

I'm sure you would agree that these are very wise thoughts indeed and a challenge to us, especially as Christians, as to how we may (and should) respond to the current unemployment crisis. Perhaps there is a need for 'Churches Together in Billericay' just as Revd Draper suggests, to be praying together about unemployment. Perhaps there is also a need for people to be willing, using all the resources our Churches possess, to establish a group for unemployed people to come together for friendship and mutual support. Perhaps we need folk who are simply willing to walk the road, and share the pain, with those who are unemployed. Perhaps there is also a need for a group of people to see unemployment, and the issues surrounding it, as a significance area of ministry. Perhaps there is an urgent need (as discussed at a recent committee meeting of 'Churches Together in Billericay') to establish a Credit Union in our town.



There's no doubt many people in our community are hurting at this time, and many more will do so in the not too distant future. There's also no doubt they need folk who will hear their voice and share their journey. Can I encourage you to look at God's word, and yourself, afresh, asking new questions about how we, as a Christian community, might respond and to be prepared for the new answers you might find in the way in which you, and we, can better serve our fellow man in these most troubled of times?

With every blessing in Jesus' precious name

Revd Paul A. Carr (Team Rector)

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A Christian Community Seeking To Serve Jesus



RECESSION REDUNDANCY & UNEMPLOYMENT



There's no doubt that many of us have been, and will be, affected, in one way or another, by the global financial crisis that is increasing on an alarming scale. Most social and political commentators suggest we are entering a recession of unprecedented proportions, which will change our society and culture as irrevocably as World War II did. All of which suggests that we should brace ourselves for some difficult years to come.

As the financial squeeze affects our spending habits, many of us will find this restricts our social life; our quality of life; our purchasing power and will even dictate whether we have a 'stay-at-home holiday this summer rather than holidaying abroad.

It is further suggested that the recession will not peak until mid 2010, with unemployment set to rise to the highest level since records first began around 1790. Some of you may be in the position where your job is under threat and some of you may have, already, tasted redundancy and the deep feeling of rejection and isolation that unemployment brings.

In this article I simply want to offer some (collected) thoughts as to how those of you who have lost your job, or are living under the cloud of redundancy (and, indeed, those of you who are living with someone under those circumstances) might be able to respond positively to what is, without any shadow of doubt, a deeply debilitating experience.



Praying may seem a strange response to unemployment. And yet as well as thinking and acting, CHUG exists to help the Churches and our society to pray and to go on praying about unemployment. Why is this? When we organise a day long vigil of prayer on unemployment – what are we up to?

One of the problems we face about prayer is the very narrow view we take of it. It is seen as a last resort. Prayer is what you do when all else fails! At least that is better than not praying at all – but prayer is meant to be far more than this. It is meant to be a natural part of our life. Prayer is becoming aware of God, sharing in his life and sharing our life with him. It is not first of all telling God things, it is about becoming receptive enough to hear what God wants to tell us. So when we pray about unemployment we are first of all asking God what he is saying to us through the sufferings of so many ... we are painfully exposing ourselves to face the reality of this suffering and the reality of God's will for our society.

Such prayer leads us first, not to righteous indignation, but to penitence; to sorrow that we are part of a society which tolerates, accepts, and uses such suffering for its own ends. So we are led to pray for those who bear the heavy burdens of unemployment and for all who seek to help and support them. Some of us certainly want to go praying for those able to influence the economy; our national leaders; and to pray that we shall see a new sense of compassion and new bold and imaginative policies that will overcome this problem. Campaigns and projects, therefore, are not divorced from prayer – they are its fruit and they must be linked to prayer if they are not to go awry. We need God's help constantly if we are to create a just society where we love and honour one another.

Long ago, a German Pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer (who opposed Adolf Hitler and was executed) wrote of the need to link prayer and action. He said: "The task of discovering a new Gospel (and building a new society) is rooted in prayer and Righteous action ... It is only in the spirit of prayer that any such work can be begun and carried through ..."

13: The Essex Churches Council for Industry and Commerce (ECCIC), a local Ecumenical Partnership of the Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic and United Reformed Churches in Essex, sponsor a team of Workplace Chaplains who regularly visit workplaces ranging from factories and offices, to supermarkets, police and fire stations. Chaplains are there to listen, to understand the pressures of the workplace, and offer support and care where they can. If you would like to talk about anything you have read in this article or, in confidence, discuss with a chaplain your experience, contact Revd Ian Swift who is the Industrial Chaplain for the Basildon District, by phone: 07725037680 and e-mail: ijeswift@googlemail.com

14: And finally, but certainly not least, we can pray. As I suggested in a recent sermon: *“Prayer is not the least we can do in our daily lives, it is the most we can do.”*

I recently attended a Diocesan Conference on the topic of unemployment (which inspired me to write this article) where the main speaker was Revd Raymond Draper who, for many years, was the Chairman of CHUG (The Christians Unemployment Group). In a very helpful booklet entitled ‘Fighting Back’ Revd Draper writes about the role of prayer in the midst of unemployment, and it is a passage well worth duplicating in full:



- 1: Being made redundant is never easy. The initial reaction might be shock, denial, shame, anger depression or all of these. For some people it feels almost like a bereavement, and it takes time to even begin to think straight about what to do. Don't try and pretend it hasn't happened. Tell your family and friends what is happening and how you feel. They care about you and they will listen, understand, and will want to support you in every way they can.
- 2: Ask your employer about other jobs in the organisation. Ask for time to look for jobs outside the organisation, while you are working your notice. Ask about redundancy payments. Ask about your pension rights. Make sure you get your P45 from employer. Get contact details from friends at work to keep in contact with them. Visit www.dti.gov.uk/employment/redundancy for some helpful information.
- 3: Contact Jobcentre Plus: Phone 0845 602 3805 and register with them. Don't delay: it could affect your income. Registration and applying for Job Seekers Allowance is now done on the phone. Book an appointment with a Personal Advisor at your local Jobcentre Plus office to discuss finding a new job; training; and other benefits. Take your P45 and two recent payslips to your first interview.



- 4: If you have redundancy pay, check with your Personal Advisor at Jobcentre Plus before you spend it. This may affect your right to benefit.
- 5: Seek good financial advice. Do not use the services of door-to-door advisors ('loan sharks!') they charge extremely high interest rates. Try a Credit Union instead, such as Essex Savers: Phone 01245 496235 or visit www.essex-savers.netcuda.net
- 6: Watch your spending. Review any standing orders, Hire Purchase agreements or financial contracts or purchases. If you are worried about meeting payments seek help from your local Citizens Advice Bureau, or the customer Credit Counselling Service: Free phone 0800 138 111 or visit www.cccs.co.uk or Christians Against Poverty at www.capuk.org or the National Debtline: Free phone 0808 808 4000 or visit www.nationaldebtline.co.uk
- 7: If you rent a flat or house you may now be entitled to a rent allowance, or housing benefit or a rebate on your council tax bill: check with your local council. If you have a mortgage, tell your Building Society or lender and ask if they can reduce your mortgage. Don't use any redundancy money to pay off the mortgage before you have spoken to your Personal Advisor at Jobcentre Plus.

- 8: Keep in touch with your Trade Union. They can offer advice and support. If you are not a union member, the secretary of your local Trades Council may be able to help.
- 9: Many jobs come through friends and relatives, so tell everyone you know you are looking! Look at Jobcentre Plus; visit the local library; search the newspapers; and register with agencies.
- 10: Build a new routine every day and every week that allows you time off. As well as job-seeking, what about: a course at a local college; helping a local charity; working on an allotment with a few friends; taking up a hobby; or becoming more involved in the life of your local church?
- 11: Meet with other people in a similar situation as yourself, this will give you much needed support.
- 12: In the midst of how you are feeling, there is no doubt you may feel alone. But your family and friends care about you and others are there to help and advice – don't be afraid to ask. It is also worth remembering that it is the job which has been made redundant, not you! Try not to take the loss of your job personally. You still have a lot to offer.

