

WHY WORK DUTY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF THE NATIONS?

By Tom Bloomer

One of the policies of the University of the Nations is that students should also share in the work of the training center where their particular school is located. (See page 41 of the 1996-98 U of N Catalogue.)

The question is being asked, should advanced students also have to carry out work duties in the U of N? After all, their time is limited due to projects, theses, and other responsibilities. Especially on a large base where there are many DTS/CDTS students, there may not seem to be an absolute need for advanced U of N students to work.

Following are some of the reasons that all U of N students should be involved in the work of a base. Of course, special exceptions will arise, such as mothers with very small children, and those who are recovering from illness. But even people with handicaps and those who are in the final stages of thesis-writing should normally be included in the work.

U of N policies are not the main question here, the crucial factor is the student's understanding of the Biblical principles involved. Therefore work should not just be imposed on them, but the Biblical basis should be taught, and as in all our teaching, the students should be invited to apply the Word.

RECOVERING THE TRUTH ABOUT WORK:

Even the Church in our day harbors completely false ideas about work, especially physical work. It is seen as a necessary evil, or at best a means toward an end: we work in order to have enough to be able to live, and the hope of many is to be able to one day "stop working and serve the Lord full time". When students and even school leaders see the work duty as taking precious time away from the student's "real" calling, that of study, we have bought into the ideology of the spirit of the age. The Bible speaks differently of work.

First of all, we are commanded to work. Work is not an option. The Lord said in the Fourth Commandment, "Six days shall you labor" (Exodus 20.9), and that is no more optional than are any of the other commandments. The Apostle Paul reiterated this commandment in II Thessalonians 3.10-13. Work is first of all obedience to the Lord's Word.

Second, work is holy. Work is our service, our worship. Many historical and ideological factors have contributed to our compartmentalizing work off into a separate category, called "secular", "morally-neutral", and other misleading terms. Because the Lord has commanded it, work is not any less spiritual, or less important, than study, preaching, praying, singing worship songs, or any other pious religious activities. Loren has often pointed out that Zechariah 14.21, among other texts, sanctifies the most mundane of our physical labors.

Third, work is one of the principal places of the application of the Word. Students can often appear quite spiritual in the community meetings and classrooms, and then in the work duty display such carnality and immaturity as to literally shock those around them. The U of N is not interested in turning out "intellectual giants who are relational dwarves", nor in giving out degrees to those who think that they are somehow above sweeping a sidewalk or washing some dishes. Those who have learned most about the Servant King should be all the more ready to participate in the work of the base; if not, there is something terribly wrong with the attitudes they have picked up during their training.

Fourth, and quite practically, we need these people. Many of our advanced students have more experience in YWAM than many of our staff. They certainly have a better understanding of the U of N, and can contribute much to its functioning. The International Registrar's Office in Europe has been run quite well by students on work duty, when those students are advanced and know the U of N from the inside out. When every one of our departments is crying for more staff, we should see students as a God-given resource. Of course, some departments may have to creatively restructure the way their work is done in order to put students into jobs that will really help.

Fifth, another practical consideration: anyone who has ever had an apartment living situation knows quite well that two hours a day can easily be taken up by shopping, food preparation, and cleanup. If students were out on their own, they would have to spend this time anyway. Campus living frees them from these tasks, so they are not really "losing" any time by participating in the work of the base.

Sixth, when students are included in the real business of running a missions base, they see themselves part of the community, and not as completely separate from the staff. Relationships are formed with key staff who are not part of the student's school, and YWAM values are imparted through the daily work routine, not just read on a sheet of paper. Meaningful participation in the work of the base further bonds them in to YWAM, and then recruiting them onto staff is a natural process.

WORSHIP IN THE KITCHEN:

The Celtic monks of the early Church saw no divisions between work and worship, study and prayer. They had a unified view of the Creation of God, where all of reality was a sacrament unto Him. Each of the monks participated in a routine of daily work, worship times impregnated with the Word, prayer, and study. All was one in these monasteries, and none would think of refusing to work because it was somehow less important, or less spiritual. Our training bases need to cast down the walls of compartmentalization, and widen our view of worship to include all that we do.

Finally, our desire in the U of N is to train servant leaders. We are not in the business of helping people prepare for high-paying jobs, or to gain a spirituality that is divorced from the real world.

We desire to see our graduates serving others. If they cannot serve their brothers whom they have seen, in physical and practical ways, how in the world can we imagine that they will serve the nations they have not seen?

The Servant King washed the feet of His followers. He performed a dirty, smelly job that even a Hebrew slave could refuse to do. He said, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Joh 13.14). We can quite easily spiritualize this passage, forgetting in the process that those were real feet, and the water and the towel were also real.

Are we teaching our students to "do as He has done to us" (Joh 3:15)? Let us be vigilant to ensure that our base policies really contribute to training servant leaders.