



# OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WORK

Topic GW1

## Overview

Do you live to work or work to live? How do you think about your work and how do you relate the ideas of work to the whole of your life? In this Topic we will explore our understanding of work and discuss ways in which we can see work as more than just a job. We will explore the different kinds of work we do and share our ideas about what work means for us and seek to define what we mean by work. These ideas will help us to think more about how we connect our daily work with each other and with God.

*This is your handout; for notes, ideas and questions*

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## Question

**What are the different communities that you are part of?**

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## Question

**'What do you do?' How do you usually answer this question?**

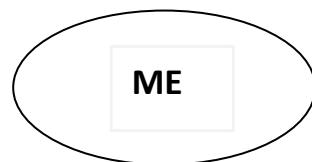
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## Activity

**Thinking about the different communities of which you are part, list all the kinds of work you perform**

**The different kinds of work I do**



### Discussion

Select one of the different kinds of work that you do. Think about the reasons why you do it and how it is valued by you and others. Share your thoughts with the rest of the group – and discover how other people see and value their work.

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### Question

**How might you define work?**

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### Activity for Group

**Compare your ideas with this list**

**What does work mean to you?** Here is a range of responses from previous groups.

1. It is hard physical effort towards some goal
2. Friendship and social contact
3. Economic necessity - a means to an end
4. Brings out the best in me and gives meaning in my life
5. Can be fulfilling and a source of self esteem
6. Ways I use my talents and gifts
7. A vocation and what my life is all about
8. Something I want to retire from, but will then replace with other work
9. Curse, or a drudgery – a necessary evil
10. A source of pressure and stress
11. Creativity and freedom
12. The source of our identities – “and what do you do?”
13. Serving others and doing something useful
14. A career
15. A place of community and belonging
16. A hobby, pastime or interest
17. Something I don’t have and I want
18. Something I love to do

### Perspective

#### A Definition of Work

As we have seen, work means different things to different people. Work is much broader than just paid employment. In his book *Unemployment – Under the judgement of God*, Peter Mayhew quotes the work of Prof William McDougall who suggested that there is an ‘instinct of construction’ in man...’the playful activities of children seem to be determined by its impulse.’ There is an intrinsic satisfaction to be derived from working. Human beings need to work. Work can be a source of real and deep joy.

Work is much more than just an economic matter, it also has social and spiritual dimensions. Work is different from a mere leisure activity, game or hobby.

We offer the following definition of work adapted from Peter Mayhew’s book :

Work is a purposeful activity, it leads to a change in the conditions for yourself and others and it has some beneficial social significance as an end. It is through engaging in ‘work’ that we find meaning and fulfilment, allowing us the opportunity to express our creativity and become more fully human.

*Adapted from Unemployment Under the Judgement of God (Contemporary Christian Concerns Series, Vol 1) by Peter Mayhew (Churchman, 1985)*

### Discussion

#### What do you think of this perspective on work?

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### Question

#### How do you understand the idea of achieving a work-life balance?

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### Question

#### Given a broader of work, are there other ways to think about the part that work plays in our lives?

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**During the week you might like to reflect on:**



**Have you got a good balance of work,  
leisure and rest this week?**

**Ponder**

**What did you learn from this session?**

**Prayer**

**Lord, whatever**

Lord,  
Whatever we build,  
Give us a glimpse of glory.  
Whatever we make,  
Give us a sense of wonder.  
Wherever we travel,  
Give us a sense of reverence.  
Whoever we meet,  
Give us a sense of awe.  
Whatever we do,  
Give us a sense of achievement.  
Whatever our situation,  
Give us knowledge of you.  
Amen.

*From 'Powerlines; Celtic Prayers about Work' by David Adam  
(Triangle, 1992)*