

UNEMPLOYMENT SUNDAY

On February 19th 2012 the Roman Catholic Church marked Unemployment Sunday. Preston Christian Action Network in the shape of Mark Willett and Greg Smith (both Evangelical Protestants) were invited by Fr. Tom Singleton to speak in the Sunday Masses at St. Ignatius Church and English Martyrs Church Preston. This article is based on their talk.

Greg Smith began by quoting from the local paper

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Figures published yesterday show the number of people claiming Jobseekers' Allowance in Preston rose from 3,498 in December to 3,660 in January, making up 4% of working population.

The Gospel Reading Mark 2 1-12... shows us what the church should be about... Jesus had two sides to his ministry offering forgiveness of sins **and** practical help to people in need... The friends who brought the paralysed man to Jesus offered some practical help... then he dealt with him spiritually and materially... and the healing left him able to get up and walk.. and no longer trapped in dependency on the charity of others...

Some links to the Bible and employment...

1. When God made the world and made people in his own image he gave them creativity... He gave Adam and Eve a job to do... using their brains to name the animals and their hands to till the soil and tend the garden together .
2. Our Lord Jesus also knew about work .. with his mind as a rabbi learning and teaching.. with his hands as a carpenter. He gave dignity and affirmation to labour and was a servant to all working for the benefit of others
3. St Paul was not just a preacher but a small business entrepreneur.. a maker and seller of tents..He did this to finance his mission.. getting an income to fund his gospel mission... In the letter to Ephesians he taught that other Christians should work so that they could support themselves and their families.. and also so they had a surplus to share with the poor and to support the ministry of church leaders.

In the light of this when society and the economy fails to provide employment for all who are willing and able to work – and only grudgingly supports those who are left without work we commit three acts of robbery...

We rob people of the chance to be creative to express themselves through work and the chance to do it in social co-operation with other people.

We rob people of their dignity and their rightful pride.. we rob them of purpose and throw them on the scrapheap of life.

We rob them of a decent income (while some still have and indecent income).. so that they can face poverty – 130 or more families now using the food bank each month.. so they can't support themselves or their families.. let alone charities or their church..

So it's important that as Christians we try to do something about it... One small way is through work clubs for unemployed people.

Mark Willet continued:

Michael had worked for the Post Office Sorting office for over 20 years, becoming redundant was real shock as he had always worked and provided for his family , he had liked his job , he struggled about transferring his skills to new jobs.
(secured F/T work))

Carol had been unemployed for over 2 years after caring for her disabled mother who had now passed away, with no computer skills she was finding it difficult to compile a CV or search on line for jobs. She had no recent work history and was getting rejected at the application phases. (is on the Work Programme undertaking Work Experience Placement keeps in touch with Work Club)

Samantha was struggling to secure her dream job after graduating from university (got temp job until summer and then starts placement in the area she is interested in)

Martin had worked in same job for 30 years since leaving school, he had never used a computer and didn't have a CV.(now working temp at Leyland Trucks)

Barry had mental health issues and his reassessment for ESA had been turned down leaving him bewildered and confused and then told he must apply for jobs or he would lose his JSA and Housing Benefit (re-applied for ESA waiting outcome , secured some volunteering keep in touch with Work Club)

Lynn had worked in a Building Society and was made redundant just before Christmas she felt humiliated when she had to sign on for JSA , she had some job application but it had been years since she had been for an interview (secured job within a week with Local Construction Company)

Real people real stories all members of the work Club

The Work Club www.theworkclub.org.uk is a

“Place to meet, exchange skills, share experiences, find opportunities, and get support to help you return to work”

The Work Club was established in October 2011 as a response by King’s Church in Penwortham to the rising levels of unemployment in their local area. King’s Church has been involved in the local community for over 25 years and the Leadership Team that the church would be the main sponsor and support Club with the purpose of demonstrating Christian compassion, hope and provide practical help to those struggling in the recession.

The Work Club is voluntary; its volunteers help people who are over 20 years old who live locally who are actively seeking work. The leadership team believe it’s about the local church making a difference in the local community. Club members can come each week until they have secured a job or training. We believe that everyone has something to offer; we are all of value. We realise that all of us may have made wrong choices or wished we could start again; **The Work Club** is about fresh beginnings and a new start to achieve member’s dreams and plans for the future. Many of our members have become unemployed over the past 12 months, some have worked in the same job for over 20 years, and some have just finished university or training, struggling to get on the ladder of employment.

The Team worked closely with Job Centre Plus and Penwortham Town Council to develop a sustainable model that would meet local needs and an enthusiastic team of specialist volunteers were recruited to help provide the specialist skills and knowledge required to get **The Work Club** up and running. All the team are committed Christians and members of a local church and give our time freely.

Attendance at **The Work Club** is voluntary, its free to attend , it is not part of the Governments Mandatory Welfare to Work Programme, although attendance at the club can be used as evidence of job seeking when signing on for benefits.

The Work Club has 5 purposes

1. A Meeting Place

The Work Club is place where people who are unemployed and actively seeking work from Penwortham, Kingsfold, Lostock Hall, Bamber Bridge and Longton **can meet each** Thursday from 10am to 12.30pm at Penwortham Community Centre, Kingsfold Drive. A wireless internet connection is available; members can bring their own Laptop or use the Clubs IT Network. There is a coffee bar and refreshments are provide free of charge.

2. An Exchange

The Work Club recognises that everyone has skills and experience. The Team encourages members to look at their own skills, abilities and interests and plan how they could apply them to a job. It's also **a great opportunity to exchange skills, help others and find out how to learn new skills through volunteering.** The Work Club Team provides lots of useful resources, sharing their expertise and skills with members in particular providing IT and job search skills. We live in an increasing digital age and basic IT skills can be a vital tool to get a job. One of our members has written an article about their experience which is currently posted on the web site.

3. Share ideas and help one another

Research has shown that one of the best ways to find a job is through friends, family or social networks. During The Work Club meetings we encourage members to share ideas and help one another with job searching. We enable members to share each other's job-hunting and career experiences.

4. Finding a job

It can be really hard to get back into work on your own. It's much easier when you are part of a Club which is made up of people all seeking the same goal backed by a specialist team of "coaches" to provide confidence, motivation and encouragement. **The Work Club** Team believes that there is a place and role for everyone, allowing them to live a fulfilling life. Finding that dream job or a job that will bring financial independence is a "job in itself".

5. Support from the team

The Work Club Team offers a range of specialist skills. Most importantly they are able to listen and help members create a personalised plan of action which will help them move forward. The Work Club offers the following services:

- Job Journey Planning and Careers Guidance
- Information about courses and training that will lead to a job
- IT and Job Search Skills including access to leading job sites
- Interview Skills; help to produce a CV, Mock Interviews
- Volunteering Opportunities
- Links with other organisations that may be able to help you
- Support and help from local businesses, including referrals to Self Employment Service Providers

To fund **The Work Club** the Church relies on Grants, Donations and individual gifts.
The Work Club Team

Mark Willett -Work Club Co-ordinator Trustee and member of the Leadership Team at King's Church (Penwortham Free Methodist) - Professional Careers Guidance Adviser, Social Entrepreneur and semi-retired Manager for Careers and Employment Services

Dave Brown -Work Club Volunteer from Fulwood Free Methodist Church – Training and Recruitment Specialist

Stephen Davies -Work Club Volunteer from St Michael's Ashton, - retired HR Specialist

Jeanette Brambles – Work Club Volunteer from St Thomas Blackpool, has her own consultancy “Passionate about Performance” – self-employed Job Coach and Trainer, redundancy and outplacement specialist

Support The Work Club

As a charity, **The Work Club** is **dependent on grants, gifts and donations for its work**. We make no charge for people to come to the club. All **The Work Club** Team give their time freely. However we would like to **expand the Network and offer Work Clubs in other locations** and to **support new emerging Work Clubs** in other parts of the Region. We have plans **to expand the number of openings**, but to do this we will need to raise more funding this year. We would also like to **develop a specialist Work Club for 16-25** year olds (currently we offer support to anyone over 20 years old.)

Unemployment is at its highest level for over 20 years. We have an “emergency” and people are desperately requiring help and support. Helping and supporting a family member out of poverty or despair into meaningful employment can impact on a whole family and on a neighbourhood.

If you have real passion for helping people back into work, then see me or Greg at the end of the service or contact through email contact address hello@theworkclub.org.uk

Other similar work clubs are now running in Preston Churches at The Salvation Army, at St Matthews Mission Acregate Lane and in the community at the Intact Centre in Ingol. Preston Christian Action Network regularly brings them together to share experience and good practice. All the clubs are grateful to Job Centre + for startup funding for IT equipment etc. We were also grateful to the congregations of the two churches where we spoke who took up a collection amounting to over £190 which was shared between the three Church based Work Club Projects.