

# GOOD LIVING



RICARDO RAMIREZ BUXEDA/ORLANDO SENTINEL

Ray Lemon (right), with Discovery worklife pastor Jim Butler, says, "Your best witness is by properly doing your job and being a good co-worker."

reaching out

## Faith on the job

Orlando's Discovery Church joins a national movement that promises to lead by example rather than in-your-face evangelism at work.

By MARK I. PINSKY  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

When a co-worker told Lynx bus supervisor Ray Lemon that he was ready to give his life to Jesus, Lemon says he suddenly felt "a clarity of purpose."

An informal, low-key relationship on the job between the man and Lemon, an adherent to his church's new form of evangelism, had led to a life-changing transformation.

For those who prefer their religion on the weekends — or not at all — the words "workplace evangelism" evoke chilling images: being cornered in cubicles by a pushy colleague, or finding unwanted tracts left in mailboxes or slipped under coffee cups.

Relax, says Jim Butler, the newly installed worklife pastor at Orlando's Discovery Church.

"Our motive isn't evangelistic, but to be models and influencers," says Butler, 50, head of the ministry called Discovery@Work. "What could be a better place to model than in the realities and challenges of the workplace?"

His goal, he says, "is not to add more people to the church, but to bring a greater degree of adventure, understanding and fulfillment to the workplace."

Butler says the notion for such a role came to him more than a year ago, when he asked himself, "Do we always live our Christian principles as we earn our daily bread?"

Discovery, one of Central Florida's most innovative megachurches, is launching a campaign to bring Christianity to the area's workplaces, beginning with Butler's appointment. It is the latest example of a national movement, which includes influential congregations such as Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in Southern California.

"It is gaining momentum," says Doug Spada, founder of Atlanta-based His Church at Work (hischurchatwork.org), which is consulting with Discovery and Saddleback. "And it's not about people taking a Bible tract to work and putting it on people's desks."

"Churches are starting to recognize that work is where their people face the majority of their challenges in life," he says. "In essence, their greatest influence is when the church scatters out there into the work world, where they spend most of their time."

Advocates say the movement, locally and nationally, has two purposes: First, believing Christians should use their faith to survive in a

stressful, competitive workplace, and thus to retain their humanity. And second, they should demonstrate that faith, to reach out to others as evangelists.

"It's more for the lives of their people, but what flows out of that is a holistic witness to the community," Spada says.

### Supporters focus on 'partnership'

The concept was intriguing enough to bring more than 200 church members — many young or in early middle age — to a recent gathering at Discovery's auditorium.

"Make your work with God a partnership," Butler urged them. Their goal should be "to bring more of his presence and values into the workplace."

For Darryl Bridges, manager of a cardiac care unit at Orlando Regional Medical Center, the most obvious manifestation of his Christian faith is "the way we treat our patients."

In a breakout session after the large meet-

*'Our motive isn't evangelistic, but to be models and influencers.'*

— WORKLIFE PASTOR JIM BUTLER  
ORLANDO'S DISCOVERY CHURCH

ing, he talked about how three members of his department — a janitor from Mexico, a nurse from India and a retired heart surgeon — affected the workplace by communicating their Christian faith through their calm, caring attitude toward patients and co-workers.

"Treat them as an individual and show concern for them," Bridges said, and "they may want to know more about the faith that motivates you."

Sometimes the example can be as simple as saying a short, silent grace over a meal.

"We can be an influence in the workplace," he told the group. "Look at the opportunities — and God will give them to you."

Ray Lemon was among those attending the Discovery session.

He was there, he says, to learn "how to properly display my Christian faith at work without stealing [time] from work, and not being overbearing with my co-workers. I learned that, as a Christian, you don't have to walk around with a Bible in your hand, and every

free moment tell people they need Jesus. Your best witness is by properly doing your job and being a good co-worker and friend to your co-workers."

Business owners also came to the sessions for guidance in living out their faith at work.

John Ledford, president of Ledford Financial in Orlando, says his Christian faith provides the "principles by which we run the organization. How we communicate with our staff, clients, perspective clients, vendors. We're not only trying to run a profitable business in an excellent manner, but also to model the life of Christ in how we do that on daily basis."

### Critics worry about intrusion

Discovery's efforts are linked to one of a half-dozen national ministry consulting firms specializing in evangelism on the job, called "Take Church to Work." This national organization helped create the Christian movement known as WorkLife with its founding six years ago.

Critics think such efforts are simply "stealth evangelism" and are intrusive in America's increasingly pluralistic workplaces.

"We get more and more queries about it, and it's disconcerting," says Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation, adding that she has no reliable national figures on complaints.

"My sense is that it's on the rise," she says, "that we haven't come to the end of this pendulum swing of right-wing, religious fundamentalism. There is an attempt to intrude religion into everything these days, and that includes the workplace. It's a terrible kind of blackmail."

Guidelines implemented in the 1990s protect religious expression in the workplace for federal employees, and many state and private employers have adopted similar practices.

The American Center for Law and Justice, a Christian religious-rights organization, reports a declining number of complaints about religious expression in the workplace, says its director, Jay Sekulow.

"A large number of the contacts are still accommodation for Sabbath observance," he says, "and some overreactions to Bible studies in the workplace. That is about it."

Mark I. Pinsky can be reached at  
mpinsky@orlandosentinel.com or 407-420-5589.