Article

From Secular to Sacred: Bringing Work to Church

Elaine Howard Ecklund 1,*, Denise Daniels 2 and Rachel C. Schneider 1,*

1 Department of Sociology, Rice University, Houston, TX 77005, USA
2 Department of Business and Economics, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL 60187, USA; denise.daniels@wheaton.edu
* Correspondence: ehe@rice.edu (E.H.E.); rsv2@rice.edu (R.C.S.)

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Abstract: Work and faith are significant life commitments for many people. Understanding how people integrate these facets of life is important for scholars, faith leaders, and religious communities. We use data from Faith at Work: An Empirical Study, which includes a U.S. general population survey (n = 13,270) and in-depth interviews. Drawing data from a Christian sub-sample we ask: How do Christians draw on their faith community in relation to work? For those in different social locations, in what ways does talk about work come up in churches? Finally, what work-related challenges do Christians experience, and how do Christians want their churches and pastors to address them? We find that many Christians see faith as a resource for enhancing their work lives but do not often encounter discussion of work at church or talk with pastors about work, though Black congregants are nearly twice as likely as whites to hear their pastors discuss work. Further, specific groups of Christians want their pastors and churches to do more to support them in their work and/or to help them navigate faith in the workplace. They also want churches to better accommodate the needs of working people at church, so they can more fully participate.

Keywords: religion; faith; work; Christianity; sociology; workplace; clergy; pastors; church

1. Introduction

Work and faith are both significant commitments in life for many people. Understanding how people integrate (or do not) these two facets of life as well as how religious people understand the relationship between faith and work is not only important information for scholars of religion, but also for faith leaders, religious communities, and employers. Indeed, since the 1980s, a number of church and parachurch organizations 1 have sought to address a perceived need for faith–work integration among middle-class Christians. Under the banner of what Miller (2007) calls the “Faith at Work” movement, the focus of these groups has largely been about encouraging Christians in business/professional environments to bring the sacred (faith) into the so-called secular (workplace).

As Miller notes, what unites many in the Faith at Work movement is the profound sense that “the church is generally not aware of their plight, does not assist them to overcome the Sunday–Monday gap, and may even send condemnatory messages about their participation in the for-profit world” (Miller 2007, p. 123). As such, many lay leaders and groups have taken it upon themselves to address specific needs around work that they feel are not addressed by churches. The hope is to help fill the “Sunday–Monday gap” by providing Christians with resources to help integrate faith with their workplace experiences.

1 Examples include Redeemer Presbyterian Church’s Center for Faith and Work (NY); The Denver Institute for Faith and Work, The Nashville Institute for Faith and Work; Flourish San Diego; 4Word Women; C12’s Christian Business Advisory Peer Groups; C3 Leaders; Christian Business Men’s Connection (CBMC); the Theology of Work Project; and many others.
Although Christians comprise the largest U.S. religious group, little is known empirically about how a more diverse range of Christians (those from different traditions within Christianity, as well as those from different race, gender, and social class groups) actually understand the role of churches in relation to their work or the kinds of support Christians would like to see from church leaders. Such data could be useful in helping church leaders provide effective support to working people in their congregations, as well as helping people understand the implications of their faith in the context of the workplace. Moreover, while there has been some examination by sociologists of how the sacred enters secular organizational life (Demerath and Schmitt 1998; Grant et al. 2004), there has been little examination of the reverse: how so-called secular concerns are engaged by religious organizations, particularly at the congregational level, despite a general consensus that the lines between religious and non-religious organizations are increasingly blurred (Demerath et al. 1998; Scheitle and Dougherty 2008).

In this article, then, we draw on both survey and interview data from the new Faith at Work: An Empirical Study to investigate how Christians draw on church resources to support them in their work, as well as to examine how Christians would like to be better supported by churches and faith leaders in navigating work-related challenges. While the broader empirical study focuses on a variety of religious traditions, in this article we focus on those who are part of Christian traditions specifically, because this is the religion where the Faith at Work movement originated, and those part of Christian traditions are the largest group of religious people in the United States.

One goal of this study is to put easy-to-understand data into the hands of as many U.S. clergy and church leaders as possible. This is important, because as our findings demonstrate, many Christians see faith as a resource for enhancing their work lives, but do not often encounter discussion of work in their churches or talk with their pastors about work. At the same time, they want their pastors and churches to do more to affirm and encourage church members in their work. They also want faith leaders to help them more effectively engage with the topic of faith and/or express their faith in the workplace. Finally, they want churches to better accommodate the needs of working people within the church space, so that they can more fully participate in the life of the faith community.

1.1. Literature Review

The topic of faith and work has been the subject of many recent influential books written for Christian practitioners and church communities. Examples include David Miller’s God at Work (Miller 2007), which examines different Christian views on faith and work over the past century; Miroslav Volf’s Work in the Spirit (Volf 1991), which develops a contemporary Protestant theology of work; as well as Michael Novak’s Business as a Calling (Novak 1996) and Jeff Van Duzer’s Why Business Matters to God (Van Duzer 2010), which argue for the spiritual value of the business sector and seek to link theology and ethics with the fields of business and economics. Other popular writings are more pastoral or prescriptive, focused on helping Christians identify ways of expressing their faith at work, rather than on a descriptive understanding of how individuals actually endeavor to do so. Tim Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf’s book Every Good Endeavor (Keller and Alsdorf 2012) or Michael J. Naughton’s book Getting Work Right (Naughton 2019) are excellent examples of this genre, examining how Christians can pursue purpose and meaning at work.

Reflective of the growing interest in the topic of faith and work among Christian groups and leaders, much of the literature above is written from a theologically informed and/or anecdotal rather than empirical perspective. That is, it often begins with an intuitive thesis, which may be based on personal experience or thoughtful reflection about how faith and life interact, but is not based upon large-scale sociological data, even if it draws on real world stories and interview material. Further,
much of this work is implicitly—or explicitly—geared towards certain racial and gender groups and certain social class sectors and occupations (often white men in business) that the writer has personal experience with, which brings a risk that their insights may not be immediately applicable to a diverse audience.

Empirical research, therefore, offers an important means of expanding the conversation about faith and work, and it can help illuminate the diversity of ways that a range of Christians understand the relationship between faith and work. Existing qualitative and quantitative studies have largely focused on integration of faith and work in the context of the workplace (Grant et al. 2004; Lynn et al. 2010; McGhee 2019; Neubert et al. 2013; Walker 2013) and how people of faith find meaning in the workplace (Davidson and Caddell 1994; Miller and Everest 2013; Miller 2003; Steger et al. 2010). Most of this work has been done with relatively small samples or focused on a fairly narrow range of inquiry. Though limited in scope, these empirical studies nevertheless show that questions of belief, purpose, and calling are significant to many Christians in the workplace.

When it comes to examining the relationship between churches and work, older research suggests that, even though they are a part of a church community, many church members do not feel valued or understood in their work when they are at church, even if they desire to receive spiritual guidance on integrating faith and work (Nash and McLennan 2001; Wuthnow 1997). For example, in a survey of 1529 Christians conducted in 1989–90, Hart and Krueger (1992) found that most church members desire clergy guidance about how to integrate work and faith but fail to receive it. They concluded that either “congregations are not providing much relevant or useful support or members are not taking advantage of it” (Hart and Krueger 1992, p. 684). While this study suggests that Christian workers may face challenges in receiving support from their churches to address work-related issues, recent research also highlights the positive impact of churches on work life. For example, research by Lynn et al. (2010) finds that frequent church attendance is positively correlated with a strong sense of faith–work integration. Additionally, research by Park et al. (2014) theorizes that churches may offer individuals “workplace-bridging religious capital”—providing sites to cultivate certain skills, habits, and dispositions that can then be applied to the work sphere. Their study also finds that people who actively participate in congregations where the application of Christian principles and beliefs in the workplace is promoted show increased job satisfaction, entrepreneurship, and a sense of personal commitment to their work.

1.2. Filling the Gap

While existing empirical research highlights how faith and churches can influence the work lives of Christians and demonstrates the importance of faith and work integration for many people, what is not addressed sufficiently are the ways that the topic of work—along with specific challenges that people face in relation to work—intersects with church life for a diverse range of Christians. Indeed, to date, no large-scale study on the topic of faith and work has been conducted by social scientists. Thus, while existing research indicates in receiving support from their churches to address work-related issues, recent research also highlights the positive impact of churches on work life. For example, research by Lynn et al. (2010) finds that frequent church attendance is positively correlated with a strong sense of faith–work integration. Additionally, research by Park et al. (2014) theorizes that churches may offer individuals “workplace-bridging religious capital”—providing sites to cultivate certain skills, habits, and dispositions that can then be applied to the work sphere. Their study also finds that people who actively participate in congregations where the application of Christian principles and beliefs in the workplace is promoted show increased job satisfaction, entrepreneurship, and a sense of personal commitment to their work.

Moreover, recent sociological studies on faith and work have tended to focus primarily on entrepreneurs (Dougherty et al. 2013), especially white middle-class Christian entrepreneurs (Griebel et al. 2014), and expressions of faith through specific job choices. However, it is also important

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3 As noted, a few older studies have explored empirically how church members perceive workplace support from clergy and in their churches (Hart and Krueger 1992; Nash and McLennan 2001; Wuthnow 1997). Utilizing interviews and surveys, these studies have found that, on the whole, respondents report that clergy rarely address the topic of work at church, and church members rarely discuss work concerns with their pastors. Yet these studies are quite dated and limited in scope. Often, they are primarily focused on white middle-class Protestant Christians limiting their generalizability. Thus, they provide little insight into the variety of ways a diverse range of Christians might be better supported in their work by churches and clergy.
to recognize that different populations may seek to integrate faith and work in different ways, and, therefore, may seek different kinds of support and guidance from their churches. There is a robust social science literature in sociology that examines the differential impact of religion on how men and women negotiate tensions between work and family (Ammons and Edgell 2007; Ammons et al. 2017; Civettini and Glass 2008; Edgell 2006; Ellison and Bartkowski 2002; May and Reynolds 2018; Rogers and Franzen 2014), as well as how religious tradition has an impact on work-related choices among mothers (Reynolds and May 2014; Sherkat 2000) and the meaning they assign to work (Gallagher et al. 2013; Hall et al. 2012). As one example, Sullivan (2006) found that single, working mothers largely drew on faith as a means to manage work-related stress rather than infusing work itself with existential meaning.

While different demographic groups may draw on their faith in different ways to support them in their work, it is not clear what these differences are. Thus, there is a need to understand how Christians from different occupations, racial groups, genders, and traditions understand the relationship between faith and work. Filling these gaps is especially important if clergy and churches are to more effectively provide support and resources to a diversity of Christians. In what follows, then, we investigate three main research questions. First, how do Christians from different traditions and social locations draw on their faith community in relation to work? Second, in what ways does talk about work come up in churches? Third, what kinds of work-related challenges do Christians experience, and how do Christians want their churches and pastors to address these issues?

2. Methods and Data

To answer these research questions, we draw on data from Faith at Work: An Empirical Study, a mixed methods study that includes nine focus groups with Christian clergy and congregation members in three cities, a U.S. general population survey (including all religious groups), as well as in-depth interviews with Christians, Muslims, and Jews as well as Christian pastors. Topics examined in the broader research study include experiences of faith in the workplace broadly, perceptions of religious discrimination in workplaces, as well as understandings of how work comes up in religious life. The survey was administered by Gallup, Inc. We sampled 29,345 U.S. adults by internet and mail in the fall of 2018 on their experiences related to faith in the workplace, receiving 13,270 completed surveys.

For analysis of survey data, we include here descriptive statistics from 7305 practicing Christian respondents from the survey. Religious practice was defined as any attendance in any religious services, excluding those who never attend services and those who did not disclose their attendance. Religious identity was defined with two survey questions. First, respondents who selected “Catholic,” “Protestant,” and “Other Christian” were included in the current analysis, excluding religious minorities and the nonreligious. Second, “Protestants” and “Other Christians” were further categorized by congregation type. Respondents chose among several response options, including “Charismatic,” “Fundamentalist,” and “Evangelical” (all recoded as “Evangelical”), and “Liberal” and “Mainline” (both recoded as “Mainline”). “Protestants” and “Other Christians” who did not select a congregation or for whom we did not know how to categorize their congregation, or those who selected multiple congregations that were difficult to categorize (e.g., Fundamentalist and Liberal), were categorized as “Other.” As a result, practicing Christians were divided into four mutually exclusive sub-categories:

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4 All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The study was approved by the Internal Review Board (Project identification code).
5 Gallup drew a stratified sample of 29,345 individuals, aiming to match U.S. population targets based on the 2017 Current Population Survey, as well as oversamples of pre-identified Muslim (n = 752) and Jewish (n = 882) respondents, yielding a participation rate of 45.2 percent and a response rate—which accounts for all stages of recruitment per AAPOR—of 1.2 percent. We knew that a probability-based panel would include a large number of Christians, but we chose to include oversamples of Muslims and Jews in the sample selection in order to accurately characterize faith–work integration and religious discrimination among members of these minority religious traditions, as well as to compare members of minority religious traditions to the Christians in our sample.
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Catholic, Evangelical, Mainline, and Other. While it is quite likely that our “Other” category includes many individuals who attend Evangelical and Mainline congregations, we were not able to ascertain from our data in which category they best belonged, so we opted to create this fourth category. Results from the survey are presented as weighted percentages to account for the probability of selection into the sample and for non-response bias.

Upon completing the survey, survey takers were asked if they were willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview with our team. As this research was designed, in part, to help clergy to meet the spiritual needs of their working congregants, we decided to focus our interview recruitment efforts on Christian respondents who regularly attend religious services. Respondents were deemed eligible for interviews if they identified as a Christian (a group including Protestant, Catholic, other Christian); attended religious services at least once per month; and were employed full-time, part-time, or not employed but looking for work. A total of 1862 survey takers were eligible to participate in interviews based on these criteria, and to-date 194 interviews have been completed with survey takers. In order to ensure that a diversity of voices was represented, we also sampled on several other variables from the survey for our interviews. These variables included—but were not limited to—demographic characteristics (age, race/ethnicity, gender), employment characteristics (industry, position within organization, employment status), religious characteristics (religious identity, frequency of religious attendance, and type of religious congregation), and social class measures (income, education).

Interviews were semi-structured and were conducted by a team of two Primary Investigators, one postdoctoral research fellow, and eight graduate students. To ensure comparability, all interviewers used the same structured interview guide. Respondents were asked about a range of topics including their views related to the their work and church contexts, their understanding of the connection between faith and work, the extent to which they can (and do) express faith in the workplace, religious conflicts in the workplace, and the ways in which work comes up in their local congregation. The majority of interviews were conducted over the phone, but a small proportion of interviews were conducted in-person. Respondents had the option of being interviewed in either English or Spanish. All respondents were asked for permission to record interviews using digital audio recorders regardless of interview modality, and all respondents agreed to being recorded. Most interviews were transcribed by an outside transcription firm, but a small proportion were transcribed by trained undergraduate and graduate students. Transcripts were then edited by a team member for accuracy purposes and all personal identifiers removed.

For this article, we based the qualitative findings on 88 interviews with practicing Christians who attend religious services at least once per month. Our team developed an initial descriptive coding scheme using our interview guide. We generated 27 coding categories, focusing on questions from the guide that could be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” (e.g., Do you have responsibilities for others and for their work as part of your job?). We then had two team members code each transcript for the presence (1) or absence (0) of each of the 27 themes selected for the coding scheme. Nine team members coded interviews for the project (graduate student fellows and post-doctoral fellow). All interviews were coded by two people, and any coding discrepancies were reconciled by the research project manager. Following this initial descriptive analysis, we then employed a partially deductive interpretive coding method to identify additional themes that emerged in our interviews. All racial/ethnic labels and denomination descriptors used to describe interview respondents are self-identified by respondents.

In order to answer our first research question of how Christians from different social locations and traditions draw on resources from their faith community to help them in their work, we analyzed the following research questions from our survey: “Skills and habits that I have learned from my

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6 154 interviews with Christians. In a second stage, we identified Muslim and Jewish survey takers and recruited them to participate in an interview as a comparison group.
faith community help me succeed at work”; “my faith guides me through stressful times in my work life”; and “my faith community supports me in my work or career.” Respondents had seven response options: five items ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree,” or “I do not have a faith community,” or “This does not apply to me.” These questions were asked if respondents were employed, self-employed, or retired. Individuals who were retired were asked to reflect on their most recent job. These questions were skipped if a respondent was unemployed, a homemaker, a student, or a volunteer.

In order to answer our second research question, the ways talk about work comes up in church contexts, we examined the responses of practicing Christians to the following survey question: “How often do you participate in discussion groups about faith and work?” Respondents were given five response options, ranging from “not at all” to “five or more times per month.” As we are particularly interested in the role of clergy in promoting conversations about work at church and hope this data will be useful to clergy members, we also analyzed responses to the questions “my faith leader teaches about the meaning of work” and “my faith leader discusses how we should behave at work.” Respondents were given six response options for these questions: “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often,” “very often,” or “I do not have a faith leader.”

Part of the analytic strategy for answering research questions one and two involved exploring subgroup differences across Christian traditions, religious service attendance, gender, race, and age, all of which are categorical variables. Chi-square tests were used to detect associations between categorical variables. Post-hoc comparisons of specific subgroups (Blacks vs. Hispanics; Blacks vs. whites) included a Bonferroni adjustment to account for the multiple comparisons being made and reduce the chances of a false positive by asserting there is an association when there is not one (i.e., Type I error).

Finally, in order to answer our third research question about what kinds of work-related challenges Christians experience and how they want their churches and pastors to address these issues, we analyzed 88 interview responses from highly engaged Christians (those who attend once per month or more) to the question: “If you could have the world any way you want it, what suggestions would you make about how faith leaders can better support people in their work?” Of the 88 interviews analyzed, 73 Christians had recommendations for faith leaders. These responses were then interpretively coded according to common themes that emerged, using the deductive approach described previously.

3. Results

3.1. Survey Findings

Demographic characteristics of the survey sample of practicing Christians are described in Table 1. Overall, practicing Christians include respondents who identify as a man (46%), woman (53%), or prefer to self-describe or not say (<1%). Most of the sample identifies as non-Hispanic White (65%), while the remainder identify as Black (14%), Hispanic (12%), Asian (<1%), other (<1%), or multi-racial/ethnic (8%). The sample includes respondents of all ages: 23% are between ages 18–34; 35% are 35–54; 19% are between ages 55–64; and 23% are 65 and older. Similarly, respondents come from a variety of educational backgrounds: 46% have a high school education or less; 20% have some college; 7% have an associate degree; 11% have a Bachelor’s degree; and 15% have a graduate degree. Approximately one-in-four (24%) respondents has a household income less than $36,000; 19% report a household income between $36,000 and $59,999; 36% report income between $60,000 and $119,999; and 21% report a household income of $120,000 or higher. The sample is composed of 28% Catholics, 28% Evangelicals, 14% Mainline, and 31% other Protestant/Christian. Having excluded those who “never” attend religious services, 43% of respondents attend religious services several times per year or less; 13% attend between one and three times per month, 35% attend every week or nearly every week, and 10% attend multiple times per week.
Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Demographic Characteristics Among a Sample of Practicing Christians ($n = 7305$).

| Demographic Variables | Percent * |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| Gender                |           |
| Man                   | 46.0      |
| Woman                 | 53.2      |
| Prefer to self-describe | 0.3     |
| Prefer not to say     | 0.5       |
| Race/Ethnicity        |           |
| White, non-Hispanic   | 65.3      |
| Black                 | 13.8      |
| Asian                 | 0.4       |
| Hispanic              | 12.1      |
| Other                 | 0.7       |
| Multiracial           | 7.7       |
| Age                   |           |
| 18–24                 | 4.2       |
| 25–34                 | 18.7      |
| 35–44                 | 15.2      |
| 45–54                 | 19.7      |
| 55–64                 | 18.8      |
| 65+                   | 23.4      |
| Education             |           |
| High school or less   | 46.0      |
| Some Tech/Trade/College | 20.4   |
| 2-year associate degree | 7.0     |
| 4-year bachelor’s degree | 11.2   |
| Post-graduate school/degree | 15.4 |
| Income                |           |
| $35,999 or less       | 23.7      |
| $36,000 to $59,999    | 19.1      |
| $60,000 to $119,999   | 35.8      |
| $120,000 or more      | 21.4      |
| Religious Identity    |           |
| Catholic              | 27.7      |
| Evangelical           | 27.9      |
| Mainline              | 13.6      |
| Other Protestant/Christian | 30.8 |
| Church Attendance     |           |
| Several times per year or less | 42.7 |
| 1–3 times per month   | 12.8      |
| Nearly every week/every week | 34.5   |
| Multiple times per week | 10.0   |

* Percent weighted for probability of selection and non-response.

Tables 2 and 3 are presented in the appendix and display crosstabs of faith and work survey questions by religious identity and religious attendance (Table 2) and the sociodemographic variables of gender, race/ethnicity, and age (Table 3). For the five subgroup comparisons (religious identity, attendance, gender, race, and age) across the six survey questions, 29 out of 30 chi-square tests revealed a statistically significant association. While all results are presented in Tables 2 and 3, select results are presented and discussed below.
Table 2. Faith and Work Survey Questions by Religious Identity and Attendance among a Sample of Practicing Christians (n = 7305).

| Faith and Work Variables | Religious Identity | Religious Service Attendance |
|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
|                          | Overall * | Catholic | Evang. | Mainline | Other | Chi-Sq. | Several | 1–3 Times | Nearly Every | Multiple | Chi-Sq. |
| Skills and habits that I have learned from my faith community help me succeed at work. |                      |        |
| Strongly disagree        | 8.4       | 12.5    | 3.8    | 9.8      | 8.3    | 12.6    | 9.5     | 4.7      | 1.0       |
| Somewhat disagree        | 4.6       | 6.6     | 2.2    | 5.7      | 4.5    | 6.7     | 5.2     | 2.7      | 1.2       |
| Neither disagree nor agree | 20.4    | 24.9    | 14.7   | 21.4     | 21.2   | *       | 23.6    | 23.1     | 18.4      | 9.7       | *       |
| Somewhat agree           | 30.0      | 29.0    | 30.1   | 33.6     | 29.3   | 28.8    | 32.7    | 32.6     | 23.3      |          |
| Strongly agree           | 27.9      | 15.4    | 46.7   | 22.8     | 24.3   | 11.7    | 26.7    | 39.3     | 64.3      |          |
| I do not have a faith community | 8.6   | 11.7    | 2.4    | 6.8      | 12.4   | 16.8    | 2.9     | 2.4      | 0.5       |          |
| My faith guides me through stressful times in my work-life. |                      |        |
| Strongly disagree        | 4.0       | 7.0     | 0.8    | 4.7      | 3.8    | 6.8     | 3.6     | 1.5      | 0.1       |
| Somewhat disagree        | 3.2       | 4.6     | 0.9    | 5.5      | 2.8    | 5.1     | 3.2     | 1.5      | 0.0       |
| Neither disagree nor agree | 13.7    | 18.9    | 7.2    | 14.5     | 14.6   | *       | 21.4    | 12.1     | 7.5       | 2.4       | *       |
| Somewhat agree           | 27.2      | 28.5    | 23.2   | 32.0     | 27.5   | 30.9    | 33.2    | 24.0     | 14.1      |          |
| Strongly agree           | 43.9      | 31.1    | 63.6   | 34.2     | 41.8   | 24.4    | 42.2    | 59.5     | 79.8      |          |
| This does not apply to me | 8.1       | 10.0    | 4.3    | 9.1      | 9.5    | 11.4    | 5.6     | 6.1      | 3.6       |          |
| My faith community supports me in my work or career. |                      |        |
| Strongly disagree        | 6.2       | 10.6    | 2.2    | 6.6      | 5.9    | 9.3     | 6.5     | 3.6      | 1.3       |
| Somewhat disagree        | 3.0       | 4.2     | 1.8    | 3.6      | 2.6    | 3.5     | 4.9     | 2.2      | 1.0       |
| Neither disagree nor agree | 30.6    | 34.5    | 27.5   | 32.5     | 29.1   | *       | 33.1    | 35.8     | 28.8      | 19.0      | *       |
| Somewhat agree           | 17.0      | 13.4    | 22.2   | 18.5     | 14.6   | *       | 10.0    | 21.8     | 23.3      | 19.7      |          |
| Strongly agree           | 24.5      | 12.9    | 39.4   | 22.3     | 22.2   | 8.9     | 22.1    | 36.5     | 56.0      |          |
| I do not have a faith community | 18.7    | 24.4    | 7.0    | 16.6     | 25.6   | 35.2    | 8.9     | 5.6      | 3.1       |          |
| How often do you participate in discussion groups about faith and work? |                      |        |
| Not at all               | 65.0      | 78.7    | 49.3   | 69.7     | 64.9   | 78.6    | 65.8    | 56.3     | 36.0      |
| Less than once per month | 18.0      | 12.3    | 24.0   | 17.2     | 18.0   | 14.4    | 21.3    | 20.5     | 20.5      |
| 1–2 times per month      | 8.3       | 5.0     | 12.0   | 7.9      | 8.2    | *       | 4.3     | 8.8      | 11.9      | 13.1      |
| 3–4 times per month      | 4.8       | 2.0     | 8.5    | 3.8      | 4.5    | 1.8     | 3.2     | 6.2      | 15.0      |
| 5 or more times per month | 3.9       | 2.0     | 6.3    | 1.5      | 4.4    | 1.0     | 1.0     | 5.2      | 15.5      |
Table 2. Cont.

| Faith and Work Variables | Religious Identity | Religious Service Attendance |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
|                          | Overall * | Catholic | Evang. | Mainline | Other | Chi-Sq. | Several Times per Year or Less | 1–3 Times per Month | Nearly Every Week/Every Week | Multiple Times per Week | Chi-Sq. |
| My faith leader discusses how we should behave at work. | | | | | | | | | |
| Never                    | 15.1    | 19.4    | 9.6    | 18.7    | 14.6   | 15.9   | 20.5    | 14.8    | 5.6         |                     | *     |
| Rarely                   | 10.3    | 10.2    | 10.3   | 15.0    | 8.4    | 6.0    | 15.6    | 13.8    | 9.7         |                     | *     |
| Sometimes                | 24.6    | 18.7    | 34.3   | 23.3    | 21.6   | *     | 13.1    | 29.7    | 33.6        | 36.5        | *     |
| Often                    | 10.2    | 4.6     | 17.1   | 7.6     | 10.0   | 3.6    | 10.2    | 14.5    | 24.1        |                     |       |
| Very often               | 6.2     | 2.5     | 11.1   | 4.7     | 5.6    | 1.7    | 5.7     | 8.6     | 17.3        |                     |       |
| I do not have a faith leader | 33.7    | 44.7    | 17.6   | 30.8    | 39.9   | 59.7   | 18.4    | 14.7    | 6.9         |                     |       |

My faith leader teaches about the meaning of work.

|                        | Gender | Race/Ethnicity | Age |
|------------------------|--------|----------------|-----|
|                        | Man    | Woman         |     |
| Strongly disagree      | 8.4    | 9.5            | 7.3 |
| Somewhat disagree      | 4.6    | 5.3            | 4.0 |
| Neither disagree nor agree | 20.4  | 20.3           | 20.4 |
| Strongly agree         | 30.0   | 29.8           | 30.4 |
| I do not have a faith community | 8.6   | 8.2            | 8.9 |

♦ All percentages weighted for probability of selection and non-response. ○ These questions were asked of respondents who are employed, self-employed, or retired. These questions were skipped if the respondent was unemployed, a homemaker, student, or volunteer. * Chi-square test significant \( p < 0.05 \).

Table 3. Faith and Work Survey Questions By Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Age Among a Sample of Practicing Christians (\( n = 7305 \)).

| Faith and Work Variables | Overall * | Gender | Race/Ethnicity | Age |
|--------------------------|-----------|--------|----------------|-----|
|                        | Man    | Woman | White | Black | Asian | Hispanic | Other | Multiple | Chi-Sq. | 18–34 | 35–54 | 55–64 | 65+ |
| Skills and habits that I have learned from my faith community help me succeed at work. | 8.4    | 9.5    | 7.3    | 8.5    | 7.1    | 10.4    | 9.0    | 9.3     | 9.8    | 9.6   | 8.0   | 8.4   | 7.8   |
| Strongly disagree        | 4.6    | 5.3    | 4.0    | 5.0    | 3.0    | 2.9     | 4.5    | 7.9     | 2.7    | 6.6   | 4.0   | 4.2   | 3.8   |
| Neither disagree nor agree | 20.4  | 20.3   | 20.4   | 20.8   | 17.7   | 13.5    | 19.1   | 29.0    | 21.1   | 18.1  | 19.1  | 19.8  | 25.3  |
| Strongly agree           | 30.0   | 29.8   | 30.4   | 30.2   | 30.8   | 33.4    | 32.7   | 24.1    | 25.8   | 31.0  | 30.0  | 28.5  | 30.4  |
| I do not have a faith community | 8.6   | 8.2    | 8.9    | 9.1    | 5.5    | 11.5    | 8.9    | 2.8     | 10.0   | 8.3   | 8.2   | 8.7   | 9.6   |
Table 3. Cont.

| Faith and Work Variables | Overall * | Gender | Race/Ethnicity | Age | Chi-Sq. |
|--------------------------|-----------|--------|----------------|-----|---------|
|                          | Man       | Woman  | Chi-Sq. White  | Chi-Sq. Black | Chi-Sq. Asian | Chi-Sq. Hispanic | Chi-Sq. Other | Chi-Sq. Multiple | Chi-Sq. 18–34 | Chi-Sq. 35–54 | Chi-Sq. 55–64 | Chi-Sq. 65+ | Chi-Sq. 65+ |
| My faith guides me through stressful times in my work-life. | 6.2       | 7.0    | 5.5 | 5.8 | 7.1 | 8.5 | 6.6 | 4.9 | 7.0 | 4.8 | 6.7 | 5.6 | 7.7 | 6.8 |
| Strongly disagree        | 4.0       | 5.0    | 2.9 | 4.1 | 2.0 | 8.4 | 4.6 | 0.8 | 3.2 | 5.6 | 4.1 | 2.4 | 3.2 |       |
| Somewhat disagree        | 3.2       | 3.6    | 3.8 | 3.4 | 1.9 | 2.9 | 3.9 | 0.0 | 2.6 | 4.6 | 3.4 | 2.6 | 1.7 |       |
| Neither disagree nor agree | 13.7     | 16.2   | 11.3 | 15.4 | 6.6 | 2.0 | 12.8 | 8.3 | 12.7 | 16.8 | 12.3 | 14.1 | 12.4 |       |
| Somewhat agree           | 27.2      | 29.5   | 25.1 | 27.7 | 24.6 | 31.5 | 27.6 | 31.6 | 27.1 | 30.3 | 27.9 | 25.1 | 24.7 |       |
| Strongly agree           | 43.9      | 39.0   | 48.8 | 40.6 | 57.2 | 53.1 | 44.2 | 56.1 | 46.5 | 38.6 | 47.6 | 48.9 | 39.8 |       |
| This does not apply to me | 8.1       | 6.8    | 9.1 | 8.9 | 7.7 | 2.2 | 5.1 | 3.2 | 8.0 | 4.1 | 4.7 | 7.0 | 18.3 |       |
| My faith community supports me in my work or career. | 6.2       | 7.0    | 5.5 | 5.8 | 7.1 | 8.5 | 6.6 | 4.9 | 7.0 | 4.8 | 6.7 | 5.6 | 7.7 | 6.8 |
| Strongly disagree        | 4.0       | 5.0    | 2.9 | 4.1 | 2.0 | 8.4 | 4.6 | 0.8 | 3.2 | 5.6 | 4.1 | 2.4 | 3.2 |       |
| Somewhat disagree        | 3.2       | 3.6    | 3.8 | 3.4 | 1.9 | 2.9 | 3.9 | 0.0 | 2.6 | 4.6 | 3.4 | 2.6 | 1.7 |       |
| Neither disagree nor agree | 13.7     | 16.2   | 11.3 | 15.4 | 6.6 | 2.0 | 12.8 | 8.3 | 12.7 | 16.8 | 12.3 | 14.1 | 12.4 |       |
| Somewhat agree           | 27.2      | 29.5   | 25.1 | 27.7 | 24.6 | 31.5 | 27.6 | 31.6 | 27.1 | 30.3 | 27.9 | 25.1 | 24.7 |       |
| Strongly agree           | 43.9      | 39.0   | 48.8 | 40.6 | 57.2 | 53.1 | 44.2 | 56.1 | 46.5 | 38.6 | 47.6 | 48.9 | 39.8 |       |
| I do not have a faith community | 18.7     | 17.7   | 19.6 | 19.1 | 15.5 | 9.5 | 19.8 | 6.7 | 21.5 | 19.8 | 18.5 | 19.0 | 17.8 |       |
| How often do you participate in discussion groups about faith and work? | 15.1      | 14.6   | 15.4 | 15.2 | 15.3 | 12.0 | 14.9 | 17.8 | 13.4 | 11.7 | 13.3 | 15.7 | 20.9 |       |
| Not at all               | 65.0      | 66.5   | 63.8 | 64.7 | 63.4 | 65.1 | 67.0 | 62.3 | 66.6 | 62.1 | 64.3 | 65.3 | 68.8 |       |
| Less than once per month | 18.0      | 18.3   | 17.7 | 18.7 | 15.7 | 25.7 | 17.2 | 25.0 | 15.9 | 19.6 | 19.3 | 17.7 | 14.5 |       |
| 1-2 times per month      | 8.3       | 7.5    | 8.9 | 7.9 | 9.1 | 9.2 | 8.7 | 3.0 | 11.2 | 9.9 | 8.5 | 8.0 | 6.8 | 6.8 |
| 3-4 times per month      | 4.8       | 4.8    | 4.9 | 4.8 | 6.2 | 0.0 | 4.8 | 6.9 | 2.2 | 5.0 | 4.4 | 5.1 | 5.1 |       |
| 5+ times per month       | 3.9       | 2.9    | 4.7 | 3.8 | 5.6 | 0.0 | 2.3 | 2.8 | 4.2 | 3.4 | 3.5 | 4.0 | 4.8 |       |
| My faith leader discusses how we should behave at work. | 15.1      | 14.6   | 15.4 | 15.2 | 15.3 | 12.0 | 14.9 | 17.8 | 13.4 | 11.7 | 13.3 | 15.7 | 20.9 |       |
| Never                    | 10.3      | 10.5   | 10.2 | 10.5 | 9.7 | 26.0 | 10.3 | 16.9 | 8.6 | 12.4 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 9.2 |       |
| Rarely                   | 24.6      | 24.2   | 24.7 | 24.4 | 25.4 | 22.9 | 24.0 | 18.2 | 25.5 | 26.7 | 26.4 | 23.4 | 20.6 |       |
| Sometimes                | 10.2      | 11.2   | 9.3 | 9.7 | 11.7 | 8.0 | 9.3 | 18.0 | 12.3 | 12.3 | 10.6 | 10.2 | 7.4 |       |
| Very often               | 6.2       | 5.9    | 6.5 | 5.1 | 11.8 | 2.0 | 6.9 | 5.2 | 4.9 | 5.9 | 6.5 | 6.9 | 5.3 |       |
| I do not have a faith leader | 33.7     | 33.6   | 33.9 | 35.1 | 26.0 | 29.2 | 34.5 | 23.9 | 35.3 | 31.0 | 33.5 | 34.0 | 36.7 |       |
| My faith leader teaches about the meaning of work. | 15.1      | 14.6   | 15.4 | 15.2 | 15.3 | 12.0 | 14.9 | 17.8 | 13.4 | 11.7 | 13.3 | 15.7 | 20.9 |       |
| Never                    | 11.7      | 12.0   | 11.5 | 12.1 | 10.4 | 17.1 | 11.5 | 15.5 | 8.9 | 13.1 | 11.1 | 10.7 | 12.0 |       |
| Rarely                   | 26.8      | 26.7   | 26.9 | 26.9 | 28.4 | 32.0 | 23.5 | 27.7 | 28.7 | 29.3 | 27.7 | 26.2 | 23.3 |       |
| Sometimes                | 9.3       | 8.7    | 9.8 | 8.4 | 11.3 | 9.1 | 11.0 | 13.4 | 10.2 | 11.8 | 10.5 | 8.2 | 5.9 |       |
| Very often               | 4.8       | 4.1    | 5.4 | 3.9 | 9.5 | 2.0 | 5.7 | 5.2 | 3.6 | 4.7 | 4.5 | 6.3 | 4.3 |       |
| I do not have a faith leader | 33.7     | 33.7   | 33.7 | 35.1 | 26.0 | 30.9 | 34.7 | 22.8 | 35.7 | 31.4 | 33.7 | 33.4 | 36.4 |       |

* All percentages weighted for probability of selection and non-response. White, non-Hispanic. These questions were asked of respondents who are employed, self-employed, or retired. These questions were skipped if the respondent was unemployed, a homemaker, student, or volunteer. * Chi-square test significant \( p < 0.05. \)
3.1.1. Impact of Faith Community on Workplace Success

According to our survey, 58% of practicing Christians somewhat or strongly agree that the skills and habits that they have learned from their faith community help them succeed at work. The level of agreement varied depending on the respondents’ particular Christian tradition (Figure 1): 77% of Evangelicals agree (somewhat or strongly) that the skills and habits from their faith community help them at work, whereas 56% of Mainline Protestants and 44% of Catholics agreed with the statement (p-value < 0.0001). Church attendance may also play an important role. For example, when asked whether skills and habits from one’s faith community help with succeeding in one’s work, there is a clear trend between agreeing with this statement (somewhat or strongly) and attendance in religious services (p-value < 0.0001). Forty percent of people who attend church several times per year or less agreed but this increased for people who attend services one to three times per month (59%), every week or nearly every week (72%), and multiple times per week (88%). Of course, it is also possible that people who find skills and habits they learn through their faith to be beneficial at work are motivated to attend religious services more frequently (so correlation does not imply causal ordering).

![Figure 1.](image)

Approximately four-in-ten (41%) practicing Christians also agree that their faith community supports them in their work or career. This may be especially true during challenging situations—as almost three-quarters (71%) agree that faith guides them through stressful times in their work-life (Figure 2). A greater proportion of Evangelicals and Mainline Protestants compared to Catholics agree that their faith community supports them in their work or career. For example, when it comes to faith guiding people through stressful times in work, 87% of Evangelicals agree that this is true, compared to 66% of those part of Mainline traditions and 60% of Catholics (p < 0.01). Similarly, a greater proportion of those with higher rates of religious service attendance agree with this statement. Among those who attend several times per year or less, 55% agree, whereas 83% of those who attend every week agree, and 94% of those who attend multiple times per week agree (p < 0.0001). Faith appears to be especially helpful in guiding particular groups of respondents through stressful times in their work life. For example, among practicing Christians, 82% of Black respondents and 85% of Asians strongly agreed, but only 72% of Hispanics and 68% of non-Hispanic Whites strongly agreed (p < 0.0001).

When it comes to broad overarching ways that faith contributes to work, most practicing Christians agree that work is enriched by their faith. They feel that what they have learned from their faith supports their professional success, and this becomes especially important and apparent during times of workplace stress and strife. These patterns appear to have a relationship to integration into one’s faith community, such that those who attend frequently also see the ways that faith enriches work. It is
important to note that this is correlational data, and to the extent that there may be causal relationships between these variables, the direction of causality is not clear.

3.1.2. Talking about Work at Church

While Christian survey respondents were generally affirming of the impact of their faith and faith community on workplace success, they reported less frequently any direct or explicit conversations around workplace issues within their faith community. For example, Figure 3 shows that 49% of Evangelicals, 70% of Mainline Christians, and 79% of Catholics do not participate in discussion groups about faith and work at all \( (p < 0.0001) \). Among those that do participate in these types of groups, they do so relatively infrequently—less than once per month.
Hearing faith leaders talk directly about workplace issues is also relatively rare. Only 16% of practicing Christians said that their faith leader often/very often discusses how congregants should behave at work (Figure 4). This was more common among Evangelicals (28%) and less common among Mainline Christians (12%) or Catholics (7%; \(p < 0.0001\)). It was also more common among those who attend religious services multiple times per week (41%), compared to those who attend several times per year or less (5%; \(p < 0.0001\)). Finally, it was more common among younger respondents, with 18% of those between ages 18–34 saying that their faith leader discusses how to behave at work often or very often, compared to 13% of those who are 65 or older (\(p < 0.05\)).

![Figure 4. % of people who say their faith leader often or very often discusses how they should behave at work (overall and by subgroup).](image)

Similarly, Figure 5 shows that it is also uncommon for faith leaders to talk about the meaning of work. Fourteen percent of faith leaders teach about the meaning of work “often” or “very often.” However, a higher proportion of Evangelicals (23%) said their faith leader spoke about the meaning of work, as compared to 10% of those who are Mainline and 17% of those who are Catholic (\(p < 0.0001\)). Attendance levels, unsurprisingly, are also relevant. Only 5% who attend religious services several times per year or less said their faith leader spoke often/very often about the meaning of work, compared to 20% of those who attend every week or nearly every week and 34% of those who attend multiple times per week (\(p < 0.0001\)). Hearing about the meaning of work from a faith leader “often” or “very often” was also more common among Black (21%) respondents as compared to Hispanics (17%), non-Hispanic whites (12%), and Asians (11%) (\(p < 0.0001\)).

In sum, despite the large percentage of Christians who report a positive impact of their faith and faith communities on their work, substantially fewer engage in or seek out explicit discussions of faith and work in their faith communities, and it is quite rare to speak to a faith leader directly about issues of work.
Similarly, Figure 5 shows that it is also uncommon for faith leaders to talk about the meaning of work. Fourteen percent of faith leaders teach about the meaning of work “often” or “very often.” However, a higher proportion of Evangelicals (23%) said their faith leader spoke about the meaning of work, as compared to 10% of those who are Mainline and 17% of those who are Catholic ($p < 0.0001$). Attendance levels, unsurprisingly, are also relevant. Only 5% who attend religious services several times per year or less said their faith leader spoke often/very often about the meaning of work, compared to 20% of those who attend every week or nearly every week and 34% of those who attend multiple times per week ($p < 0.0001$). Hearing about the meaning of work from a faith leader “often” or “very often” was also more common among Black (21%) respondents as compared to Hispanics (17%), non-Hispanic whites (12%), and Asians (11%) ($p < 0.0001$).

3.2. Interview Findings

Given that the majority of our practicing Christian survey respondents reported never discussing work with a clergy member or participating in groups that explicitly discuss faith and work in the church context, in our interviews we asked highly engaged/highly practicing respondents (those who attended once per month or more) to share what suggestions they would make to faith leaders about how they can better support people in their work. Of the 88 interviews we analyzed, 73 respondents had clear recommendations for their faith leaders about how to better support people in their work. These recommendations generally fall into three categories: (1) how pastors and churches can provide more affirmation and encouragement to Christians in their work, (2) how pastors and church can help congregants more effectively engage with the topic of faith and/or express their faith in the workplace, and (3) how churches themselves can better accommodate the needs of working people within the church space so that they can more fully participate in the life of the faith community.

3.2.1. Encourage and Support Workers

Many respondents in our interview subsample wanted their churches and pastors to provide more encouragement and support to people around their work, demonstrating a felt desire for an increased sense of integration between faith and work, churches and the workplace. Interview respondents shared several ways that this could happen.

Affirm the Spiritual Value, Meaning, and Purpose of Work

First, Christians we interviewed felt that pastors could do more to signal to church members that, regardless of one’s occupation, work itself has spiritual value. That is, they wanted their pastors to make more explicit connections between faith and work in ways that communicated respect for work itself in all its varied forms. For example, a self-identified Caucasian Evangelical man who works as a maintenance technician advised pastors to “talk about it [work] as valuable,” noting that “just about
any work” is valuable because it “mimics the creativity of God in creation.” A white Episcopal woman who works as an IT specialist reflected further:

I think that the best thing that we can do as congregation leaders, as faith leaders, is to remind people that every single one of them has value, and the way that you are contributing to the world is the way that God has asked you to, and that that has value. [...] And so I think the answer has to do with helping people find dignity and value in what it is that they do.

For this respondent, the fact that many people (including herself) work in jobs that they are not personally passionate about in order to financially care for their families was all the more reason for clergy to help people find purpose and meaning in their daily work. She reflected, “[H]ere in the Episcopal church we talk about our baptismal covenant, which asks us to seek and serve Christ in every person, which asks us to uphold the dignity of every human being. And regardless of what job you’re doing, you can seek and serve Christ in every person, and you can uphold the dignity of every human being.” Providing this type of theological framing, then, could be a way for clergy to help people find increased integration with faith in their workplace. As a self-identified Asian American Evangelical man who is a healthcare student suggested, framing work as meaningful activity—beyond just paying the bills—could also help people feel more motivated and less burnt out in their individual work circumstances.

Others wanted pastors to place more emphasis on individuals seeing the “purpose of God” in work, or having a sense of “mission” at work, which they thought could increase a sense of faith–work integration. This desire for help with finding meaning at work in so-called “secular settings” was sometimes framed in contrast to work in explicitly Christian settings. One white Evangelical woman who worked in social media commented, “I feel like my job now I’d love for it to be more maybe spiritually meaningful, but I don’t exactly know how to get there. So, maybe offering just some ways to help with that, some ways to find meaning in your job that’s not in ministry or in missions or directly working for something that’s faith related.” For this woman and others, it was particularly important to understand the meaning of work that was perceived to be secular.

The most obvious way for pastors to help church members derive increased spiritual meaning from their work was to more visibly address the topic of work at church. A white Methodist woman who works as a college recruiter told us: “tell faith leaders to discuss faith in the workplace, openly and intentionally, and not just when it simply comes up in the conversation or when it connects to a specific point you’re trying to make.” Additionally, preaching and teaching should be more accessible—avoiding jargon—and helping church members see that no aspect of life is “beyond our relationship with God.” Equally importantly, pastors should encourage congregants to “be the best you can be,” no matter one’s job, and to “do what they love.”

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7 ST44, Man, Caucasian, 31, Maintenance Technician, South Carolina, Evangelical.
8 ST07, Woman, White, 49, Senior Communications Specialist (Univ IT), California, Episcopal.
9 ST07, Woman, White, 49, Senior Communications Specialist (Univ IT), California, Episcopal.
10 ST85: Man, Asian American (Vietnamese), 22, Graduate Student, Missouri, Catholic.
11 ST83, Man, African, 20, IT Support, Maryland, Anglican.
12 ST85, Man, Asian American (Vietnamese), 22, Graduate Student, Missouri, Catholic.
13 ST104, Woman, White, 31, Director of Marketing, Kentucky, Evangelical.
14 ST76, Woman, Hispanic/White, 67, Call Center Worker, New Hampshire, Roman Catholic; ST62, Man, White, 59, Transportation Consultant, Florida, Catholic.
15 ST97, Woman, White, 29, College Recruiter, Alabama, Methodist.
16 ST100, Man, Hispanic/Caucasian, 65, Delivery Driver, California, Baptist.
17 ST35, Man, White, 64, Business Owner, Nevada, Lutheran.
18 ST39, Woman, White, 29, Engineer, Virginia, Evangelical.
Pay Attention to Those Who Struggle: Challenging Professions, Women, and Job Seekers

Second, respondents urged pastors to pay special attention to supporting those who might be struggling with difficulties in their career or workplace environment. For example, an Alaskan Native Evangelical woman who is a small business owner emphasized how important it is for church leaders to be “open-minded” and “non-judgmental,” so that people can feel comfortable going to them with any issues they are facing in the workplace. Additionally, many respondents wanted leaders to be accessible and intentionally get to know church members and their work-related struggles better, so that pastors could provide effective support tailored to individual needs, including offering resources like prayer and counseling.

A Hispanic Evangelical man who is a consultant manager suggested that pastors encourage workers to draw on prayer as a resource for dealing with stress at work, while a self-identified African American Episcopal woman who is a non-profit executive director suggested looking for tangible ways to make a difference in congregants’ lives, such as helping with resume writing.

In particular, respondents hoped pastors would encourage congregants to persevere in times of work difficulty and not be afraid to make changes to their work if needed. For example, a white Evangelical woman who works as a Spanish teacher wanted pastors to remind people that “okay, maybe you do not like your job right now and maybe it doesn’t seem like any doors of opportunity are opening up just yet. Maybe that’s because God is like telling you, you know, ‘just wait, I need you in this place. For some reason I need you in this place still.’”

They also saw a role for churches in supporting people in working through ethical dilemmas, workplace conflict, and stress. A Hispanic Evangelical man who is a communications manager for a fast food franchise recognized that there may be times when Christians feel “miserable” at work due to perceived conflicts between their work and their faith. In this instance, Christian workers should be supported in trusting God and discerning whether “you can take yourself out of the situation and try something that lines up with what—your beliefs are” and what one feels called to do.

Respondents also expressed a desire for clergy to exhibit more empathy for working people, noting that many clergy lack experiential knowledge of the work environments and struggles that many working people face, such as inflexible schedules, balancing family and work demands, and financial challenges. For example, a self-identified Caucasian Evangelical man who works as an actuary reflected:

I think unfortunately, very few pastors have been in the work world. And I think it’s hard to relate. I know pastors have very demanding lives because of what they do, but in a lot of ways their schedules are pretty flexible too. That same thing is not true in the work world. And so, I’ve definitely seen situations with what I’d say a lack of empathy or understanding towards just how demanding work can be. And I don’t know that a lot of pastors realize that. I mean I think intellectually they know it, but I don’t think they get it.
One way churches could exhibit greater understanding and empathy for working people is to provide more targeted support that is geared towards specific professions or groups. For example, a Hispanic Catholic man who is a corrections officer hoped that churches would be more open to supporting “people who have to see the ugly side of the human, the human species”—for example, those in law enforcement, health care, and firefighters. As he explained, “there are professions that are a little bit more strenuous than others in that sense” and they need additional support in integrating faith and work.28 Our respondents told us that churches could offer tailored small groups for veterans, first responders, business owners, government workers, medical professionals, working mothers, or educators, reflecting the range of occupations for these individuals;29 no doubt others would have identified other occupational categories. Another recommendation was for clergy to visit church members in their workplaces in order to immerse themselves in particular professional worlds.30

In light of changing family structures and gender roles (Ammons et al. 2017; Edgell 2006), a number of our respondents wanted increased support by churches and pastors for working women. Several saw a need to recognize these women from the pulpit: both by recognizing working women who were present in the congregation, especially those with families, and by offering affirmative Biblical messages about women who work. They felt that if these women were more empowered and recognized at church, this would translate to more confidence in the workplace as well as acceptance within congregations.31 A Black Evangelical woman professor expressed some degree of frustration that support for working women seemed to be politicized in the church. She put it starkly, “Stop demonizing people for choosing to do something for a living . . . stop using religion as an excuse for political ideology especially when you’re talking about religion and the workplace or you’re talking about women in the workplace. No. Stop doing these things.”32 A white Lutheran woman who works in law enforcement put it more positively: “I think it’s really important for faith leaders to make sure that no matter what your career choice is, your life choice is, there is value in it, and it is something that God probably wants you to do.”33 In particular, she felt that mothers who choose to be full time workers should be celebrated as professionals (and parents) by faith leaders, rather than being shamed for continuing to work or for enjoying their specific job and excelling in it. Another white Evangelical woman who works as a nurse put it bluntly, “It’s hard being a working mom.”34 While she considered supporting working mothers to be an unmet need, she had no idea how churches could help, in part because working parents are already so busy that it is “hard to fit anything in that would be worth their time and effort.” However, another evangelical Christian, who works as a nurse noted, one tangible way churches could support working parents is through offering childcare;35 another suggested bringing food to schools on parent–teacher nights.36

Several people we interviewed also mentioned the need for churches to do more to support people in the emotional and practical challenges of job-seeking. Practically, support could look like encouraging people in the job application process, serving as a liaison to outside networks and resources, helping with financial planning, or offering workshops and job fairs at church.37 As a white

28 ST25, Man, Hispanic (non-White), 36, Asset Manager, Dept of Corrections, California, Catholic.
29 ST40, Man, White, 42, Paramedic Supervisor, Oregon, Evangelical; ST45, Woman, White, 48, Tutor, Connecticut, Evangelical; ST56, Woman, Asian, 35, Pediatrician, California, Mainline; ST77, Woman, White, 22, Data Analyst, Virginia, Evangelical; ST37, Man, White/Hispanic, 43, High School ROTC Instructor, Pennsylvania, Evangelical.
30 ST49, Man, Black, 38, Criminal Investigator, Texas, Evangelical.
31 ST31, Woman, White, 25, Civil Engineer, Washington, Evangelical; ST36, Woman, White, 45, Associate Professor, Ohio, Catholic.
32 ST102, Woman, Black (British), 32, Assistant Professor, Texas, Evangelical.
33 ST29, Woman, White, 55, Law Enforcement Deputy, Colorado, Lutheran.
34 ST54, Woman, White, 36, Nurse Practitioner, Indiana, Evangelical.
35 ST98, Woman, Caucasian, 60, Nurse, Minnesota, Evangelical.
36 ST19, Woman, White, 55, Spanish Teacher, Ohio, Evangelical.
37 Man, White, 49, CFO, California; Evangelical; ST15, Woman, White, 47, Financial Services, Arizona, Evangelical; ST66, Woman, African American, 50, Tech Consultant, Virginia, Evangelical; ST73, Man, Black, 31, Human Resources, Michigan, Evangelical.
Evangelical man who works as a land surveyor reflected: "It would be nice to harness the network of the church in educational and job search related stuff." A white Catholic woman who is an art teacher shared that when she was looking for a job, she expected to find a support system in the church, given how well-connected and networked priests seemed in the wider community, but instead she found that priests did not seem well-equipped to play this connector role, which left her disappointed.

Whether through providing theological frameworks that support the integration of faith and work or offering emotional support, what our interviews show is that Christians across different social locations and church traditions place a high value on clergy affirming the value of work—regardless of occupation—and they want clergy to demonstrate a more nuanced (and non-judgmental) awareness of the needs of working people. They also want faith leaders to find creative practical solutions to addressing the unique work challenges that different groups face within church structures and pastoral ministry.

3.2.2. Provide Guidance for Engaging Faith at Work

Within our interview subsample, many also expressed a desire for more explicit guidance from clergy and churches on how to effectively navigate the topic of faith itself at work. Overall, these respondents wanted more concrete teaching and training on how to express their faith appropriately or engage with different religious or political views in the workplace.

Help with Navigating a Diverse Work Environment

Several younger respondents in their twenties and thirties who worked in professional business contexts wanted more emphasis in pastoral teaching on how to navigate a diverse work environment respectfully. For example, a white Catholic man who is an engineer wanted people to be better equipped to have "a rational conversation" with those of different religions in ways that encouraged openness and curiosity. A Filipino Evangelical man who works in politics recommended that churches offer "sensitivity training" on how to engage with coworkers or supervisors with "contrary political and religious beliefs." This sentiment was echoed by a white Evangelical woman nurse who said:

I think that that’s where a lot of conflict comes from, in the workplace, is the clashing of different religions. And I think, instead of having the religions compete, just discuss the differences. Don’t make one right, and one wrong. I think that’s where a lot of the issues come from. And I think that support from the community, what those leaders can do for people in the workplace, is just counsel them on how to have those discussions that are non-judgmental, that are just curious about someone else’s faith. Because I think, to be an individual that is religious, working with the public, where you’re gonna encounter all types of people, from all different cultures and religions, you have to understand them. Like, instead of knowing nothing about—know about their religion. Know their practices. Maybe you don’t agree with them, but you’re aware of them, and you respect them.

For these younger respondents, it was important that faith leaders stress workplace values of equality and respect for difference, encouraging congregants to respect religious diversity rather than seek to convert others.

Younger respondent also saw leaders playing a role in promoting values of compassion and understanding of others. A white Lutheran man who worked as an engineer shared:

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38 ST24, Man, White, 31, Land Surveyor, Maine, Conservative Baptist.
39 ST42, Woman, White, 31, Art Teacher, Illinois, Roman Catholic.
40 ST72, Man, White, 23, Engineer, Pennsylvania, Catholic.
41 ST13, Man, Filipino, 32, Politician, California, Evangelical.
42 ST86, Woman, White, 21, Nurse, Tennessee, Evangelical.
My perspective on this is that we’re all playing a couple-thousand-year-old game old of telephone regardless of where you are or what your worshipping—be it Christianity, be it Judaism, be it Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, it’s all just passed down, handed on, there’s no direct source that you can go to, that you can 100 percent say in this is infallible—now that be heresy to some of my more fervent friends here, but uh, compassion goes a long way and that is something that is evident in all religions and I think we’d be much better served to have that understanding—um, and being willing to understand people of other faiths than to take an Evangelical approach and just trying to convert everybody just to my specific brand of religion.43

Expressing Their Own Faith

By contrast, some older respondents wanted more concrete guidance from pastors and churches about how to appropriately express their own faith in the workplace, or, as one Black Evangelical woman who is a corporate training put it, how to “live out your faith in the workplace and not get fired or offend everyone around you.”44 This group tended to identify almost exclusively with Evangelical Christian traditions. Many were also women and people of color. For example, a self-identified African American Evangelical woman who works as a reimbursement analyst suggested that churches should model different scenarios in the workplace to teach people how to stand firm in their faith in the workplace, but she also wanted training on how express ones faith “in a way that won’t turn the world off from us but cause the world to come to us.”45 In a similar vein, a white Evangelical man who works as a field operations director also expressed a desire for churches to “train people in the way to present the Gospel in a manner of an invitation instead of like a coercion.”46 Citing fears of conflict,47 hostility, or the repercussions tied to expressing faith openly in the workplace,48 others wanted faith leaders to empower congregants to “live out their faith without fear.”49 To this end, the Black Evangelical woman who worked as a corporate trainer50 suggested creating safe places, such as small groups, for like-minded Christians to be able to share openly about “how to live out your faith in the workplace.” Alternately, a self-identified Caucasian Evangelical woman who is a wedding coordinator wished for “more teaching on diversified religions [. . .] and how as a Christian to reach those people.”51 She felt hesitant to discuss faith around people who did not share the same Christian views while working, due to feeling ill-informed. A self-identified African American Evangelical man who works in marketing thought if pastors could offer more concrete guidelines about expressing faith in the workplace, this could help relieve anxiety for church members:

I think sometimes people will shy away because everyone’s always scared of breaking a law that there’s a lawsuit coming or something that I think sometimes we just shy away from everything. So I think it would be good to understand in the faith side or in the church side, and also for the senior leaders to be able to better articulate, ‘Hey, this is acceptable and this isn’t.’52

Though this respondent understood there needed to be some boundaries in the workplace, he also wanted employees to be empowered to express their faith with others during lunch breaks or organize

43 ST16: Male, White, 32, Engineering Consulting, Nebraska, Lutheran.
44 ST17, Woman, Black, 40, Corporate Trainer, Georgia, Evangelical.
45 ST71, Woman, African American, 66, Reimbursement Analyst, California, Evangelical.
46 ST58, Man, White, Director of Field Operations, California, Evangelical.
47 ST41, Woman, Caucasian, 60, Accountant, Nebraska, Evangelical.
48 ST61, Man, White, 43, Manager, Minnesota, Catholic.
49 ST55, Woman, 39, Mixed (Caucasian, Cuban), Substitute Teacher, North Dakota, Evangelical.
50 ST17, Woman, Black, 40, Corporate Trainer, Georgia, Evangelical.
51 ST60, Woman, Caucasian, 53, Wedding Coordinator, Pennsylvania, Evangelical.
52 ST09, Man, African American, 50, Program Manager, Illinois, Evangelical.
a Bible Study after hours. Knowing what was legally or socially acceptable could help employees connect with confidence.

Still others suggested that pastors could help better prepare church members for conflict, discrimination, or hostility at work, and encourage members to respond in a distinctly Christian way when these things occur. A Black Presbyterian man who works as a graphic artist reflected:

I think, that pastors and religious leaders should help teach them using the dictates of their religion, teach them how to respond in a way that is honoring to the religion. You know, not to respond as—in a secular manner, but act in a way that will bring honor to God. I think that’s something that all—that definitely all Christians need to learn. I think—like I said, I think a lot of us, we tend to react instinctively because I think a lot of us just aren’t—it’s never discussed in church, I think, for a lot of people. When it comes up, they don’t know how to respond. They’re either—they either get angry, or they get scared, or they just get so nervous that they fall over themselves, and I don’t think that’s—I don’t think that’s the way that Christ wants us to respond. I think he wants us to respond in a way that’s measured, and it comes out of knowledge, not out of fear.

What is clear from these responses is that many older church members feel a lot of confusion and apprehension about what it means to appropriately express faith in the workplace. Thus, they are looking to pastors for both moral and practical guidance. On the other hand, younger Christians want pastors to place a higher emphasis on values of tolerance and curiosity when engaging with others who are different from them at work. In both instances, navigating difference at work while finding ways to express one’s faith in an authentic way, including through connecting with other Christians at work, were seen as topics of vital concern for clergy to address.

3.2.3. Minister to Working People at Church

While the majority of our interview subsample wanted more support and guidance from churches and faith leaders in their work and work contexts, there were some who also emphasized a need to better accommodate the needs of working people within the church context. They described difficulty attending Sunday morning church services regularly due to work schedules, and they wanted their churches to be more accommodating to working people and families by offering different service times. Several recommended offering mid-week Bible Studies or alternate worship service times.

Flexible Offerings

The need for ways to access spiritual resources outside of Sunday morning services seemed to be particularly relevant to those whose work can require long hours or inflexible shifts. A white Evangelical man who works in the oil industry wanted to see “more [service] times available for people who do work a lot of hours,” noting how helpful it is when churches broadcast their services on the radio or online. A Hispanic Evangelical woman who worked long hours in finance expressed her appreciation for a monthly women’s group from her church that met on a weeknight. Even though she could not attend Sunday services often, this allowed her to gather with others, talk, and stay connected with what was going on at the church and to feel a sense of community with others. Therefore, her recommendation would be for churches “to provide something like that, because it’s hard. It is very hard to do it on a weekend, for those that might work, or you want family time, that time. So, on a weeknight is much better, so it’s just finding that right week night, that’ll work for

53 ST33, Man, White, 48, Business Owner, Wisconsin, Evangelical.
54 ST43, Man, Black, 48, Graphic Artist, Florida, Presbyterian.
55 ST20, Man, White, 50, Engineering Manager, Michigan, Catholic; ST30, Woman, Black (Hispanic), 47, Senior Analyst, Georgia, Evangelical; ST101, Woman, White, 73, Educational Consultant, Massachusetts, Catholic
56 ST21, Man, White, 32, Land Assistant, Texas, Evangelical.
everybody." However, a self-identified African American Evangelical woman who is an executive director of a non-profit also cautioned leaders to be conscious of start times for weeknight activities in order to give people a chance to go home from work.

Hospitable Church Environment

In addition to increasing accessibility to corporate worship, the theme of creating a hospitable church environment that ministers effectively to people in a diversity of occupations also resurfaced. For example, a Hispanic Evangelical man who worked as an ROTC instructor described how critical it is that certain groups of people, such as those in the military, are not made to feel “dumb” or “judged” while at church. This same respondent described how important it is that pastors to make the Sunday message accessible and relatable to “the average man.” A self-identified African American Evangelical woman who is a financial analyst shared how when her church was faced with financial decisions her skills seemed to be treated as a detriment rather than an asset.

Thus, it seems that planning church activities with working people in mind is one practical way that clergy can show support and empathy towards the needs of working people. Additionally, clergy could demonstrate respect for working people by being sensitive to issues of stigma, welcoming people to contribute their professional expertise to the life of the church, modeling respect for all forms of work, and also tailoring sermons and ministries to include working class concerns.

It is also important to note that the desire for more flexibility and understanding from church with respect to the demands of work is likely under-represented in our interview sample, because we focused on those who attend church at least once per month. We did interview a white Evangelical woman who co-owns a heating/air conditioning business with her husband who was not part of our sample who said: “You know, one of the reasons that we just never went to church every Sunday was because Sunday is the only day that my husband has off, you know. He generally for most of the year will have to work on Saturday, so he just doesn’t get as much weekend, and you know Sunday morning is the only morning he gets to sleep in and rest.” This quote illustrates the tensions that people sometimes feel between work and church in a very practical way, and church leaders might benefit from reflecting on these tensions further.

4. Discussion/Conclusions

Our data help illuminate how secular concerns emerge within sacred space. While sociologists, drawing on Weber (1930) onward, have been primarily concerned with how the sacred informs the secular work context, not much is known about how so-called secular concerns like work are emerging within sacred spaces like churches. Thus, this has helped further illuminate the degree to which Christians actually draw on church and faith resources in their work and workplace, how often discussions about work come up explicitly in the church context, and what kinds of resources church members would like to receive from their faith leaders.

In general, we find that Christians from different traditions and social locations do draw on their faith community and faith in relation to work, but that faith leaders and churches could do more to explicitly connect faith and work. The majority of survey respondents see skills and habits they learn from their churches as helping them be more successful at work, meaning that churches indeed can offer individuals “workplace-bridging capital,” skills that have a pay-off in terms of work success that can enhance their work lives (Park et al. 2014), and this has an even stronger effect for those who attend church more regularly, highlighting the importance of church attendance for faith–work integration.

57 ST38, Woman, Hispanic, 51, Finance, Texas, Evangelical.
58 T57, Woman, African American, 59, Executive Director of Non-Profit, North Carolina, Evangelical.
59 ST37, Man, White/Hispanic, 43, ROTC Instructor, Pennsylvania, Evangelical.
60 ST18, Woman, African American, 45, Financial Analyst, Tennessee, Evangelical.
61 ST01, Woman, White, 50, Office Manager/Business Owner, Tennessee, Evangelical.
(Lynn et al. 2010; Park et al. 2014). In addition, faith was seen as a source of support in times of stress or difficulty at work, particularly among Evangelicals and certain demographics. A greater proportion of Black and Asian Americans, in particular, when compared to white or Hispanic individuals, say that faith guided them through stressful times at work.

At the same time, we find that explicit discussion about work does not come up that often in churches, and church members in particular rarely discuss work challenges with faith leaders. The majority of those surveyed have not participated in discussion groups about faith and work, and far fewer say that their faith leader teaches about the meaning of work or discusses how to behave at work. There were, however, some differences between groups in terms of the frequency with which work was discussed by their pastors. Evangelicals were more likely than Catholics or Mainline Protestants to report that their pastor talked often or very often about work. Additionally, Black congregants were nearly twice as likely as white congregants to hear discussions about the meaning of work and how to behave at work.

When we turn to our interview subsample, we find that the vast majority of highly practicing Christians—those who attend church once per month or more—indeed want church leaders to do more to communicate the value and meaning of work, to make themselves accessible and support church members in workplace challenges and difficulties, and to provide specific supports for specific constituencies—e.g., targeted professional groups, working women, the unemployed—including making service times and other church events more accessible. Women, in particular, describe wanting more legitimation from clergy of their work choices, as well as recognition of (and sensitivity to) the unique time pressures or family challenges they face. Thus, future research on faith and work might examine specifically how churches minister to the needs of working women, and what religious resources women draw on to ascribe value and meaning to their work.

Additionally, while offering overall encouragement and support for people in their work is critical, some groups, such as older evangelical Christians, especially women and Black evangelicals, wanted more guidance on how to express faith at work in appropriate ways, while others, such as younger Christians of all social groups wanted more emphasis on respectful engagement of differences in the workplace. Our future research will explore further how religious tradition, gender, age, and race have an impact on the kind of guidance that people want from churches regarding faith in the workplace.

Our data shows that many Christians want faith leaders and clergy to do more to make the topic of work more visible at church, and that many Christians want their leaders to reflect empathy and understanding for the challenges faced by working people in the contemporary work landscape. Thus, one of the ultimate goals of this project is to put easy-to-understand data into the hands of as many U.S. clergy as possible and create networks of clergy who are trained to meet the spiritual needs of working men and women from various demographic groups, across multiple occupational domains and at various income levels. Our findings also show how important it is for churches to be accessible and hospitable to people in a wide variety of jobs and also how important it is for pastors to affirm the worth, value, and meaning of a wide variety of jobs. Church members want faith leaders to pay attention to the different occupational groups represented at their church and remain cognizant of the differential impact of work pressures on different social groups within the church. While pastors may be limited in how much support they can offer, there may be peer-based solutions that allow individuals to connect with church members who share their same struggles, providing additional encouragement and support.

This study ultimately offers a means of providing faith leaders with empirical data that will allow them to more effectively address the work needs of congregants and formulate specific resources and responses. While the purpose of this article is to look at U.S. Christians and church settings, other studies may extend these findings to other religious groups and contexts outside the United States. This study also moves beyond the tendency of previous research to focus on a fairly narrow range of Christian professionals, offering insight into how a diverse range of Christians integrate faith and work. Future research can expand on these findings to investigate further the specific needs and
challenges faced by working religious people, including how race/ethnicity, gender, and social class inform people’s level of faith–work integration and the level of support they perceive in their work at church.

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