

Three Elements of Ministry

by W. Dan Lee

As a litigation lawyer, I have a complicated case in which I am representing 14 plaintiffs against the owners of a commercial property. The property in question is an indoor-fleet mall ("Mall") in Chicago and its patrons are predominantly Hispanics. My clients were tenants of the Mall and are either Hispanic or Korean with a significant language barrier, whereas the defendants are sophisticated business people armed with a number of lawyers. For each court appearance and hearing, my full devotion and attention is required, not because of its complexity but because of my awareness of each client's predicament. The Mall was shut down for 18 months because of severe building safety and health code violations. The defendants told the plaintiffs that the Mall was closed temporarily for repairs, notwithstanding the city's order not to open it until it was brought to safety requirements under the city's building code. My clients were led to believe that the Mall would be reopened soon, and the "soon" promise became 18 months. During those 18 months the owners of the Mall kept the value of their property by keeping my clients as tenants, whereas my clients had no income for that period. Some went through divorce, bankruptcy, or relocated for new business.

No matter how I am involved in this case emotionally, I can still detach myself from the case. No matter how sorry I am about each client's life circumstances, I am still far removed from their reality. After all, being a lawyer means practicing law. It is simply my profession. Profession requires education, skills, and experiences. I went to school, passed my bar, and got my experience in litigation. This is how I became professional, and I get compensated for my legal services.

Unlike any other profession, ministry requires three elements: (1) a conviction of God's calling; (2) a passion for God's Kingdom; and (3) a compassion for God's people. Without the conviction of God's calling, ministry becomes performance. Absent our passion for God's kingdom, ministry is simply to accomplish goals and objectives. Our compassion for people becomes a driving force to make a difference in their life as well as our own life. The people we are called to serve cannot be another client. For each and every one of them, Christ died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. This is our mission, our profession, and our calling.