, they don't think they can bring their whole selves to work, as the workplace doesn't readily allow them to do so.[20] The inability to express one's feelings in the workplace represents what Christina Robb calls the "central relational paradox" by which girls shape themselves to conform to cultural norms: "keeping your true feelings out of relationship to maintain some semblance or remnant of relationship."[21] In the face of pressure to hold an important part of their inner life separate from their work life, people are encouraged to compartmentalize

---

[18] Barsh, et. al., 38.

[19] Ian Mitroff and Elizabeth Denton, "A Study of Spirituality in the Workplace," in *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 40 (4) (Summer 1999): 85.

[20] Mitroff and Denton, 86.

[21] Christina Robb, *This Changes Everything: The Relational Revolution in Psychology* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2006), 26, quoted by Kondrath, 160.

their experience, which for women in particular is a recipe for burnout.

McKinsey's research identifies two dimensions of centered leadership that help to address the issues of compartmentalization: managing energy, and positive framing. A study published in *Harvard Business Review* in 2006 states that ninety-two percent of women still manage all household tasks, including child care and preparing meals, a phenomenon that McKinsey refers to as the "second shift." For them, managing energy, including minimizing depletion, restoration, and flow, is essential. The work of minimizing depletion is centered around avoiding burnout. Psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi identified "flow," the phenomenon of not noticing the passage of time due to one's intense engagement, as characteristic of individuals whose work energizes them, yielding higher job satisfaction and productivity.[22]

The frames through which we view the world, whether optimistic or pessimistic, can affect the quality of our decisions, as optimists tend to see the world more realistically than pessimists. Because optimists see the adversity around them realistically, they are able to develop strategies to counter that adversity. Referencing the work of Martin Seligman, the McKinsey study states that the ability to develop the skill of positive framing can be learned. In his book *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, Seligman describes how pessimism can deplete one's energy by promoting a tendency to see reality, especially negative experience, as persistent, pervasive, and personal. But people who by nature are pessimistic can, by being self-aware, process a negative experience by seeing it as having an impact that is temporary, specific, and impersonal.[23] Such positive

---

[22] Barsh, et. al., 41.

[23] Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life* (New York: Pocket Books, 1998), 41-53.

framing is especially important for women, who are twice as likely as men to become depressed.[24]

The fourth characteristic of centered leadership is connecting, which includes having a strong network, practicing reciprocity and inclusiveness, and sponsorship. McKinsey's research reveals that women tend to have narrower and deeper networks and relationships than men, and men's broader (albeit shallower), networks give them more access to important work-related knowledge and opportunities. If leadership "is the ability to figure out where to go and to enlist the people and groups necessary to get there,"[25] the strong networks that men often have can be an asset.

The McKinsey study also discusses "the importance of having individual relationships with senior colleagues willing to go beyond the role of mentor—someone willing to stick out his or her own neck to create opportunity for or help a protégée,"[26] an individual that one female financial services executive calls a "sponsor."[27] Looking back on my own experience in business I can identify two mentors, both male, who were instrumental in serving as advisers, encouragers, and sources of feedback. Both individuals were two levels above me in the organization, and both took an interest in my development without my having to ask them to serve as a mentor. I never had a female mentor because there were no women senior to me during my business career. I would have sought male mentors in any event, as their perspective was so helpful to me in negotiating the male environment and power structure in the industrial company for which I worked.

---

[24] Barsh, et. al., 42.

[25] Mark Hunter and Herminia Ibarra, "How Leaders Create and Use Networks," *Harvard Business Review*, 85 (1) (2007): 40-47, as quoted in Barsh, et. al., 44.

[26] Barsh, et. al.

[27] Barsh, et. al.

While my male mentors helped me to understand and negotiate the politics and practices of our company, it was a sponsor, Bob, whose advocacy was directly responsible for my promotion to vice president. I had replaced a vice president when he retired. At the time, my boss, Dave, told me that he would give me Ed's job but with a director's title, and I would need to earn the promotion to vice president. I served in that capacity, with the title of director, for at least a year, with feedback that I was performing well in the position. In time I was, indeed, promoted to vice president. It was only later that I learned what precipitated that promotion.

Like me, Bob reported to Dave, so Bob knew my work. I worked closely with Bob and with Dave's other direct reports, but because I was at the director level, not the vice president level, I was not included in certain meetings and activities, especially the offsite golf outings and other work-related social occasions of the (all male), executive team. So yes, I can relate firsthand to the comments in the McKinsey report about the hard road that women face in being recognized for their contributions. Here's what Bob told me:

> I said to Dave, Sandy's doing very good work, in fact better work than Ed did. "Yes she is," Dave replied. "She's doing a great job." "So why," Bob asked, "is she still a director? She should be a vice president, Dave." At this point Dave, looking uncomfortable, said, "But Bob, what's it going to be like to have a woman along on our executive team outings? Will we have to act differently? It just seems uncomfortable." Bob: "Don't be ridiculous, Dave. She's more than earned that promotion. Give it to her." Dave: "You're right, Bob. I'll do that."

Dave did give me the promotion, and from that point on he became a sponsor and advocate. Bob had opened his eyes. In discussing gender-based power Kondrath says, "Many people who identify as male often unconsciously accept and rely on societal rules that favor them, that give them more power and unearned privilege, and see those

who identify as female as less than themselves."[28] In my situation, it took a male ally to challenge another male on his own reliance on societal rules favoring male dominance. What can complicate sponsorship is the sexual dynamics that Korkki describes in her article. The McKinsey study says:

> One surprising thing we learned as a result of talking with female leaders was that they often fail to reciprocate and find expectations that they should do so distasteful. A senior partner at McKinsey noted that men naturally understand that you must "give before you get," but women don't. This tendency—which other leaders have described to us as well—combined with the sometimes awkward sexual politics, real or perceived, between senior men and younger women, makes it harder for women to find sponsors.[29]

The final dimension of centered leadership is engaging, consisting of finding one's voice, ownership, risk taking, and adaptability.[30] As discussed earlier, finding voice does not come easily to women. McKinsey quotes Julie Daum, an executive recruiter specializing in board placements, as saying "even senior women on boards still lose out by not speaking up: they hang back if they think that they have nothing new to say or that their ideas fall short of profound."[31] And who among us has not had the experience of not being heard when we raise an idea in a meeting with no response from the men in the room, only to have a male colleague congratulated for saying the same thing later in the conversation?

Mid-way through my career, I was given a promotion to a position at the director level on the staff of one of the company's business segments. My position entitled

---

[28] Kondrath, 173.
[29] Barsh, et. al., 45.
[30] Barsh, et. al., 37.
[31] Barsh, et. al., 46.

me to travel with the management team from around the world to the annual management meeting. I was the only woman in a group of forty. On the first day of the meeting, we participated in team-building where we were organized into competitive teams to conduct problem-solving exercises. After three such exercises, the division president called us together. Addressing the group, Dave said, "I've been observing you in these exercises and there's something I need to say. In every exercise, Sandy has come up with a correct solution that has been ignored. The rest of you did not acknowledge what she said, and she turned out to be right. So guys, you need to listen to her, and Sandy, you need to speak up and argue your point." It took me awhile to find my voice with that group, and with each move to a new department, I needed to find my voice again. In the workplace, many women can be invisible and mute among groups of men. We need to claim our voices.

The McKinsey report summarizes the centered leadership model, which it calls "a new approach to leadership [that] can help women become more self-confident and effective business leaders,"[32] as involving "a shared purpose with deep meaning for the people involved, explicit awareness and management of energy, positive framing, strong informal and formal networks, and the collaborative creation of opportunities."[33] While the McKinsey Leadership Study states that such leadership provides a "well" of spiritual strength, its only hint as to the source of that spiritual strength is in a brief reference to how, for some individuals, transcendence provides a bridge to finding deeper meaning and purpose in their work. In my own case, it became clear over time that in order to claim my voice I needed to engage consciously in issues of meaning and purpose in order to bring my whole self to work. While Gilligan, Robb, and others state that the struggle to claim one's voice is

---

[32] Barsh, et. al., 35.
[33] Barsh, et. al., 48.

characteristically a female challenge, integration of spirituality and work is acknowledged as an issue for many men, as well. The "Faith at Work" movement is one of the avenues through which the linkage of the workplace to sources of meaning is being addressed.

Faith at Work

In *God at Work*, David Miller traces the "Faith at Work movement" from its roots in the Social Gospel era to today and cites a "marked increase…in Faith at Work activity" in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. He quotes a 1999 Gallup survey of the religious landscape in the United States: "Two of the underlying desires of the American people at this time are to find deeper meaning in life and to build deeper, more trusting relations with other people in our often impersonal and fragmented society."[34] Miller adds,

> If there is one overriding theme or organizing principle that appears to be a commonly held view by virtually all participants in the movement and that drives interest in Faith at Work, it is a quest for integration. There is a shared view that faith and work are not meant to be separated or isolated from each other. Businesspeople want the ability to bring their whole selves to work—mind, body, and soul—and are no longer satisfied with sacrificing their core identities or being mere cogs in the machine, nor do they want a disconnected spirituality…just as they seek spirituality in their work, they want to bring the issues of their work into their worship. Christian businesspeople and other professionals find common agreement that living a bifurcated life, where faith and work are compartmentalized, is neither true to the Gospel nor a healthy way to work. Integration

---

[34] Miller, 73.

acknowledges the distinctive natures of faith and work, as well as other different spheres of life, while also bringing them together in a reconstructive, dialectical, and holistic fashion.[35]

But such integration is not easily accomplished. During my business career the inner voice that said, "I can't do this anymore" surfaced around issues of equality and justice that I now see were fundamentally theological issues. Because of the central relational paradox for women that Kondrath describes, I struggled with how to communicate those concerns to my workplace colleagues. "Voice" and "vocation" share a common root word.[36] As I sought over time to engage in issues of meaning and purpose related to my work, I began to examine more directly my calling as a religious leader. I had felt called to ordained ministry since high school, but the lack of female clergy role models in my formative years, coupled with economic necessity, led me to get a job in business after college—something that I had never intended to do. In time I came to see that business could be challenging and rewarding, so I received an M.B.A. and pursued a career in business. Periodically the call to ministry would surface again, but it never seemed the right time; in the meantime, I sought to find meaning and purpose in my work in business. To some extent I was successful. I came to see that one can be a "religious" leader in the workplace by honoring the fundamental equality of all people regardless of rank, by showing hospitality to others, by treating others with compassion, and by trying to influence the company to make just and ethical decisions. The calling to ordained ministry kept surfacing, though, and I determined that I would ultimately retire early to pursue that vocation. That time came sooner than I had anticipated, however. My boss, the chairman and CEO, decided to move the company's headquarters hundreds of miles away, a decision for which there

---

[35] Miller, 74.

[36] *vox, vocare* (Latin) www.etymonline.com, accessed 1/17/12.

seemed to be no strategic or financial justification. He wanted me to relocate and "leave all this stuff behind," including the two hundred people who would lose their jobs. But my inner voice once again had other ideas: "I can't do this anymore." This time vocation empowered voice, and I paid attention. I gave notice that I intended to resign, but due to the transition that was occurring in the company I stayed for another six months. During that time I was indeed a religious leader at work, spending much of my time listening to and counseling employees struggling with any number of issues, from whether to relocate with the company and be treated as a "traitor" to their friends who were losing their jobs, to how to handle the anger and grief they were experiencing due to losing their workplace "family." I left the company in 1999, went to seminary, was ordained, and for four years worked part-time on the clergy staff of a large church and part-time for a parachurch with which I had been associated for more than twenty years. For the past four years I have been engaged full-time in community ministry through the parachurch.

A Change of Venue

Having been a religious leader in business for many years, for the last eight years I have been a religious leader in religious institutions. Earlier in this article, I said that when I was in business, issues of the workplace had never been raised from the pulpit or in adult education class in the church I attended. I suspect that omission is partly because never having worked in business, the clergy didn't know where to start. Perhaps discussions with parishioners about their workplace experience occurred in one-on-one pastoral care, but it was never a matter of public discussion. I have tried to change that. I taught a class at church on "The Meaning of Work" that led a group of businesspeople who attended that class to start a weekly discussion of faith and the workplace. Recently I preached a sermon in a congregation and on

the radio about compartmentalization and the workplace, and the church's role in that compartmentalization, based on the lectionary text, Matthew 22:15-22. The feedback? Lots of stories, along with gratitude for having named the issue. People want to feel that what they do from Monday to Friday has something to do with what they hear in church on Sunday so they can make sense of their workplace experience; by and large, they told me, the church hasn't helped them address that deep desire.

One year ago, through my parachurch, I started a workplace ministry designed specifically for people who do crisis work. The aim of this ministry is to help individuals find meaning in their work so that they can cope with the trauma and stress of the workplace, an area of interest that is the focus of my doctoral studies. At noon each Wednesday, a group of social workers and others who work with rape victims, battered women, children who witness violence, elder abuse victims, and others who suffer trauma gather for "Spiritual Food," a time of music, guided meditation, reflection, and conversation. The reflection from Spiritual Food is shared as "Food for the Journey" via email to a distribution list of crisis workers whose schedules do not permit them to attend the Wednesday gathering. Many of these individuals have churches of their own but find their workplace experiences of vicarious traumatization and secondary traumatic stress outside the range of Sunday morning discourse and church programming. Our time together helps crisis workers find meaning and healing in story, in art, and in community with others who work day in and day out in situations of trauma and suffering.

While one man attends Spiritual Food periodically and a few men are on the mailing list for Food for the Journey, feedback suggests that this ministry is particularly meaningful for women because it addresses the distinctly female challenges outlined in McKinsey's centered leadership model: meaning, managing energy, positive framing, connecting, and engaging. Women come to Spiritual Food because they appreciate a time of

serenity in the middle of a chaotic work week. They also value the opportunity to connect with others who experience and understand the particular challenges of crisis work, and the toll that such work can take on one's emotional and spiritual well-being. They are relieved to be able to share stories, thoughts, and feelings that are not welcomed in their workplace and at home. For these women, Spiritual Food offers sustenance and hope in the wilderness of daily living.

Closing the "Sunday–Monday Gap"

The church in a post-Christian age can develop a new understanding of the relationship between church and society by relating the gospel to the social order and becoming, as George Hunsberger writes, "the genuine organizing center integrating the fragmented pieces of modern living."[37] The church can become that "organizing center" by being intentional about engaging the daily issues that parishioners confront at home and in the workplace around matters of time, money, energy, and meaning.

My workplace ministry illustrates the hunger that those who do crisis work, especially women, have for making connections between their spirituality and the chaotic, frightening, violent world they encounter through their work. The reflections offered at the weekly Spiritual Food gatherings and through Food for the Journey are around themes common to the experience of crisis workers. What I hear in conversations around those reflections is that the women in our group hunger for opportunities to lead more integrated lives so that they can make sense of their workplace challenges, family issues, and the stress of daily living. I hear this hunger as

---

[37] George Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America," in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, ed. George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 22.

well during individual counseling and in meetings with individuals and groups in the workplace after particularly traumatic events. In a world that encourages compartmentalization, women long for wholeness.

A colleague who serves as chair of stewardship at her church is addressing the Sunday–Monday gap through an expansive approach to stewardship as a year-round, intentional way of living. Each week she raises a question about spirituality and daily life in the worship bulletin. Occasionally the question is discussed during the announcement time in worship. Opportunities for conversation around the question are offered on the church's Facebook page. It is exciting, she says, to see the conversations between teenagers and seniors on Facebook about the challenges of being a Christian in all aspects of daily life. In addition, the stewardship chair has convened a stewardship and spirituality group that is meeting for a year to discuss the spirituality of stewardship in three areas: prayer, relationships, and resources. They are reading together and having discussion about what a more comprehensive view of stewardship really is. The group includes professors, an attorney, an environmental activist, businesspersons, a social worker, and chaplains.[38]

Churches can also encourage study and dialogue about calling and vocation as it relates to secular employment. Recently I and others at my church took "spiritual gifts" inventories. The report that we received identified our spiritual gifts and how we might put those to use for the church. Rather, why not offer encouragement and counsel about how to put those spiritual gifts to use outside the church?

From strategic planning to "dashboards," the church has appropriated processes and techniques from business for its own use. Certainly, effective management of financial and other resources in the context of mission is part of the church's stewardship. But critical thought

---

[38] Reference used by permission. For details, contact author.

should be given to the ways in which business processes and measures are being used within the church, lest market share eclipse transformation of persons and communities as the measure of the church's success. The church should also examine whether it is promoting spiritual formation and wholeness when it asks businesspeople to fill the same roles and functions at church as they do in the workplace.

Thirty years ago, shortly after I moved to a new city to work in industry, I visited local churches in my search for a new church home. On one such visit I was approached after the service by a parishioner who asked, "Are you new here?" "Yes, I just moved to town." Having then learned that I was working in finance for a local corporation the greeter asked, "Great! Do you want to be on our Finance Committee?" This, on my first (and last), visit to that church!

Women in leadership in the church face many of the same issues as women in leadership in business. As in business, women have made inroads in the church; in the United States at least two denominations, Disciples of Christ and the Episcopal Church, are led by women. Nevertheless, to quote again the title of Korkki's *New York Times* article, "For Women, Parity is Still a Subtly Steep Climb"—though many clergy women might question the modifier "subtly." In 2008, the United Methodist Church started the Lead Women Pastor Project to study the barriers to women being appointed pastors of churches with more than one thousand members. While twenty-three percent of United Methodist clergy are women, only eighty-five women lead churches with membership of one thousand or more, compared to 1,082 men in those positions.[39]

Meaning, managing energy, positive framing, connecting, and engaging: these five dimensions of

---

[39] "Methodist Women Seek to Pastor Large Churches," *The Christian Post*, January 21, 2009, www.christianpost.com, accessed 10/28/11.

centered leadership identified by McKinsey for women in business leadership apply as well to women who are leaders in the church. My own experience in the church and anecdotal evidence from female colleagues suggests that, just as in business, women in religious institutions can struggle to find their voice. Indeed, female clergy face an additional barrier, given that some in their congregations may use Scripture (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:11–14), to question their authority.

It is in the area of meaning making, defined by McKinsey as "finding your strengths and putting them to work in the service of an inspiring purpose,"[40] that female clergy and their male colleagues should be at an advantage in comparison to leaders in business. For where should there be more meaning and purpose than in the church? Therein lies one of the particular challenges for religious leadership today. With declining membership and related financial challenges, the institutional church and its leaders are under tremendous pressure. Anxious judicatories pore over membership and contribution statistics to evaluate clergy effectiveness and congregational health. Congregational mission statements based on the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20), are translated into strategic plans for "making disciples" who will add to membership rolls and help keep the doors open. In the face of these pressures, parish clergy may begin to share the sense of compartmentalization experienced by their counterparts in business, their vocation coming to seem like a job divorced from meaning and purpose.

Having McKinsey's framework for centered leadership at hand would have helped me, as a female business leader, stay in touch with my own relationally-based values in an environment whose power dynamics made it difficult to do so, while also encouraging me to engage questions of meaning and purpose. The church could have facilitated my integrative work of meaning

---

[40] Barsh, et. al., 36.

making by teaching me to reflect theologically on my workplace experience. My subsequent theological training has helped me to understand that my relational approach to leadership is characteristically female, but it is also grounded in Christian theology. God as Trinity is relational in God's very Being. Just as the divine life is relational, ours is as well, for all creation exists in relationship through the Creator. Fostering and participating in that fundamental interconnection of all creation through God is integrative, meaning-making work on the journey to wholeness in God. Facilitating that meaning making in community is one of the principal functions of religious leaders. The journey begins with the inner work of being in relationship with the living God, work that is essential in a world that can drive people to live compartmentalized, fragmented lives. The Quaker scholar Thomas Kelly described this challenge seventy years ago:

> We Western peoples are apt to think our great problems are external, environmental. We are not skilled in the inner life, where the real roots of our problems lie…The outer distractions of our interests reflect an inner lack of integration of our own lives. We are trying to be several selves at once, without all our selves being organized by a single, mastering Life within us. Each of us tends to be, not a single self, but a whole committee of selves…And each of our selves is in turn a rank individualist, not cooperative but shouting out his vote loudly for himself when the voting time comes. And all too commonly we follow the common American method of getting a quick decision among conflicting claims within us. It is as if we have a chairman of our committee of many selves within us who does not integrate the many into one but who merely counts the votes at each decision, and leaves disgruntled minorities…We are not integrated. We are distraught. We feel honestly the pull of many obligations and try to

fulfill them all…Strained by the very mad pace of our daily outer burdens, we are further strained by an inward uneasiness, because we have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence, a life of unhurried serenity and peace and power…Life is meant to be lived from a Center, a divine Center.[41]

In a world that is changing at a bewildering pace, our households and our institutions are filled with and increasingly paralyzed by anxiety. Women can be further challenged by power dynamics, especially in the workplace, that can silence their voices and leave them feeling isolated and drained. If they are to diminish the Sunday–Monday gap, religious leaders will need to address the realities of women's issues in the workplace and the workplace ecology itself, thus becoming facilitators of meaning making and drawing those they serve to a "divine center" of wholeness and peace.

---

[41] Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, (San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1941), 91–93.