

EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS AT WORK

By Julian Reindorp.

"In the minds of most Christians in our churches there is a deep cleavage between the purposes of God and the world of secular reality" (Graham Dow, *A Christian Understanding of Daily Work*, Grove, Pastoral 57). "Nine out of ten practising Christians feel their work is always at the level of a spiritual encumbrance" (Teilhard de Chardin quoted in Kenneth Adams' *Our Work and our Faith*, Tenth ICF Annual Lecture 1986) If we believe this is God's world, if we believe that we are called to seek signs of God's Kingdom then God's working world is clearly of vital importance. But how can we equip Christians for their daily lives whether they are in paid or unpaid employment? How do we express the reality that for most people their calling as Christians is at work many miles, perhaps even a continent away from the domestic life of their local church? All ministers will have asked these questions, may have and will have tried to tackle them in different ways.

Seven strands to this ministry

Working in different settings over 30 years - Dockland, New Town and Suburbia, I have found seven strands useful, as well as taking an interest in people's working lives in conversation and in pastoral visits.

Christians At Work Group - Saturday, 9.15 - 10.15am. Fortnightly during term time.

Morning Conference, Saturday, 9.30 am - 12.30 pm. E.g. 'A Personal Ministry Course'; 'People and the New World of Work'; 'The Individual in a Corporate Culture - survive or thrive'.

Evening 'Theme Meetings' - Focus on one person's job.

Rogation Sunday - offertory: each person brings a symbol of their work: the Christians at Work Group leads worship: interview someone about their work/unemployment.

Visits to people's work place.

Commissioning of people for work, e.g. job by job, week by week.

Preaching, public prayers, people's jobs and their pressures known.

Perhaps the most fruitful aid has been our 'Christians at Work' group (renamed as the 'In and Out of Work' group). In my present parish this has been going for six years now. Early in the life of the group we outlined our hopes to make connections, to share the pressures, to encourage a vision and our aims (see below). I have also outlined some of the issues that emerged from one term's meetings. The fortnightly Saturday morning meetings never last more than an hour and the person introducing their topic is given ten minutes. We ask people to keep what is shared confidential. We have thirty people on our mailing list and an average attendance of ten. These open groups have been much valued.

The occasional evening meetings for those who can only make this time last one and a half hours. We ask people from our congregations who have considerable responsibility to speak about the challenges and pressures of their work e.g. a newspaper editor, director of a university department, commercial director of a national company, a high court judge, vice president of a bank, a television producer etc.

'Christians at Work' Groups

Making Connections - Sharing the Pressures - Encouraging a vision.

Possible Aims:

1. To develop an informed Christian mind
2. To clarify issues for ourselves and others
3. To create a 'moral check list'
4. To help people live with impossible situations

Issues raised from one term:

Is there a Christian code of ethics for work?

Have we lost the link between religion, faith and ethics?

There is a spectrum of decisions - those in the middle are most difficult.

How do we evaluate a complex set of consequences?

How do we sensitise our compasses (consciences)?

Do we/how do we know 'true north'?

Are there Golden Rules?

Resources

ICF Theme Pamphlets: e.g. No 31 *Theology and Work: Why the Connections are not made*. Contact Ridley Hall, Cambridge.

People and Work. Personal Ministry Course for Lay People. Lay Training Opportunities, Peterborough House, Northampton .

Monday Matters: Study Guide looking at Faith and Life - 6 sessions. National Society/Church House Publishing.

Mind the Gap: Connecting Faith with Work; Richard Higginson; CPAS, Warwick

Sunday - Monday: Faith in the world - 6 sessions. Scripture Union

Making our work good - 6 sessions. Ealing Abbey, London.

In the world - Video and Resources Pack, Luton Industrial College,

Grove booklets - e.g. Graham Dow, *A Christian Understanding of Daily Work*, Pastoral Series 57; Richard Higginson, *The Ethics of Business Competition*, Ethics Series 105.

Faith in Business - Quarterly and membership of The Industrial Christian Fellowship. Also Industrial Mission Agenda

Unemployment Sunday resource Pack. Church Action on Poverty,

Serving God? Serving Mammon? Christians and the Financial Markets, Stephen Green, Marshall Pickering,

Thank God It's Monday. Ministry in the Workplace, Mark Greene, Scripture Union, £4.99.

Frontline Mission: Ministry in the Market Place, Denis Glaringbull, Canterbury Press,

Work in Worship. Prayers, Readings, Hymns etc., Cameron Butland, Hodder & Stoughton

Ethics in an Age of Technology, Ian Barbour,

Unemployment and the Future of Work, CCBI.

JULIAN REINDORP

Team Rector of Richmond, Surrey