

10 things churches can do about unemployment

1. Set up a group from the local churches to explore what can be done and report back your findings to the churches. Include in this group some people with experience of unemployment.
2. In this group listen to the stories of people who are unemployed, and listen to the experience of their families.
3. Read the resources on “Unemployment” available on the Chelmsford Diocesan Website: www.chelmsford.anglican.org/unemployment.
4. Discover the statistics about unemployment for your Borough, County or District on the website of the Office of National Statistics: www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/2038431774/report.aspx. On pages 3 & 4 (of a 9 page survey) find the WORKING AGE BENEFITS section and discover the JSA (Jobseekers Allowance) figures for last month. This is not the whole story but it will give your group an idea of the age groups of people who are registered as unemployed and how long people have been unemployed in your area.
5. Make contact with and learn from those in your Borough, County or District who are trying to help people through a period of unemployment from Central Government (Jobcentre Plus), from the Local Authority, and from Voluntary Groups (Citizens Advice Bureau, Credit Unions, Youth Projects). Try to visit any church sponsored projects locally and learn from them.
6. At every meeting of your group pray, and encourage your churches to pray, for those who carry the heavy burdens of unemployment, for all who try to help them, and that your group and Christ’s broken churches, may discern what God is calling us to do locally and nationally. Do not be daunted by the scale of the problem or your own limited resources. God has the capacity to surprise us.
7. Use your church magazine, weekly notice sheets, websites and posters to publicise what your group is learning. To help those in the first shock of unemployment print in your magazine and have available in your church the “Lost your Job?” leaflet, which is available on the Chelmsford Diocesan Website, above. Then publicise your local groups that are making a difference and articles from those willing to share their experience of unemployment.
8. Slowly you will begin to see respectful and appropriate ways for your churches to act. These could include the following:
 - Support for existing groups serving those who are unemployed and their families.
 - Setting up new support groups to help people through shock.

- Setting up, with appropriate training and support, debt counselling groups. Some larger churches have done this.
 - Setting up recreational projects, (sport, music, environmental arts, crafts) Many smaller local churches have done this.
 - Discreet practical support for individuals and families with very limited incomes. Many churches are doing this.
 - Political lobbying to ensure that existing provision by local authorities and central government is preserved and that new imaginative schemes may be developed. Some local authorities are providing apprenticeships, many are resourcing new opportunities for your people.
9. Ask your local churches to have one Sunday designated as “Unemployment Sunday” and prepare resources for such services. Consider an ecumenical all day and all night vigil of prayer and ask local church leaders to lead half-hour sections. Advice for running such vigils is available in “Fighting Back – a starter kit for Christians concerned about Unemployment”, available for £1 from Raymond Draper (020 8257 2792).
10. Persist. The longer unemployment lasts the less notice people take of it. You will need one another, and the help of God, to discover what God is calling you to do, and to find the strength to do it.

Revd Raymond Draper
July 2009