

Helping People Deal with Unemployment

Employment characterizes so many aspects of a person's daily life that it almost sends the idealism of that childhood question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" out the window!

Even before the traumatic consequences of September 11, the overwhelming realities of unemployment have affected the lives of many in this country. They transcend profession, education, socio-economic class and marital status.

Current statistics show that some 6 percent of our employable population is unemployed. "Not bad," we might say, until we realize this represents millions of people's lives. Consider for a moment the number of things in our lives that are affected by the income generated by our employment.

Among the many challenges in our lives, job layoffs and terminations often hold a stigma that causes people to withdraw from the very communities where they once thrived. It can be the source of conflict and anxiety within family life.

In these times it becomes the church's privilege to reassure those who are affected by the difficulties of unemployment or job transition. Refer to Hebrews 13:5 and Romans 8:35, 37-39 to remind your congregation's members that God's grace is not limited by life circumstances.

How you can help

Here are ways that congregations can uphold and support those who are unemployed or in the midst of job transition.

- Join with other congregations to invite local experts to speak to members about life or career transitions at a community forum or short-term support group. Check with social service agencies for ideas.
- Partner with a counselor or community organization to sponsor and facilitate small group support.
- Offer the option of pledging time and talent as an alternative to monetary giving. You may want to value each task with a monetary comparison for those who might appreciate this affirmation.
- Promote the availability of resources such as food shelf and emergency assistance to people in temporary as well as chronic need.
- Provide scholarships for all activities and events. You might even offer them as work scholarships, inviting parents to chaperone an event or youth to assist leaders in special preparations. This serves to uphold the integrity and sensitivity of those who are in a bind financially.
- Be mindful that some causes for unemployment are health-related and may not be covered by workers' or unemployment compensation. Be prepared to reach out with love and appropriate support and referrals.
- In preaching and teaching, refer to unemployment and job transitions, along with the many other challenges in life, as vulnerable realities of human existence, rather than surprising exceptions that set us apart.
- Offer formal and ongoing prayers for those who are seeking employment and experiencing the realities of job transition and unemployment.
- Check out this book from Augsburg Fortress: *When You Lose Your Job* by Donna Bennett (ISBN 0-8066-4362-5; \$4.99 plus shipping). It's part of their "Difficult Times" series and can be ordered by calling 800/328-4648.
- Inspire an attitude of gratitude for our temporal securities and a sense of ongoing thanksgiving for our God's gracious gifts of life and salvation. Nurture a sense of compassion for those who are uncertain about one or both.

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