

Section Four

RESPONSES

While this paper is intended for the Lutheran Church of Australia and its members, the following are proposed as suggested responses to the issues raised in this paper. They do not represent answers, but are points to be used for further discussion and exploration. Many more issues can be, and should be, addressed by appropriate individuals and agencies both of the church and governments.

4.1 GOVERNMENTAL

An important responsibility for addressing work and unemployment has been vested in governments, which are the servants of God for the good of the people they govern (Rom 13:4). However, in democratic countries all citizens have some of the responsibilities of government, called upon not only to obey the laws, but to contribute to the examining of wise measures as they have expertise and as they have opportunity.

For example, the possible responses to unemployment include those outlined below.

- a) Those aimed at the **demand for labour** are principally connected with monetary and fiscal management. Some of these are:
 - * increased government expenditure on direct employment-creating schemes;
 - * interest rate management;
 - * protection of Australian industries from overseas competition; eg tariffs;
 - * stimulation of production, eg subsidies and bounties to specified industries;
 - * income and taxation measures designed to redistribute wealth and income.
- b) Policies aimed at the **supply of labour** and concerned primarily with the re-distribution of unemployment. These include:
 - * job-creation schemes (especially directed towards disadvantaged workers such as: migrants, youth, women, people who have been unemployed for long periods);
 - * human resource policies, based on the concept of training and retraining schemes for labour, especially for structurally and frictionally unemployed;
 - * subsidising employers to take on more labour. The effect of this is to lower the wage costs faced by the employer. It is not a help if employers already have idle capacity and a surplus labour requirement;
 - * shortening the working week and/or restricting overtime to spread the available working hours among more people;
 - * part-time work and job-sharing policies which aim to spread the impact of unemployment;

- * early retirement schemes which are designed to allow younger people to fill jobs vacated;
 - * efforts to remove ways in which cash is exchanged for labour so that taxes and other societal structures are evaded and job opportunities are denied other people.
- c) **Income maintenance or relief** and other support provisions of governments, churches, trade unions, and benevolent organisations.
 These provisions attempt to alleviate the living conditions of unemployed people. Generally these measures are intended to be short-term.
- d) **A re-examination of the concept of work**, as there generally exists in our society a rigid distinction between paid and unpaid work. This involves a reassessment of what constitutes work and how people should be remunerated for their labour.
- e) **A transformation of the social, political, ideological, economic, and cultural system.** A system that defines 'humanity' or 'worth' by work, but denies work to large numbers of people, requires change. This approach implies that the nature of work is socially determined and not immutable.

4.2 CHURCH

This section should be examined in the light of the Lutheran Church of Australia's statement, 'The Involvement of the Church in Social and Political Problems' (1972).

Church Action

The following suggests ways in which the church can act.

- a) Committee(s) and groups in the church with social responsibility roles, together with pastors, can assist those with work and without work to develop renewed understanding of work as a privilege which results in service. This could involve:-
 - * scriptural study;
 - * examination of individual's own values and attitudes to work and how these can influence and shape the attitudes and experience of those without work;
 - * guidance on how every person can be motivated and assisted to work as praise to God;
 - * peer group activity;
 - * working with other denominations to develop ecumenical responses.
- b) The church should develop liturgical and educational material which brings people closer to issues of the workplace and the world of unemployment. This could involve:
 - * publication of prayers and hymns which take account of work and unemployment, poverty and wealth, capital and labour, in terms people will identify with and respond to;
 - * development of sermon resources;
 - * creation of motifs which could be taken up in various art forms used in worship;

- * development of Bible studies and discussion points which could be used in small group study or individual reflection;
 - * development of curriculum aids and materials on vocation, appropriate for particular age groups within its educational institutions.
- c) The church should cooperate at national, state and local levels with other Christian denominations, to study and promote awareness and discuss and share possible solutions/responses to the social injustices evidenced through the problems of unemployment.
- d) The church can actively help individuals develop their skills and attitudes to work as a service ministry, and not just as a means to accumulate wealth and pursue materialistic ends. This could involve:
- * support for individuals facing ethical dilemmas in work which can effect the nature of work and the opportunities for others to work;
 - * recognising, creating, and using opportunities for individuals to work in the life of their local community and in meaningful roles in the wider society;
 - * encouraging the formation of support and self-help groups, with a focus on faith and work and business ethics.
- e) The church should examine its own attitudes and practices as an employer and ensure that:
- * it provides meaningful opportunities for Christian service;
 - * it does not demean the contribution of any of its workers;
 - * it considers its role in work creation;
 - * its employment policies do not discriminate against, or further disadvantage, unemployed people;
 - * it provides a model to the wider community through its own work, employment and management practices.
- f) Church leaders can encourage Christian employers to carry out their responsibilities in providing opportunities for service.
- g) The church should examine the links between education and work through the church school system. This could involve assessment of the standards and concepts of work about which students are being educated, to ensure that they are developing appropriate Christian values, attitudes and ideals of work, and that they are aware of the realities of finding work and living with periods between work.
- h) The church, through its welfare programs, should dedicate adequate financial and human resources to assisting individuals who are in need through circumstances of unemployment.
- i) Each congregation should come to appreciate the needs of its immediate neighbourhood and respond positively to meet those needs.
- j) The church should promote dialogue and seek to understand better the situation of individuals with or without work and of employers, so that it can improve the effectiveness of its responses.

Individual Christian Action

Individual Christians can exercise their personal responsibilities in much the same way as the church. The following ways are examples:

- a) Personal examination of one's own values and attitudes to work and how God is praised through that privilege. This could involve:
 - * examining the motivation and willingness to seek opportunities to work;
 - * examining attitudes to people who have not found, or have been denied, the opportunity to work;
 - * understanding and exercising one's responsibilities in the use of wealth to meet the needs of others, as well as one's own personal needs, (eg job sharing and/or wealth sharing).
- b) Christian employers should ensure that:
 - * they do not demean the contribution of any workers;
 - * they do not discriminate against or further disadvantage unemployed people;
 - * their own work, employment and management practices are a model to the wider community.
- c) Individuals in their own church, vocational and social communities should seek to understand the social injustices and consequences of unemployment and use their talents to alleviate them.
 - * This includes working to assist individual people, as well as speaking out and working towards broader social change, where comment and suggestion are made in the light of the Christian faith.
 - * All Christians should show love and concern for their neighbour and help where people are in need. This not only involves the giving of material assistance, but also the giving of time, friendship, patience and understanding.

* * * * *

Resources for Further Study

Anderson, Digby (ed), *The Kindness that Kills: The Church's simplistic response to complex social issues*, SPCK, London, 1984.

Diehl, William E, *Christianity and Real Life*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1976.

Diehl, William E, *Thank God, it's Monday*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1982.

Diehl, William E, *The Monday Collection*, Harper Collins, London, 1991.

Gulker, Virgil, *Help is Just Around the Corner*, Creation House, Florida, 1988.