

Professions of Faith

Exploring workplace themes in the Revised Common
Lectionary



May 2012

Welcome to Professions of Faith. These notes and reflections are offered as a resource for preachers, leaders and clergy to provide ideas and suggestions for how Sunday worship can relate to the working lives of a congregation. They seek to offer connections between the set lectionary readings for the day and key workplace themes. We recognise that these do not always represent the key thrust of the passages, or indeed the intent of including them within the lectionary schedule. They are intended as a companion for more overtly exegetical and liturgical resources, and while every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the Biblical references, we can accept no responsibility for errors or omissions, and recommend the use of recognised publications produced for that purpose.

May 6th– Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:26-40 Psalm 22:24-30 1 John 4:7-21 John 15:1-8

The central figure in the Acts reading is an Ethiopian official. This might lead to encouraging a congregation to pray for foreign diplomats, ambassadors and other Government officials. We might also remember that the man's identity as a Eunuch and a Gentile foreigner would have made him an outsider in the eyes of many religious people. This might lead to a congregation reflecting on the roles and professions in society that we find easy to "demonise" and perhaps being challenged to think differently as those who are part of God's Kingdom. Other workplace themes that emerge might be those engaged in the world of publishing, teaching of literature, and those who translate and distribute Scriptures and religious books. The image of the vine and the gardener in the Gospel reading is another opportunity to pray for working people engaged in horticulture.

These of course are all secondary themes, the key thrust of these passages being the God who comes into the world to draw all nations and all people to himself. So we might remember that Jesus Christ is Lord of all things and apply this to every aspect of our working lives.

May 13th – Sixth Sunday in Easter

Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

Today, the Sunday before Ascension day, has traditionally been marked as Rogationtide, which ICF historically designated Industrial Sunday. You are encouraged to use various resources and ideas available from ICF and other websites, to pray for the working lives of everyone in your congregation and local community. A prayer for the world of work can be found at <http://www.icf-online.org/icfprtext.php?ident=24>

The Psalm with its key focus on music and singing might provide an opportunity to pray and reflect on the work of musicians and composers, and all those who work in this field. Reflecting further on how rivers, seas and hills are enjoined to the song of worship, might lead to reflecting on how the beauty of the world around us inspires so much creative art, and how that art often helps us more deeply engage with and express our worship of God. So we might celebrate those who work in the world of the arts in a variety of ways.

Another key theme is the keeping of God's commandments, which is rooted in our love for God and His for us. We might reflect on the positive benefits of law in creating a stable and safe society. The New Testament reminds us that ultimately obedience comes not through imposing it, but through our love for God, the great law-giver. This might cause us to particularly reflect on the work of probation officers and those who work to re-habilitate offenders, including those who pioneer work of restorative justice. In these and similar professions, the aim is not simply to impose compliance, but to help individuals re-discover those virtues that lead to natural obedience. This is the true nature God's law.

May 29th - Seventh Sunday in Easter

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

This week's *Roots* resource begins with the idea of using protective outfits and equipment that are associated with certain roles and professions to explore the various ways in which we keep ourselves safe at work. This leads to a contemporary engagement with the Gospel reading in which Jesus prays for protection for his followers. At the heart of this is a call and a prayer that "they might be one". We might invite a congregation to think about workplace situations where it is important to work together as a team. Many who work in the area of health and safety argue that one of the most important contributors to safety and wellbeing in a hazardous environment is the relationships that exist between employees. When people are looking out for each other, they keep each other safe. How might we apply this reality from the world of work, to the life of God's Church?

As we reflect on Christ's prayer for protection, there is an obvious opportunity to pray and thank God for those who work to keep society safe and protected.

A way of exploring Psalm 1 might be to think about the various workplace contexts in which people have to sort the good from the bad. There might be people within the congregation who in different ways work as checkers or sorters on production lines, Quality Assurance officers or even perhaps ticket collectors, making sure that only those who should, are able to gain access. There is a similar theme throughout the Psalm, the rooted tree bearing fruit is compared to chaff, the waste product once the grain is taken from wheat, that is blown away in the wind. The Psalmist goes on to say that "the sinner has no place in the council of the righteous". Like the person without a ticket, the product that fails a quality check, they fall short of God's fair and righteous judgement. There is obvious further application of the mercy and forgiveness of Christ etc. etc.

May 27th – Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104: 25-35,37; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15 (alt - Ezekiel 37:1-14)

On this day we remember the coming of the Spirit, transforming the disciples and breathing life and power into the infant church, it is a day that many describe as the "*birthday of the church*". There are many potential applications for the everyday world of work and commerce. Jerusalem was a difficult and threatening place for the Early Believers; it was through the power of the Spirit that they found the strength and wisdom to become faithful witnesses. Many Christians find work a difficult place to live and act as people of faith; there is clear opportunity to pray for the Spirit's strength and enabling in this context. Our workplaces will be diverse and different; just as the crowd who gathered on the day of Pentecost represented a huge variety of places and languages. We might pause to reflect on how we "*translate*" the hallmarks and principles of our faith into the various contexts with which we engage in our everyday lives. We remember of course that it was the Holy Spirit who enabled this to happen - the Spirit comes that we might make Christ known to the wider world.

Pentecost offers a powerful contemporary message as it echoes the account, in Genesis 10, of the Tower of Babel. Here the diverse languages and nations are explained as God's response to humanity's pride and lust for power and prestige. The organisations that tend to bring people together from across the globe today are often multi-national business corporations - the common language of our world is probably economics; profit, loss and bottom-line. We might even reflect on how the internet has created a world community, drawing people of every language and nation into on-line conversations and information sharing. (Google can even do the translating!) This provides a moment to pause and to recognise that at the heart of our faith is a belief that nations should be drawn together under Christ's righteous rule; this is the work of God's Spirit. Our work might even be part of that. We could take the opportunity to pray that those who have such widespread influence might know God's help to use it well.