

## Topic Overview

It is all too easy to keep parts of our working lives in separate compartments and to imagine the God is mainly interested in certain things we do. The Church sometimes reinforces this point of view by suggesting that some work is more spiritual. Moreover is there anything distinctive about a Christian at work? This unit explores these issues and imagines how God might be involved in what we do each day.

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

## Facilitator

*Offer a quick overview of this session and note that there are other Topics in this series that relate to the wider question of work and how we connect our faith with our work. Some issues that may come up in discussion will need to be dealt with in another session.*

*Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members*

## Facilitator

*Ask the group to consider the following question. It might be helpful to write the ideas of the group down on Post-it notes or on postcard so the ideas can be grouped later.*

## Question

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**How might you be able to tell that someone at work was a Christian?**

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## Facilitator

*Write all the ideas down as above and then invite the group to begin to cluster the ideas into common themes.*

## Discussion

**How might you group these ideas into common themes?**

## Facilitator

*See what common themes emerge from the discussion.*

*Introduce the question about whether there is actually anything that is really distinctive that marks out Christians over and above other good people who express no faith. Here are some ideas to explore :*

## Perspective

**Is there anything that is really distinctive about the Christian at work?**

It has been suggested that there are a set of propensities to act which can be associated with Christians at work. What would you like to add to this list?

1. Challenging money as the only way to measure and recognising human cost
2. Speaking up – doing so when it is particularly detrimental or costly to self or business
3. Being a sign of encouragement and giving hope to others
4. Behaving in a self-sacrificial way with a sense of greater good
5. Being held accountable for how we live up to our values
6. Challenging at a systemic level and acting within the given mess

**Facilitator** *Introduce this perspective from Margaret Kane and ask the group to what extent they recognise this issue.*

**Perspective** **Whom does God work through?**

“Christians easily take a proprietary view of the Spirit as though it belonged only to them. When they are told that God’s Spirit is poured out not just on a chosen few but on all flesh, they experience an identity problem. If people, who do not acknowledge God or Jesus Christ, are working for the kingdom’s ideals of justice, peace and human solidarity, what is the place of the church? God as spirit is everywhere present creating and sustaining all things and all people. His love is constantly seeking a response, but each one is free to respond or be deaf to this call, and not all people respond. Many who do respond serve God’s kingdom without knowing who it is they serve. The church consists of those who acknowledge that God is who he has shown himself to be in Jesus Christ.”

*‘What Kind of God?: Reflections on Working with People and Churches in North East England’  
by Margaret Kane (SCM Press, 1986)*

**Facilitator** *Groups sometimes come to the conclusion that it is difficult to pin down exactly what it is that is distinctive about Christians at work and what marks them out from people who have no expressed faith. Perhaps we are looking in the wrong place. One of the things that is distinctive for Christians is the belief that God is at work in the world and that he is there already ahead of us when we are at work. This depends on how we understand God and what kind of God we believe in.*

**Facilitator** *Introduce the topic of how the Church typically sees the world of work and can give the impression that some kinds of work are more valued than others.*

**Discussion** **What is the Church’s view about work**



Here is an Industrial Chaplain talking to a working fireman who regularly attends church.

Who do we think is doing Christian work? Who has authority?

In what ways can the idea of having a ‘ministry’ at work be confusing?

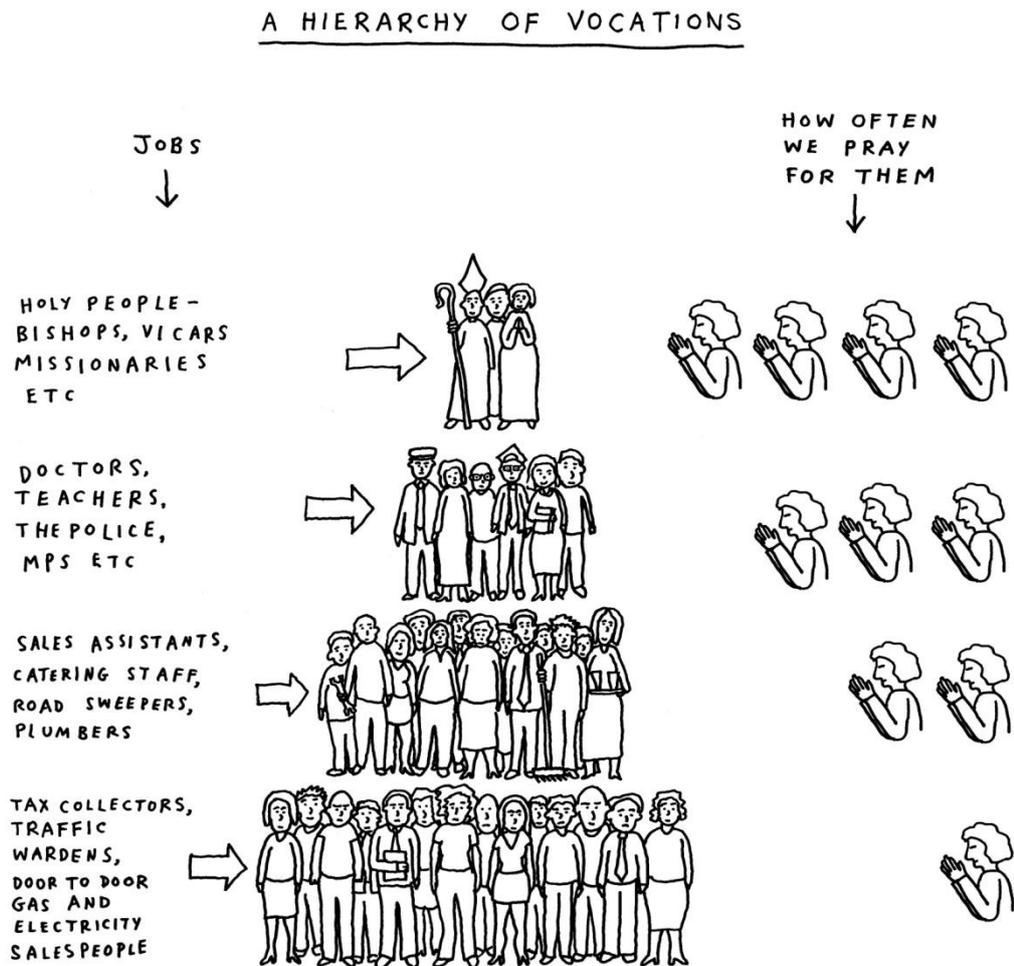
**Facilitator** *The Chaplain is representing the Church in an easily identifiable way as part of the Church’s mission to the world of work. The Christian fireman is equally part of the body of Christ i.e. the Church and is representing the Church in its dispersed mode in the world. Why should there be any difference in the perceived value of their work? Some people talk about themselves as having a ‘ministry’ at work. We would suggest it is better to talk about being a disciple at work following and joining in with the work of God in Christ.*

**Facilitator**

Introduce the light-hearted Dave Walker cartoon and ask the group to what extent they recognise the point that is being made here. What lies behind this model?

**Discussion**

In what way does this cartoon reflect your experience of the church's thinking about how different kinds of work is valued? Is some work more worthy or spiritual than others? Are some vocations more important than others?



**Facilitator**

What is the challenge for the church if we were to turn this hierarchy on its head? We explore the issue of vocations much more in other units.

**Facilitator**

Introduce the following two prayers written by Frank Colquhoun. Read them through with the group and ask the group to comment on the differences between them and the assumptions that are implicit within them. How would someone working in the busy world of commerce feel if they heard the second prayer being read out in church? What view of work is being promoted here?

## Two Prayers

### Those who serve the community

God our Father, we remember before you with gratitude those who in their different capacities serve the community.

We pray for those who safeguard the public health and minister to the sick; those who provide for the welfare of the young and care for the elderly and infirm; those who serve in local government, administer the law and preserve the peace. Assist them in their varied duties, and deepen within us all the spirit of loving service; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### The world of business

We pray, O God, for those whose lives are immersed day by day in the busy and complex world of commerce, with its many demands, responsibilities and temptations. Save them from being so absorbed in material wealth that they lose sight of the things of priceless value, the things that are worth more than all the money in the world. Give them integrity of character, that their lives may be sincere, their dealings honest, and their words truthful; we ask it in the name of Christ, the Lord of all life.

*From 'New Parish Prayers', edited by Frank Colquhoun  
(Hodder and Stoughton, 1982)*

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## Question

**What assumptions are being made in these 2 prayers by the same author?**

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## Facilitator

*Ask the group to share their views and summarise the discussion*

## Facilitator

*Introduce this perspective on Godly Work from Armand Larive's book called After Sunday. He helps us to focus beyond just the question of how we connect our faith with work to the much broader question about how connect our work with God. He helps us to discover the God who is at the very heart of what we are doing in our daily work. This perspective is a good summary of the line of thought in this unit so far.*

## Perspective

### Godly Work?

Because people's occupations often centre life's meaning so powerfully, does that mean that they are bending the knee in de facto obeisance to secular gods, kingdoms and morals of a workaday world, saving Sundays for Christian activity? What does the church say to someone who is out in the world of commerce and industry, someone whose Christian vocation seems challenged by service to idols of mammon. Typically, the church's response is a palliative suggestion that one's job can be a springboard for

kindness towards others, a platform for keeping the Ten Commandments, an opportunity to make a witness, a location for a ministry of presence, or a context from which prayer may be shot. This message implies that, while so-called secular careers have some value as a service to others, they possess no inherent value in their own right.

But what about the welder who believes welding per se is his Christian activity? What about the homemaker who believes she shares a personal delight with God in a good cheese soufflé. Would it be possible that God motivates the engineer who works on fuel cells or sustains a man who collects garbage? Could it be that the knack for finding good teaching methods is not just hard work but also the prompting and gift giving of the Holy Spirit? Could the promise of Christ be part of what motivates the designer who wants to improve sewage disposal?...Are not all these equally cases of godly work?

*From 'After Sunday: A Theology of Work' by Armand Larive  
(Continuum, 2004)*

**Discussion**                      **What do you think about the ideas suggested here?**

**Facilitator**                      *Ask the group to consider the following question*

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**Question**                      **What difference would it make to look at your work as God sees it?**

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**Facilitator**                      *Encourage the group to see the value in the work that they are doing as an expression of their Christian living*

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



**How might you think  
about your work as godly  
work this week?**

**Facilitator**                      *Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session.*

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

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**Facilitator**

*Ask group members to share quickly 1 or 2 points and reflect back any common themes or issues that need to be explored elsewhere. Agree with the group what they would like to do next and who is going to lead the next session.*

**Prayer  
said or sung**

**Let All the World in Every Corner Sing**

Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!  
The heavens are not too high, His praise may thither fly,  
The earth is not too low, His praises there may grow.  
Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!

Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!  
The church with psalms must shout, no door can keep them out;  
But, above all, the heart must bear the longest part.  
Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!

*Words : George Herbert Copyright © 1978 Novello*