

Caring for the Unemployed

What can you do?

A: The Deanery and Unemployment

The deanery is the key unit in helping churches respond to unemployment. Within a deanery one person, or a small group, can discover how unemployment is affecting the community you serve. One way to do this is by using the statistics published on the website of the Office for National Statistics.

Ways to help churches use this material may be found on the Chelmsford diocesan website: www.chelmsford.anglican.org/unemployment. There you can find the document *“Understanding unemployment in your area”* along with unemployment profiles for the County of Essex, for 14 Districts of Essex, and for 5 East London Boroughs.

When you share the deanery profile of unemployment with your Deanery Synod they will be shocked. If you want to help those in your Deanery Synod, who do not have experience of unemployment, to see why Christians should be concerned, see the documents *“Why should the churches be concerned about unemployment?”* and *“The nature of this recession”* on the Chelmsford diocesan website.

It is important to offer every church in your deanery instant resources to help them respond to unemployment. Some of these can be found on the Chelmsford diocesan website, including

- *“Lost your job?”* – a leaflet to help those in shock after losing their job.

- *“A Place for me?”* – a parish magazine article for young people who cannot find a job.
- *“A Place for them?”* – a parish magazine article to help local churches consider how they can help young people who cannot find work.
- A selection of Posters to signpost local and national resources for people who have lost their jobs, for those struggling with debt, and those worried about their mortgage.
- Articles to help churches develop appropriate, respectful and effective pastoral care in a recession.

In every deanery I have visited there are people passionately concerned about unemployment, waiting for the opportunity to do something. A deanery debate about how we can respond to unemployment in our area can be the encouragement they need, and can be the place where experiments and projects can be launched and authorized.

There are seven areas that every deanery could consider:

1. Can we set up a deanery support group to help people who are affected by unemployment to share their experiences in confidence, and to support one another? A deanery is an ideal unit for such a group, and it can be a great support to those who share in it.
2. Can we publicise local help for people who struggle with debt? A number of different agencies offer this, and it is a life-saving service to publicise national and local debt resources on posters in local churches, halls and schools.
3. Can we publicise national and local help for people who fear they may lose their home? If the government’s plans to reduce Mortgage Support Interest and Housing Benefit go through, unchallenged and unamended, every deanery will see an increase in repossessions and in homelessness.

4. Can the deanery organise a deanery arts event? A deanery play, concert or pantomime can be a huge boost to a local area, and it allows people who are unemployed to work with those who are retired and with those who are employed, to create something good for the whole community. Many deaneries are now considering this, and some have been doing it very well for years!

5. Can the deanery support an initiative to help young people who are unemployed? As local opportunities become available under the new Single Work Programme, or as people begin to think, pray, and see new possibilities, this area of care is urgent.

6. Can the deanery organise a vigil of prayer on unemployment? It is often the key starting point for the emergence of a comprehensive response by the churches to unemployment in your area. There is an article on the Chelmsford diocesan website called *“Organising a Vigil of Prayer on Unemployment.”*

7. Can the deanery offer support to the large number of people working short time / part time, in the shadow of this recession? Posters telling people of local resources to help can make a difference - so can free concerts, nearly new clothes stalls, and an understanding group of churches.

This area of suffering is so large and so frightening that our first response is that it is too big for us to handle. But God knows the nightmare that many individuals, families and communities are going through, and he calls his people to learn how we can help people through this very difficult time. The evidence is clear; where churches dare to learn how to care for people through unemployment, they can make a real difference. Knowing you are not alone, knowing that someone understands and cares, knowing that people are trying to help, can be the factor that helps individuals, families and communities to survive.

B: The Challenge for the Churches

1. The arithmetic

- 2.47 million people unemployed in April 2010
- 600,000 public sector Jobs to go in the next five years (Treasury figures)
- 700,000 private sector Jobs to go in the next five years (Treasury figures)
- 2 million people moved from “higher paid” benefits to Jobseeker’s Allowance in the next five years (Government Target)

TOTAL: 5.77 million people facing unemployment in the next five years.

2. The politics

- ❖ There are serious questions about the viability of the coalition as these figures sink in. We could be facing a new General Election if changes are not made to save the coalition.
- ❖ Industrial action, which can take many forms, is very likely as the scale of the Job-cuts proposed for the public sector becomes clear.
- ❖ The political debate has hardly begun. Democracy can rise to this challenge and ensure that cuts protect and do not damage the economic recovery, and do not penalize the most vulnerable.

3. The ethics

Those who have lost most in this recession are those who have lost their jobs, lost their homes, or young people who have never had a chance of finding work, and the 1.08 million people forced into part time work.

What is this government proposing to do for this group of people?

I. Add to their numbers by cutting 600,000 public sector Jobs and 700,000 private sector Jobs, and by shifting 2 million people on Incapacity Benefit onto Jobseeker's Allowance.

II. Reduce training opportunities for unemployed young people and adults by cutting part of the £1335 million set aside for training and job subsidies.

III. Make large numbers homeless by cuts in support for Mortgage Interest and by cuts in Housing Benefit.

IV. Steadily reduce the value of unemployment benefit, relative to the lifestyle of those who are employed.

The policy of this government on employment and unemployment cannot be defended on ethical grounds. To punish the group of people who have already suffered so much through this recession, and voluntarily to add to their numbers in such a savage way, while cutting their slender financial resources from the State is morally wrong.

4. The role of the Churches

1. Campaign for policy changes:

The Churches should call for a change in government policy on employment and unemployment. It should argue its case on *political, economic* and *ethical* grounds.

The *political* case for a change in government policy is that this government wishes to retain power at the next General Election. If the policies of this government produce the increases of unemployment, homelessness, crime, and riots predicted, they will become deeply unpopular and will not be re-elected.

On 2 December 1830 Mrs. Maurice wrote to her son, F.D.Maurice, "These midnight fires have been very necessary to awaken us." The Toxteth riots in

the 1980's awakened a former Conservative government and led to the setting up of the Manpower Service Commission as a response to youth and adult unemployment. It would be far better for this government, and in its own interest, to change its proposed policies before it is faced with another set of "midnight fires."

The *economic* case is equally strong. If we are to become the economy this government hopes for, then training opportunities and re-training opportunities of a high quality are the stepping stones. So also is the commissioning of infra-structure projects to ensure that the private sector can generate the 2.5 million jobs this government is hoping for.

The *ethical* case is the strongest of all. As people see rising youth crime, rising homelessness, and growing poverty, they will say, "This is not fair." Without a sense of fairness, the austerity measures will be resented and the credibility of this government will be destroyed.

The Churches should call for the following changes:

I. Capital spending should return to 2.25 per cent of Gross National Product immediately – to save 700,000 private sector jobs and to give the private sector the opportunity to generate new jobs.

II. The £1335 million cut from training, retraining and job support initiatives should be restored, and the new Single Work Programme should be developed, using all these resources.

III. Cuts in Housing Benefit and "Support for Mortgage Interest" should be abandoned, to prevent a rapid rise in evictions and homelessness.

IV. Plans to move 2 million people from Incapacity Benefit to Jobseeker's Allowance should be abandoned. A thorough re-assessment of the 'sickness test' should be made.

V. The Jobseeker's Allowance should be increased in line with the retail prices index, not the lower consumer prices index. The resources offered through Jobseeker's Allowance are already slender. They should not be reduced further in the next five years, relative to those in employment.

2. Encourage public debate

The Churches should use all the means open to them to stimulate public debate on these issues, including the media, membership of the House of Lords, informal contacts with government ministers and the Prime Minister, and within churches and communities. This debate should include, in my view, calls for private and public prayers for a change of policy on employment and unemployment. Vigils of Prayer, as well as public debate and private prayer, all have a part to play in persuading governments to change their policies.

3. Develop programmes of solidarity and care

Even with such a change in government policy, unemployment will be high for the next five years. The churches should publicise the resources now available to help local churches, and groups of churches, respond to unemployment in their area. Some of these resources are already available on the Chelmsford diocesan website

www.chelmsford.anglican.org/unemployment

*"What does the Lord require?
Do Justice
Love Mercy
Walk humbly with your God."*

(Micah 6, v8)

***This Briefing has been written by Raymond Draper,
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**For the detailed analysis of the prospects for unemployment
from which Raymond Draper has drawn his conclusions, see**

www.parishandpeople.org.uk/unemployment

Parish and People would welcome news
of resources and projects in other dioceses
that serve the needs of the unemployed -
for publication in future issues of Deanery Exchange.

Contact dx@parishandpeople.org.uk