



Engaging the local church with the world of work

F2

Purpose

This worksheet offers a range of practical ways in which the local church can encourage, support and equip lay people for their ministry and mission in the world of work. All these initiatives have been taken by members of the Methodist Diaconal Order over recent years. With similar initiatives, they embody a form of ministry which is of special relevance to the role of the deacon. [Where another worksheet describes one of these initiatives more fully, its reference number is given in square brackets.]

Process – engagement within the local church

Awareness raising

- Produce a booklet of the kind of work (paid or voluntary) in which members of a congregation are involved. At the end of the booklet include two or three prayers for the working day. [F3]
- Give an opportunity for people to display items depicting their work (paid or voluntary). Logos, badges, brochures, photos or letter headings could be used for such a display or collage – including school or college emblems. [F3]
- Publish short articles in the church newsletter about how people are trying to link their faith and their work (paid or voluntary). Such articles could be written by lay people or put together from interviews with them.

Worship

- Ask lay people (and prepare them beforehand) to speak during worship about how their faith and work relate. [H1; H2; H3]
- Arrange a service where people are encouraged to talk about what, as a Christian, it means to be unemployed, to be working very long or unsocial hours, or to be retired.
- Use work-related visual aids in worship to remind the congregation that the whole of life belongs to God who is already active community building in the world. [H1; H2; H3]
- Ensure that family or all-age worship takes up themes related to living out one's faith in daily life, including the ministry of children and young people at school and college. [D1]
- Arrange an annual 'commissioning' service to affirm the ministry and mission of the church in the world of work.
- Encourage local preachers and worship leaders to draw on their personal experience of being a Christian in the workplace to inform and enrich their leading of worship and preaching. [F4]

Learning and reflection

- Set up reflection and discussion groups for those who want to meet informally to explore the relation of their faith to their work. [I1; E1; E3]
- Set up more structured courses to explore the theology/ethics of work and/or to explore the spirituality of work.
- Offer young people associated with the church the opportunity to reflect in a faith context on, and talk together about, their life as Christians at school or college.
- For a church away day or retreat, practice the art of communal living Benedictine style – working (indoors and outdoors), eating, studying the Scriptures and praying together.

Pastoral care

- Offer prayers within worship or at other times, for the working concerns of church members. [H2; H3; F3; J1]
- Deacons and presbyters take pro-active interest, and keep a record of the work (paid or voluntary) in which church members are involved.
- Deacons and presbyters exercising counselling and/or mentoring skills support lay people facing difficulties at work. [E2]
- Deacons and presbyters 'work-shadow' lay people to learn more about the nature and challenges of their working lives.

Process – engaging with the *local* world of work

The role of deacon, in particular, is concerned with bridging the divide that often exists between the local church and the local world of work, including schools, health practices, the social and public services, the police, shops, local businesses and so forth. A number of initiatives can help to bridge this gap. These include:

- working with other churches on an ecumenical basis to set up a series of workshops on how Christian faith might relate to and enrich the working life of the neighbourhood (*Faith in Bakewell*, 2008);
- inviting local businesses, shops or services based in the neighbourhood to offer something representing their products, goods or services for a display (on church premises) to celebrate the working life of the area [F5];
- inviting Christians (from any denomination) working in shops and businesses in the vicinity of the church to meet together to get to know one another, to affirm and to support one another's ministries in any way appropriate. If acceptable, the meeting might be held before the working day commences, perhaps on the premises of one of the shops or businesses concerned.

Resources

Clark, David, *Breaking the Mould of Christendom: Kingdom Community, Diaconal Church and the Liberation of the Laity*, Peterborough, Epworth, 2005 (pp. 112-113, 114-120, 284-291)

Association of Bakewell Christians, *Faith in Bakewell*, 2008 (available from www.methodistdiaconalorder.org.uk)