

Mission Shaped economy ***Reflections on ministry to the work place***

The development of ministry to people in the workplace is an issue that has been the subject of a lot of discussion and debate in recent years. The perception that it is important to retain a presence in work place visiting and chaplaincy is often seen to be the heart of this particular debate.

In many places the decline in this ministry is leading to a revaluation and in some cases a revival of the practice through the use of volunteers and part time Chaplains.

The importance of theological reflection on ministry to work place(s) can not be underestimated; it is the potential point of contact with a large part of the population. It is also true that it is very difficult to identify a methodology for developing this area of work. The days of the factory floor where workers were available between shifts is long gone and the work place is more likely to be an office with limited space for private conversations.

The truth is that a lot of industrial mission from the 1980's onwards recognised this and moved into the ancillary areas of work with the unemployed and with the multitude of government programmes. The contribution to theological reflection on regeneration and urban renewal should not be underestimated, but it is a very different approach to the traditional models of industrial mission.

The later developments of Chaplain's to 'Asda' and related models have helped maintain a momentum that has assisted in masking the changes. In a few places visiting continues but this does tend to be few and far between. In addition there is a movement in some areas to a recovery of the traditional models, it remains to be seen if they can be reinvigorated for a new era.

The publication of '*Mission Shaped Church*' raises questions about new models of Church and in this context the idea of '*networks*' plays an important role. The idea of Churches that are based around '*networks*' is in some ways a welcome addition to the debate on ministry in the work place. It must be said that in many ways the earliest days of industrial mission would have met the criteria being used.

In John Hull's pamphlet '*Mission Shaped Church – A theological Response*' he argues that the current debate is too narrowly defined around Church and misses the point that Christians are called to serve the world. The Church is a result of mission and it is called to mission in the world. If we are not careful we constantly return to the old ways of maintenance not mission. The '*Networks*' may be knew the models of Church are not and end up turned in on themselves.

The importance of Industrial Mission has been its commitment to being in and of the Church whilst being very much in the world. The key to understanding

its contribution is its commitment to being a prophetic voice on the edge of society.

It is important that given the changing context of both Church and society that in the context of mission and ministry to and with people in the workplace that new ideas are explored. It is important that in undertaking any review that the changes in the global economy and the increasing awareness of globalisation are taken into consideration.

The global nature of our society is obvious. It is seen in the way that we are bombarded with information from across the world. We buy coffee from 'Starbucks' or a similar chain and any discussion of factory closures will be based on why a company in another country is making decisions about the UK workforce.

The challenge is to try and identify a new approach by asking what our mission to the economy and work place is.

If as I believe the days of industrial visiting and Chaplaincy are past, it is important that we find new models. A tentative approach that I hope might be possible is:

- The Church is called to prophetic as well as pastoral ministry. In a globalised economy many companies are part of international conglomerates. The potential for work place visiting is very unlikely, though there will be Christians who are working in these companies. The need for theological reflection remains a key element of our ministry; could this not lead to the appointment of *theological animators*? Whose task would be to work with groups drawn from the world of work to reflect on issues of faith and discipleship?
- The second part of such a role would be to be a support to local churches in establishing work groups. Membership would be drawn from within the congregation to reflect on their contribution to the wider community. A key area of reflection would be on their understanding of what they bring to and from their working lives.
- The third element would be to be a resource to the wider diocese and other institutional structures in offering training and theological support.

The way forward must be rooted in an understanding of mission and discipleship. It demands theological reflection that is open to new models of ministry and is prophetic in its outlook.

The challenge is not find new ways of being church but of being theologically rooted in the way that we approach our globalised society.

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