



ADVENTURES IN ADJUNCTING

The Essentiality of Church Community

JOEL JUPP

Adjunct instruction presents countless challenges beyond the classroom. In fact, the classroom may even provide solace from the complications of everyday life. Adjuncts often work other jobs, care for family, commute long distances, learn new online systems, and so on. Most of those efforts have little to do with the classroom itself.

As adjuncts know well, many of these challenges involve disconnection. For example, you might be hired a week before classes begin (as I have been several times). No one has seen you face to face, and no one will recognize you on campus. No one will know when you come to campus or leave, and no one knows where your office is. The feeling can be extremely isolating, especially when life outside the classroom is difficult.

Many colleges continue to make efforts to overcome these challenges. In fact, one Christian college where I have taught has a staff person dedicated to supporting adjunct instructors. The idea is laudable and needed, but these efforts often fall short. One semester before classes began, I received a call and was told that the college cares about adjunct instructors, but then I never heard from the college again. The only “personal” emails I received were reminders about submitting my syllabus and grades.

I have been aware of this problem for about seven years—particularly at school gatherings, such as award ceremonies that honored my full-time colleagues but did not recognize the milestones of adjuncts. Yet the sense of disconnection became especially poignant over the past year, after my wife was diagnosed with advanced ovarian cancer. I told my students, and they sent encouraging notes, shared personal stories with me, and prayed for my wife. When I had to miss classes for her surgery, I told some supervisors, yet others had no idea. (After all, unless someone asks how you’re doing, “my wife has cancer” is not something you tend

to say in a work email.) In my experience, I found comfort knowing that my students were behind me, yet I also felt hurt that my Christian colleagues generally had no idea.

So what is the solution? It is tricky in the current milieu. After all, colleges know of the problem and want to address it. Even still, with so much turnover and so many full-time employees, colleges continue to struggle in this regard. Administrators care, but practical solutions can be difficult to identify and implement.

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Of course, colleges should not *cease* efforts of trying to build community with adjuncts. There are many ways of working toward this, such as including adjuncts in prayer mailings and sending adjuncts personalized video messages. However, we must also face reality. Without any kind of labor union in place, it is unlikely that adjunct disconnection will end anytime soon, and it is more likely that such disconnection will increase as colleges hire more adjuncts.

I would argue that, like in other employment situations, we cannot depend on a work institution for too much. Instead, for deep personal connections, adjuncts must look where all people (regardless of profession) should look: the church.

After all, it is in the church where we function in a body and fulfill a unique role, as determined by God himself. In a local church, we are known—not only by a pastor, but by fellow members. We are welcomed and incorporated not by our job performance or accomplishments, but by our identity in Christ. As a result, our position is secure and our tenure confirmed, not by our good works or even our research, but because of the Lord himself.

In my situation, the church fulfilled what no employer ever could. Women visited my wife while I would teach classes. Church families cooked meals on my teaching days. Young adults spent time with my son after church. Elders checked on our physical and spiritual health every week. The list goes on and on and on...

So yes, like any employer, our Christian colleges and universities will sometimes fall short. While our educational institutions will strive to improve over time, we cannot afford to wait for community, so we should seek more connection in our local church. Ultimately, in the church, we find purpose, hope, and the community we so desperately need. **D**



JOEL JUPP Dr. Joel Jupp leads music and college ministry in Chicagoland. He also teaches philosophy at Aurora University, writing at Judson University, and Bible for Moody Distance Learning. He is the executive editor at PaperBlazer, and his music is available at JoelJupp.com, Spotify, and Apple Music.