



staying *on* TRACK

What Are We Doing and Why Are We Doing It?

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It is often helpful to go back to the basics. In sports, we call them “fundamentals.” In theology, Paul called them “rudiments” or “milk.” In piano, it is “playing the scales.” In ministry, it is “mission,” “vision,” and “goals.”

Reviewing the basic mission of Christian Legal Society, at least every now and then, can help remind us what we are supposed to be doing. It's a way to stay on track, to keep our bearings.

Many of those reading this will have a very good idea as to what “we are supposed to be doing” on law school campuses and in our attorney groups meeting in cities across the country. Many others may wonder. Some of us are involved in vibrant, effective communities of lawyers or law students, and we may not need a refresher. The vision speaks for itself. Others of us are struggling with our meager communities, hoping that we'll survive long enough to have another event, another meeting, another lunch together. Some are simply wishing there were others with whom they might fellowship.

Whatever our particular circumstance, it is good to return to the basics. We all need a reminder of what we're in this for and what it's all about. Is it worth the effort to gather together? Is our time effective and edifying? Are we making a difference in our communities? Why are we doing this?

Whether we're a brand new 1L, a seasoned attorney, or someone somewhere in between, we have a longing—sometimes vague, sometimes fierce—for our legal work to matter. As Christians, we want law to be kingdom work, a ministry of justice, meaningful love of neighbor, used by God as He redeems the world. The mission of Christian Legal Society is to both nurture that longing and give it wings—to provide the means by which it might become fully realized.

So I thought I might use this space this month to remind us of our mission, as well as the real goals of our shared ministry with and to lawyers and law students.

The vision of CLS, in sum, is to nurture and encourage law students and to “inspire and train” attorneys in three areas: spiritual formation, compassionate outreach, and vocational stewardship. This vision is further developed through four foundational objectives of CLS’ ministry: Gathering, Spiritual Formation, Vocational Stewardship, and Service. I invite you to walk through these objectives, imagining what they might look like in your community.

Gathering

The first, and most modest, goal in fulfilling the CLS mission is simply an invitation: we want to bring students and lawyers into community by encouraging them to gather locally or to simply identify as Christ-followers. This is not an earth-shaking goal, and it has few deep consequences apart from creating an invitation for law students on campus and lawyers at the bar to stand up and say “I’m with Him.” Yet this goal is central. As lawyers and law students who follow Jesus, we provide encouragement to our brothers and sisters in the profession.

Implicit in the call of Christians in the law to gather together—to simply identify with one another as disciples—are a few related assumptions:

- We are better fit for our callings in the law when we engage one another.
- God’s call into law is not merely a call to the individual lawyer or law student.
- There is something important to the mission of the Church that is served when vocation-centered groups convene.

Do not neglect this modest goal of meeting together. Though it is indeed a modest goal, it requires intent—it won’t just happen. As you consider taking steps to meet or shore up this goal in your own community, consider these practical tips:

- Meet regularly, rather than *ad hoc*. Even if your fellowship gathers only once a quarter, make it actually happen quarterly, come rain or shine.
- An invitation to gather is almost as important as the gathering itself. Those who receive an invitation to join you are themselves identified with your group, and regular invitations and updates are meaningful, even if the organizer never knows how much.
- Many lawyers and students long for fellowship and feel isolated in law school or in the practice. For them,

gathering meets a real need. Provide opportunities for introductions and interaction at every meeting, if possible.

- Be creative in your invitations. Consider that local pastors, law students (if you are lawyers’ group) or lawyers (if you are a campus group), professors, campus ministers, and others will be interested. Cast a broad invitatory net.
- Gathering, in and of itself, is important and worthwhile. But groups need to aspire to a mission beyond mere fellowship, so read on.

Spiritual Formation

The second goal is to assist attorneys and law students as they become more Christ-like in the context of the legal profession and preparation for it.

We all recognize that there are unique challenges, temptations, and issues facing Christian lawyers and law students, and our “lay” friends, including pastors and mentors, do not always understand the issues we face. Whether it be the time crunch of memo writing in law school, the pressures of partner-track politics at the big firm, the stress of preparing for trial, or the intricacies of an ethical dilemma, faithful responses are not easy to come by. Sharing with a brother or sister in Christ who gets the issue is often the most significant step on the way to spiritual understanding.

To be sure, spiritual formation happens primarily in the context of the local church, our families, and accountability groups. Yet much of our ethical and personal formation happens through our law school training and law practice—and the habits we develop thereby. So our *counter-formation*, including habits that fight conformity to the “pattern of the (law) world,” is often best developed in a community of Jesus-loving lawyers or law classmates.

As you think about what that might look like in your city or on your campus, consider the following:

- Many lawyers and students enjoy a good Bible study, but there are ample opportunities to study Scripture. What is rare, however, is the opportunity rigorously to *apply* Scripture to the everyday challenges of lawyers.
- Formation often involves reflection and self-awareness, two things that take time and quiet space, which are in short supply for most law students and lawyers. Consider providing time for reflection, evaluation, and discussion in meetings when meaty topics are presented. Perhaps

a one- or two-day retreat with lots of space for individual group reflection is a possibility.

- The annual CLS National Conference and various regional retreats are designed to foster thoughtful training and interaction with other lawyers and students in the context of faithful spirituality. Consider making the time to promote and attend these types of events.
- A good practice in your community of law students or lawyers is to ask—out loud—what barriers folks are experiencing to spiritual growth. If we are honest and intentional about our challenges, regardless of whether they are inherent in legal training and practice, we will be able to face them together.

Vocational Stewardship

The third foundational goal of CLS centers on the lawyer's calling. We want to help law students and lawyers develop a well-defined understanding of Christian vocation and how it works itself out in law study and practice.

Many lawyers, like many Christians, have a dualistic view of life and work: our spiritual lives are private matters, having to do with worship and church life and little to do with our law practice or study. On the other hand, our secular lives are public, having to do with business and commerce and centered on our daily jobs. Sure, our devotional lives teach us not to lie, cheat, or steal, but beyond that, business is business.

This approach is a harmful lie. If we don't understand that all of life should be rooted in worship and that our ordinary work is a way to both worship our Creator and love our neighbors, we are living spiritually impoverished lives. Our life in the church flows into and informs our daily work, our family life, our recreation, and our public witness.

Amy Sherman's wonderful book, *Kingdom Calling*, lists twelve theological themes undergirding vocational stewardship. The first is the "gospel of the kingdom:"

To steward their vocations well, Christians need to have a big conception of God's redemptive work. At

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the heart of the gospel is the glorious message of new life in Christ, made possible by the atoning sacrifice of our Savior Jesus, who lived the life we ought to have lived and died the death we deserved for our sins. Yet this good news is even bigger: God's salvific work is not limited to individual salvation but concerns his mission of restoring the whole of the created order (Col. 1:19-20; Eph. 1:9). The gospel of the kingdom is about making *all*

things right. . . .

As Christians we have entered this kingdom and become citizens in it, and that citizenship is to shape us in every way—including our work lives.¹

Lawyers and law students who submit every aspect of their calling to the Lord are a part of God's redemptive work in the world. This redemptive work of lawyers, shaped by their citizenship in the kingdom, gives glory to God and furthers His kingdom. This work has the potential to do justice, reform the profession, free the oppressed, reconcile those at odds, vindicate the rights of those who suffer, or simply give wise counsel to those in need, to name just a few possibilities.

Further, the gifts that God gives us, including our gifts for law study and practice, are given for the benefit of our neighbors as instruments of God's grace:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.²

How then might we help each other in our legal community apply these theological truths to the specific gifts and practices in our lives in the law? Here are some ideas:

- We might study the topic of Christian "vocation" or "calling" together;
- We should intentionally discuss the gospel of the kingdom as it relates to law practice and study when we gather;

- We should challenge one another to talk about how our daily law-related tasks are centered in loving our neighbors in specific ways, and we should encourage one another to tell stories of the redemptive work, especially in the more mundane areas of practice;
 - We ought to remind each other of the reasons we went to law school in the first place;
 - We should talk about our work in real terms of justice, freedom, reconciliation, process, vindication, right, and service, among the other foundations of legal work;
 - We can offer CLE programs and panels in which we model the exploration of vocational stewardship and of ministry of the law, even though we know we are not perfect in doing it;
 - We might consider avoiding the language of “full-time Christian work” as applied to pastors and missionaries only, and speak of our own work as fully Christian; and
 - Mentor a law student or a younger law student, with an eye toward talking on purpose about Christian calling.
- Your community might sponsor a charity event or project that others on campus or in town could join, such as Angel Tree, Shoes for Orphan Souls, Operation Christmas Child, soup kitchen service days, food pantry collections, and the like;
 - Lawyers and law students might offer their services as a speakers’ bureau to local schools for Law Day, Constitution Day, and other events, or simply adopt a classroom;
 - Adopt a highway; or
 - Raise funds for the family of a classmate or colleague in need.

There are hundreds of ways to use your legal gifts for the good of others in our local communities. Furthermore, do not limit your service locally, but rather think globally, too. It is no accident that attorneys and law students are at the forefront of justice ministries around the world, from anti-human-trafficking efforts, to anti-slavery missions and other global justice initiatives.

Christian Legal Society has a vision to see lawyers and law students transformed as they seek to serve Christ in and through ordinary law practice and study. This mission is carried out by encouraging lawyers and law students to gather, to grow spiritually, to think faithfully about their vocations, and to serve well with their legal gifts.

May you and your colleagues experience the power of the Holy Spirit as you seek these things!



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END NOTES

- 1 Amy Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* 235 (InterVarsity 2011).
- 2 1 Peter 4:10-11 (ESV).

Service

Finally, Christian Legal Society seeks to encourage Christian law students and lawyers to reach out to their campuses and communities with the love of Christ. This element of service is a natural outgrowth of gathering together, growing spiritually, and thinking carefully about vocation. After all, if we see our legal gifts as given to us for the benefit of others, one of our critical tasks will be indentifying those “others” that might benefit from what we have.

As your think about how your community might serve as a unit, consider these examples from law student and attorney fellowships:

- Lawyers have much to offer local law students in the way of mentorship, fellowship, and encouragement;
- Law students and attorneys have legal gifts that can be used to serve the poor and needy through local Christian Legal Aid programs;
- Law students serve their classmates by offering outlines, donuts and coffees, prayer, and free lunch at events;