

NUCLEAR AND EXTENDED CHURCH

By John Gagliardi



There is no doubt in my mind that the next great move of the church worldwide will be in the area of marketplace or workplace ministry. Jesus and His disciples ministered in the marketplace, and after some 2000 years of clerical and liturgical emphasis, it is now time for that great truth to be restored to the “ekklesia”, the called-out people of God we call the “church”.

Every movement has its “movers and shakers”, those who can see ahead and bring the rest of us into line with the new things God is doing. And one of the prime movers in the current marketplace restoration is Dr C. Peter Wagner, a man who mixes faith and vision with a sharp, honest, intellectual edge that is all too rare these days in ecclesiastical thinking.

Dr Wagner is one of the world’s foremost Christian leaders, heading up the Wagner Leadership Institute, Global Harvest Ministries and the International Coalition of Apostles. He is the author of more than 60 books on topics such as church growth and spiritual warfare, and most recently a seminal work on marketplace ministry, *“The Church in the Workplace”*.

I first met Dr Wagner in 2005 at the Transform World “marketplace forum” event in Jakarta, Indonesia. We talked widely on various areas of ministry, and I well remember a breakfast during which he laid out his concept of what he called the “nuclear” and “extended” church. For me it was one of those “aha!” moments when a lot of generalized ideas and thoughts that had been swimming around in my head suddenly fell into place.

As he talked, and he was also talking of other things close to my heart, like the end-time wealth transfer and the place of workplace apostolic leaders, it was this concept of a nuclear and extended church that really hit me. It made practical sense to me. It was what I was seeing happening all around me, but which I previously struggled to put into clear words.

Peter himself, being as I said intellectually honest, admits it took a sharp nudge from God to change his thinking on the subject of marketplace ministry. He puts it this way: “For years I had been aware of the teaching on marketplace ministry that was emerging, and I had a favourable disposition toward it. But I had planned on keeping it at arm’s length, letting others carry this particular ball, while I continued going about doing what I considered to be more important things.

“...But God surprised me with as clear a word as I have received from Him: ‘My son, I want you to pay strict attention to the church in the workplace’. From that point on, it was no longer a matter of preference on my part; it was a matter of obedience.

“When the notion arises that the people of God in the workplace are, in fact, a legitimate form of the church, it proposes a significant innovation for most people ... What happens in a paradigm shift? Inevitably, we get pulled out of our comfort zones.”

According to Peter in *The Church in the Workplace* (a book I would regard as required reading for anyone involved in marketplace ministry), the church in reality takes on two forms: one is the gathering of believers in local congregations usually once a week on Sundays, and the other is the scattered body of believers throughout the workplace the rest of the week.

“They are the same people, namely, the People of God. What is the best terminology to describe these two forms of the church? In my opinion, the terms ‘church and world’, ‘church and marketplace’, ‘priests and kings’, ‘church and Kingdom’ and ‘pulpit and marketplace’ all reflect to one degree or another the Greek (dualistic) way of thinking. They maintain the distinction between the sacred and the secular, though both forms are actually the church.

“I like ‘gathered church and scattered church’ better ... however I have concluded that the best terminology of all is **‘nuclear church and extended church’**, which builds on the commonly accepted sociological concepts of the nuclear family and the extended family ... To follow this analogy, I have chosen ‘extended church’ to refer to the church in the workplace,” he says.

In his transparent honesty, Peter admits that this is new thinking for him – it was not that long ago that he believed that all “true” ministry was congregationally based, and even went so far as to teach that spiritual gifts were given to use only in the traditional congregational or “nuclear” church. But that was before God got hold of him, and “renewed” his mind totally in the terms of Romans 12: 2.

He writes: “I mention this because I want to empathize with those who have not yet gone through the paradigm shift that I am advocating ... If you are one of them ... I want to encourage you to begin to stretch your ideas of church and ministry. Let’s live in the present, not the past.

“What God’s people (the ekklesia) do in the extended church can be considered ministry just as much as leading a small group, teaching Sunday school, greeting those who come to church on Sunday, praying for the sick ... and even pastoring the church.

“Let me ease some readers through the paradigm shift by ending with a thought that will be new to many, namely, that **work is sacred** ... Work is part of God’s original design for the human race. According to Genesis 2: 15, when God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He put them there to work the garden.

“Now let’s kick this up another notch. Work can even be regarded as a form of worship ... The other day in church I was singing Matt Redman’s song ‘Let Everything that Has Breath.’ When we came to the line, ‘I will worship You with every breath,’ I got to thinking about the premise behind that line. Part of worship is obviously singing songs like this one in church on Sunday, no question. However, that is not all worship is.

“If we really believe that we can worship God with every breath, wouldn’t we be worshipping God with every breath at work? I can remember how relieved I was when the Holy Spirit gave me this thought. Why? Because, to be honest, I enjoy working more than I enjoy singing. And it gives me hope that there will be work in heaven as well as times of singing new songs as we gather around the throne of the Lamb. The thought of sitting around and playing a harp for all of eternity has never been that appealing.

“yes, there is a church in the workplace – we are that church – and what we do in the workplace is just as much ministry, service to God, and even worship as what we do on Sunday in our local church.”
(For further reading see Breakthrough Word June 15, 2006: “Your Work – Sacred or Secular?”)

Peter summarizes his thinking on the extended and nuclear church, and work as a sacred call to Christians, by quoting from Gregory Pierce's thoughtful book, *"spirituality@work"*:

"The spirituality of work is a disciplined attempt to align ourselves and our environment with God and to incarnate God's Spirit in the world through all the effort (paid and unpaid) we exert to make the world a better place, a little closer to the way God would have things."