

***Just One Of The Team
- Reflections of a Laboratory Assistant.***

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I have been licensed as a Reader in St Albans Diocese of the Church of England for 14 yrs. I'm preaching and assisting in one of three local Churches on a regular basis. A few years ago at a Reader conference I was challenged to take a look at what I do during my major non-church activities, including Mon-Fri at work. This was to begin to see Reader Ministry as also work based and not just what we do on church based duties.

During all my 14 yrs as a Reader I have been employed as a Senior Laboratory Assistant for a small independent polymer research facility and polymer materials consultancy. My main area is chemical analysis as part of a small team. Although a church minister I have no formal chaplaincy role but am just part of the work team. Many of my work colleagues know I have a church ministry connection but I am like most of my regular church congregation folk simply trying to be a Christian presence within my place of work. Among my colleagues in other departments there are a few other Christians of various church backgrounds and we meet fairly frequently to pray for each other and for our other colleagues about work based and personal situations.

A good proportion of my immediate colleagues in my analytical team are atheists. Others had church influences and connections in the past but do not want to belong to the institutional church now. They may have varying levels of Christian belief and moral principles derived from those former connections. In this setting I feel I am first and foremost a listener to hear their objections to formal religion and where appropriate offer a personal and reasonable defence of my faith. Many speak of a church that somehow failed them in some way, failed to live up to its ideals and therefore seeming hypocritical. My response is often silence and later reflection on how we as the church often do fail to live up to our calling and by doing so confound someone else's budding belief and commitment to God.

Another personal response to my colleagues is simply to take their troubles, comments about the church and the world back into my own prayers and offer them up to God in my private devotions. Also to offer and show a genuine concern for their lives and troubles inside and outside work.

Over the years I have had questions directed to me from the point of view of serious enquiry and wanting to understand. More recently after being professed as a member of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis I started to wear my professional cross to work. One colleague has asked why I wear it and this has provided a small opportunity to talk about living under my particular Franciscan rule of life. One work colleague is a fan of the cult TV series "Buffy the Vampire Slayer". He made a remark that my cross slightly alarmed him. "I expect you to be out slaying vampires!" Well I'm not slaying vampires exactly but hopefully over time I can slay some misconceptions about Christian faith and discipleship. I hope I can also continue to find ways to show a person can be a thinking person, scientist, analyst and be Christian.