

# God's Perfect Design.... To Work And To Play

## The value of self-care and development for improving personal and organizational effectiveness

### Introduction

The primary text that describes God working, Genesis 1 and 2, references the Sabbath, a period of rest that God took after having worked for six days (Gen 2:2-3). To work as God calls requires that we also partake of His Sabbath rest. And yet, so often we forgo the opportunity to experience these essential times, persuaded that the seemingly urgent and immediate needs of today must take priority. As a result, individuals and organizations can experience a loss of vision, burnout and staff attrition.

In 2018, the Pilgrim Foundation invited a group of non-profit organizations to apply for a Care & Development (C&D) grant that would enable the organization to provide Sabbath experiences for their staff. We presented the grant as an opportunity for literal rest or 'play' initiatives, or development activities that would facilitate more effective and balanced work experiences in the future.

The invitation was brief and simple, 'If you were given a gift of \$10,000 how would you use the funds to support, develop and refresh your team over the next twelve months?' The application process was intentionally designed to require minimal time investment, simply submit a one page description of how, where and when the funds would be used. The Pilgrim Foundation President and Executive Director quickly reviewed the submissions and within a month made the grants. One year later, we invited the grant recipients to share the highlights, learnings and even the challenges of deploying these grants in the form of a simple survey.

Our hope is that in sharing this feedback, many more foundations will recognize the critical enabling role that they can play by funding C&D initiatives for passionate and hard-working organizations.

### Background: God's Perfect Design For Us.... To work and to play

Ephesians 2:10 "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (NRSV)" is often cited as a truth that motivates many believers to dedicate their lives to faith based work. Given we are made in His image, it's not surprising that the phrase 'good works' has the same meaning as God's work of creation in Genesis 2. Work should be creative, fruitful and productive according to God's purposes.

Given this Genesis context, it's equally important to understand that creative work occurs in conjunction with periods of Sabbath rest. Theologian, Ben Witherington, states that the concept of 'playing' is an extrapolation of the Sabbath

experience<sup>1</sup>, stating that play is a “form of celebration of life and as such it celebrates in advance the joy, excitement, re-creation of the new creation.”<sup>2</sup>

God’s perfect design for us is therefore to experience work and play. Where we understand **play** as experiencing emotional and psychological healing and restoration through rest, opportunities for relational community, connecting more intimately with the Lord’s heart to receive His guidance for our work and through hope as we develop greater ministry effectiveness. Our heart at the Pilgrim Foundation is as much to enable the restorative play of these organizations as it is to support the specific work of these organizations. In doing so, we believe that these organizations will become even more effective in their kingdom endeavors.

### **Grant Recipient Survey Responses**

The remainder of this paper shares some of the feedback from recipients. Appropriately, the nature and approach to care and development is unique to each organization based on the individuals, their needs and the focus of the organization. Our intention is to share just some of the feedback in order to demonstrate the diversity, creativity and learning experienced through these grants.

- Whilst, many organizations took the opportunity to combine a time of fellowship with a time of learning by attending a conference or retreat together, several also recognised that their staff had unique needs and made it possible for each staff member to shape their own care and development experience. (Figure 1). Grant deployment generally fell into one of four categories - conference event or retreat, individually designed self-care/development, training/ employee development initiatives or operations/ infrastructure improvements.

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Witherington, *Work. A Kingdom Perspective on Labour*, (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2011), 146.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Witherington, 146.

Q1 🗨️  
Approximately what percentage of the grant was allocated to: (Do NOT use the % symbol.)

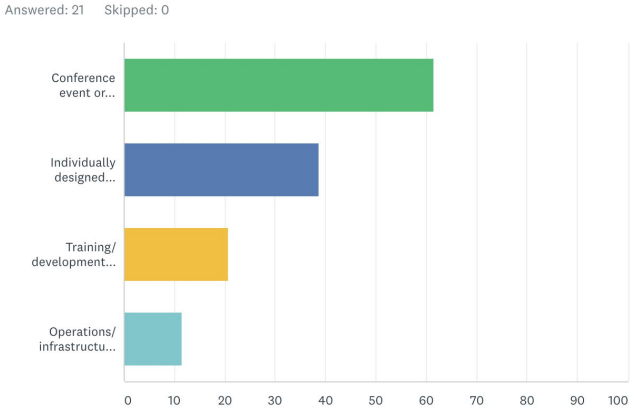


Figure 1: How was the grant used.

- Was the grant used for a one-time event, scheduled throughout the year or for an ongoing activity? Positively, the importance of care and development activities was recognized as needing an ongoing focus for a number of organizations. These organizations have made it a priority to provide these opportunities on a continual basis. (Figure 2)

Q2 🗨️  
Indicate when the grant was used

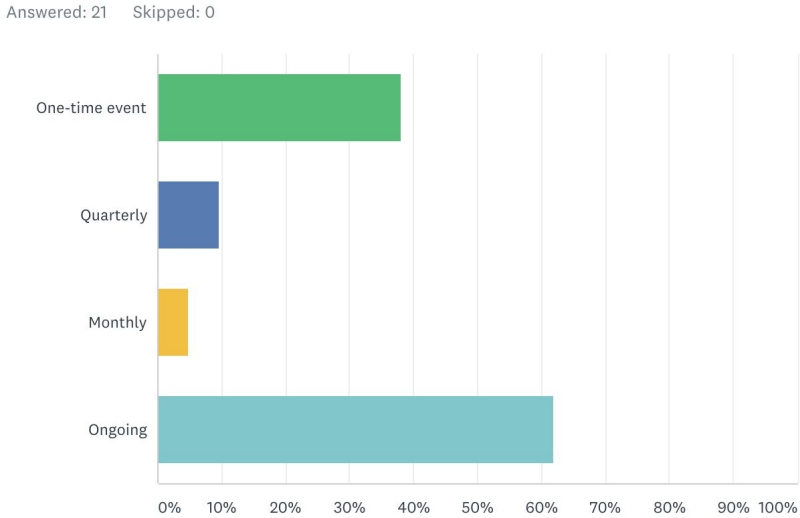


Figure 2: When was the grant used.

## Individual and Organizational Learning

Finally, recipients were invited to respond to three questions. Firstly, what were the highlights or positive results from receiving the grant? Secondly, were there any challenges? And thirdly, what has the organization learned about the value of self-care and development. Excerpts from feedback are shared below:

- Highlights
  - We were grateful to be able to have an individual "stepback" conversation with each staff member about their self-care & professional development goals. We were also able to launch an annual transition of staff retreat and end-of-year stepback gathering.
  - (1) Quarterly days away have provided staff organizationally-approved and funded time to commune deeply with the Lord (2) Having all of our global leaders together at our leadership summit helped us see some of God's greater vision and accelerates our relationships
  - We split the grant into three parts: a day at an amusement park with staff and their families, retreats- annual staff retreat and an overnight leadership retreat to strengthen the lead staff and a leadership conference (to be attended in 2019). The lead staff retreat going away overnight was a powerful way to engage the team and develop deeper relationships. The amusement park trip was a day of fun with the staff.
- Challenges
  - Discerning how best to use the funds, training or a day of fun, ultimately we tried to blend the two so that staff could experience a bit of both.
  - Our main challenge is that we had to delay our global staff retreat until July 2019. This was the primary expense in the budget we submitted, but the plan is currently being finalized. We think this speaks to the challenge of prioritizing rest and reflection and deeply appreciate having a grant to support this.
  - More of an opportunity than a challenge, was the push to have deeper conversations about what links individual staff members' personal development goals with the overall organization's strategies/priorities. We also want to make this an ongoing conversation, so that self-care and ongoing growth are not a one-time conversation.
- What did you and your staff learn about the role and value of self-care and development in your ministry from this grant experience.
  - Our team learned we do not discuss self-care deeply enough as part of our organizational culture, including how it will only make our mission and impact stronger over time. It has also influenced some important shifts in our organizational

behaviors, including practices around email/meeting limits, work day behaviors, and more openly discussing one's bandwidth for new projects. Thank you!

- We have realized how hard it is to get away from ministry- that we need to incorporate more self- care. Receiving this grant has allowed us to be more intentional (individually, but also as a team). It has opened up the door for many valuable conversations that may not have been had before. We often are bombarded with the daily needs and emergencies, which drives our decisions, meetings, and everything. This has driven intentional regular conversations and the practice of challenging each other to implement self- care. This is difficult for our group, because we all naturally tend to serve until we are burnt out! I was reminded the other day that my number one job as the leader of this ministry is to be spiritually healthy. I am so grateful that this grant has provided funding which allows us to practice self-care and development. This grant has increased our team unity, and has provided opportunities for us to truly care for each other's spiritual, emotional, and mental health!
- Something as simple as a free lunch can ease the stress of working with our clients and their children. It is important that we continue to let our staff know that they are valued and appreciated. As caregivers we must care for ourselves first. This is so often hard to do but so very important.
- We learned that self-care and development are a critical component to the success of our ministry and to building the Kingdom. Being intentional about including these components in our plans/budgets and the culture of our organization will allow our staff members to serve from a place of fulfillment rather than a place of emptiness. We also learned that we need each other as a community to support and hold each other accountable in this journey. Making sure that we are pacing ourselves well and we are not becoming complacent about developing ourselves personally, spiritually and professionally.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Pilgrim Foundation would like to thank the survey participants for sharing their experiences and learning during the grant process. We hope that each organization has benefitted from the experiential learning of intentionally considering how care and development can become part of their organizational DNA. At The Pilgrim Foundation, we have been tremendously blessed by the opportunity to encourage and enable these initiatives. We would like to encourage foundations to consider similar initiatives with their grantees. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information and questions.

***The Pilgrim Foundation***

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