

Sacraments in Work

Coventry Diocese MSE Group

"I hadn't thought of connecting work with sacraments but this was a very useful exercise. It helped me look at my work in a different way – to realise God present in it – to realise more deeply the holiness in it – to see the sacramental nature – and things that may be ordinary but are important."

A group from the Coventry area met again on a Sunday afternoon in March for another session on "Ministry where you work", but this time we focussed on the theme of Sacraments in Work. We were a mixture of 4 ordained Ministers in Secular Employment and 6 Readers, and we engaged enthusiastically with our theme - "So much came out of a short time it was surprising and inspiring."

We began the afternoon in groups talking about the events of our week at work – the mundane routine activities, the on-going major projects, and the exciting and challenging one-off occurrences. The balance between thinking and discussion and individual / small group / whole group work worked well and kept the discussion moving along.

"It was good to talk. The afternoon gave the opportunity to talk to other people who have a ministry in their workplace, especially another teacher. Listening to other people's stories gave new ideas to adapt to my particular situation. It was encouraging to find others doing very similar things within the work place, although their work places are so very different."

We then moved on to think about how we might see sacraments taking place in these activities, beginning from the traditional definition: "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace". We thought it might be useful to give a couple of examples of sacraments we recognised at work – although with caution, as it is difficult to capture the individual's particular situation and the depth of discussion which surrounded these suggestions.

The shared lunch time and particularly the shared communal weekly or monthly lunch in the office or department resonated with ideas of communion. Another more telling example was of a cake sale for money raising which not only benefited others through the money raised but also brought people together, working communally to make the cakes and organise the sale.

We found several examples with echoes of the sacrament of extreme unction – although we decided it could more helpfully be called "anointing for New Life" – involving a step in faith into the unknown. We thought of major life changes such as retirement or redundancy, but also the change in a pupil's home life (for example, when parents separate).

"I found very interesting the discussion on the Sacraments. We could spend a lot more time on this theme, perhaps exploring the question of making it explicit – but the first step is recognising what we are doing. Maybe we could take one of the themes that emerged this time and explore it further. It would be interesting to turn the question around – to ponder how what we do in Church is relevant to what we do in the workplace."

What was valuable was actually stepping back to look at a normal working week and seeing what stood out as important. It was good to have time to reflect on what was happening and, having identified those tasks within the working week, to be aware of them as they happen, not just retrospectively. We often worry that our contribution

is too small – when we should be saying, "let us recognise what is going on in what does take place and value it."

However what we did here was just a beginning: *"I shall continue to think and maybe I can see the themes emerging in the coming weeks".*

"Most of the people in my church have no concept of work as a place where you can minister (ministry is for professionals!) so it is refreshing just to explore these ideas. Anything like this that helps with closing the church / "real world" gap is good".

The group were enthusiastic to meet again, so we are aiming at 3 times a year, and hoping to plan another meeting before the summer holidays. More importantly, we would encourage you to organise something similar in your area – you can help other people discover their MSE.

If this sounds interesting, come and join us for our next meeting

Ministry where you Work ?

Come and discuss.....

- could you have a ministry at work ?
- how might God be calling you to expand your ministry ?
- an opportunity to explore possibilities beyond your parish

We shall continue our exploration of.....

What Sacraments do I discover at Work ?

Saturday 11th July 2009

9 am – 12.30 pm

Offa House, Offchurch

Followed by optional lunch (at own cost) for those who would like to stay.

If you would like to come, or for more information, please contact Felicity Smith (chair of the Coventry Ministry in Secular Employment group) on 01926 492 452. Email felicity@fandi.me.uk