

## **WORKPLACE CHAPLAINCY IN THE UNITED STATES - HISTORY AND PRINCIPLES**

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### ***HISTORICAL OUTLINE***

Workplace ministry has existed in various forms in this country since colonial times. As early as the 1640's, Massachusetts Bay Colony legal records stipulated that religious instruction was to be provided at the work site by employers, particularly for employees in remote locations and when Sunday labor was required. Company logs from the 1700s and 1800s show a variety of concerned employers who provided chaplaincy services for their workers.

During the post-Civil War era of urban industrial labor organizing and formation of labor unions, clergy often provided counsel and advocacy support. Churches also authored major pastoral letters on the meaning and dignity of work; the landmark 1891 social encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, paved the way for a century of similar statements and involvement by most of the major faith groups.

Contemporary industrial chaplaincy in the U.S. is often cited as having been pioneered in 1931 by the industrialist R. G. LeTourneau, who initiated "shop meetings", counseling and worship services conducted by chaplains for the Hoover Dam project field crews. By 1941, LeTourneau had established full-time industrial chaplaincy at his plants in Illinois, Georgia and Mississippi. Other business owners soon followed suit. Through the 1930s and 1940s, a number of chaplains also continued to be involved in the labor movement, serving in advocacy and pastoral counseling roles, in various urban settings, including factories and seaports.

During and following World War II, new models of workplace chaplaincy were established to meet the needs of workers returning from war to industrial and business work. Many of the veterans suffered from what we know today as PTSD, accompanied by substance abuse, marriage breakups and workplace conflict. Concerned company leaders decided to provide employee counseling in conjunction with company-sponsored programs developing out of the Twelve-Step AA movement and similar interventions. Many companies hired former military chaplains who had experienced war and who also were adept at working in structured settings and providing advisement to management pertaining to personnel well-being.

These counseling programs were later influenced by the evolving Employee Assistance Program movement. Their purpose was to provide employees with confidential counseling about personal problems brought to the job site as well as job-related stresses. One of the earliest full-time workplace ministries was the pastoral counseling program established at R.J. Reynolds in 1949. The company first employed a former military chaplain who would be available to counsel employees from his pastoral counseling department, located at the company headquarters in Winston-Salem, NC. Rodney Brown, a United Methodist minister who also became licensed as a Marriage and Family Therapist, then expanded the program. This program lasted through the

1990s until the name and function shifted to become the Managed Care liaison.

The *Detroit Industrial Mission* was founded in 1956 by the Rev. Hugh C. White, an Episcopal priest, to link congregations composed of primarily white-collar employees with those of blue collar employees and to create an on-site presence within industrial plants. By the mid-1960's eleven Industrial Missions had been established in major cities, including San Juan, Puerto Rico, and formed themselves into a loose consortium called the *National Industrial Mission*, modeled on the *English Industrial Mission* concept.

The NIM centers worked with plant and business employees and associated parishes, forming study groups and doing workplace advocacy and counseling. They focused on linking faith and worklife, while addressing such issues as length of workday, wages, safety, race relations and women's rights. For a variety of reasons, including questions about the purpose of the NIM and funding decreases by national churches, the last mission, in Baltimore, MD closed in 1975.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the development and expansion of a number of types of workplace ministry outreach, among these, company-initiated chaplaincy/employee counseling programs, pastoral counseling centers taking work-related referrals, chaplaincy provider groups and professional associations. The *Industrial and Commercial Ministries*, was founded in 1972 as a Methodist Church outreach, and later became interfaith, training and deploying volunteer part-time chaplains working out of local Units. The ICM, based in Harrisonburg, VA, is still active.

The *National Institute of Business and Industrial Chaplains (NIBIC)*, was incorporated in 1976 as the professional chaplaincy organization whose mission was to promote workplace chaplaincy, setting standards of practice and addressing issues being faced by business and industrial chaplains in their corporate settings. NIBIC is still active today as a member of the COMISS Network and within the Corporate Division of the Spiritual Care Association.

In 1985, a major grass-roots labor union chaplaincy program was initiated within the United Auto Workers union, beginning with a pilot project at local 599 in Flint, MI, to provide industrial chaplaincy to union members, and NIBIC members provided training and advisement. The program was organized by region and continued to grow through at least 2015, with over 300 chaplains active in plants across North America.

Many workplace chaplains originally came into this ministry by means of personal acquaintance with business owners, and much of their work began as part-time or volunteer. By the 1980s, in addition to continuing service by part-time and small business chaplaincies, increasing numbers of persons with advanced professional training were becoming employed as corporate chaplains and by the 1990s with Employee Assistance Programs and workplace chaplaincy provider groups.

The movement was attracting more workplace spiritual care givers who had received Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), mostly in hospitals, but also in programs sponsoring field placement within financial districts, business and industry or community settings. Chaplain Bob Eades, NIBIC President and director of a CPE program in Wichita, KS, pioneered a model that provided a second year of Advanced Units, with the CPE Residents rotating through the corporate departments of the hospital and relating primarily to employees.

A good number of chaplains were also earning credentials in mental health, human resources, organizational behavior, conflict resolution, management coaching, business ethics and as first responders. These clinically trained chaplains then staffed employee counseling programs, dealing with personal pastoral care issues, such as marriage and family, drug and alcohol abuse, and grief and loss issues that were affecting employee performance in the workplace. They also provided consultation to management about policies and issues affecting the workforce. A leading member of NIBIC, Chaplain Rodney Brown, served in this capacity for many years with RJ Reynolds, in Winston-Salem, NC.

The experiences gained through the corporate upheavals, with widespread takeovers and restructuring, of the 1980s brought many corporate chaplaincies to broaden their focus and skill set, as they worked with organizational change and the variety of new workplace environment factors. Workplace chaplaincies paid increasing attention to integrating and addressing the concerns of employees with quality of worklife issues such as staff communications and dispute resolution, business ethics, stress mitigation, work/life balance and career transition needs.

The major corporate changes as well as the rise of Managed Care by the end of the 1980s also brought with it increasing outsourcing by companies of their corporate employee services, including their counseling and training programs, where most workplace chaplaincies were located. In 1988, research conducted by the Australian industrial chaplaincy organization (ITIM), estimated that over 4,000 persons in the United States were at that time actively engaged in worklife chaplaincy. But by the late 1980s and early 1990s, many in-house chaplains were being retired or laid off, and employee care services were being outsourced.

Many of us in the movement's leadership realized that we would have to create new models of service in order to continue to provide spiritual care for employees and influence the integrity of their organizations. Corporate restructuring spurred the development of external Employee Assistance Programs, which incorporated providers who used to serve within companies. Contract workplace ministry provider groups also developed; they marketed their services to client companies using their member chaplains who often served part-time and by the hour. Some companies, such as Tyson Foods, hired chaplains to serve its processing plant workers.

A major provider center, the *Worklife Institute* and its chaplain training division, the *Institute of Worklife Ministry*, was founded in 1988 in Houston, Texas, and has become the largest such center operated by NIBIC members and has mentored networks of persons wishing to serve as workplace spiritual care givers. The *National Institute of Business & Industrial Chaplains* is now based at the *Worklife Institute* Resource Center in Houston, Texas, and corporate chaplaincy archives are maintained there.

International networks of workplace ministry professionals have been forged over the years, with on-going communications linkages among national organizations' leadership. Exchange of information, training resources and personnel continues to take place among chaplains providing ministry in a vast variety of settings - corporate business, medical centers, industrial plants and field sites, retail districts, sports and entertainment industries, law enforcement, fire fighting and rescue units, the Armed Forces and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

## ***PRINCIPLES***

### ***Overview of the Purpose, Standards and Settings of Workplace Ministry***

The spiritual basis of workplace ministry is the affirmation that the arena of business, including hospital districts and government agencies, is an integral part of the world in which God is lovingly involved. As a consequence of this, work is meant to be a spiritual and religious act deeply touching peoples' lives. All persons are invited to be co-creators with God through the work of our hands and minds and in cooperation with others. Each person is to be respected as of infinite worth in the context of his or her daily work. This respect acknowledges the varied cultures and belief systems represented by the workforce as well as the importance of the workplace endeavors in which the people are employed.

Workplace ministry provides spiritually-based counseling, educational and other support services to people in the context of their worklife, addressing needs which derive from both personal and workplace-related concerns, including marriage and family issues, balancing work and family priorities, chemical dependency, grief and trauma, financial and legal problems, job stress, dispute resolution, quandaries relating to personal values and business practice, employment issues such as job change, layoffs, retirement.

Workplace ministry adheres to the standards of the major professional chaplaincy and counseling organizations in the United States: Workplace chaplains, as well as being academically and clinically trained, are to be grounded in their own faith tradition and endorsed by their faith community for chaplaincy service. They are committed to a ministry which, in respecting each person being served, does not violate employees' various faith traditions. (Thus, workplace chaplaincy is not to be used as a proselytizing arm of any church organization or sectarian program). The chaplain's witness as a deeply caring person of spiritual depth, who becomes seen as "the hands and feet of God", provides the invitation to employees to delve into their own core values and sources of ultimate meaning in the process of working with particular worklife issues. This principle undergirds the integrity of workplace chaplaincy.

Workplace chaplains (often serving with such titles as corporate chaplain, employee counselor, director of employee assistance, pastoral counselor, human resources advisor, corporate trainer) work in a vast variety of settings: corporations, manufacturing plants, retail centers, airports, seafarer centers, truck stops, police and firefighter units, labor unions, race tracks and other sports and entertainment industries, health care institutions (focusing their attention on employees), educational institutions, pastoral counseling centers, employee assistance programs, corporate chaplaincy provider organizations, and centers located in urban industrial and business districts. Workplace chaplaincy outreach is multifaceted and can be developed in any setting where the intentional focus of the ministry is to persons in the context of their daily work life's endeavors and experiences.