

Finding Faith ... and Not to Mention Work

With unemployment at record highs, churches and Christian organizations are stepping in to help job seekers both practically and spiritually.

Ministries such as Florida-based Christian HELP and Career Solutions in Dallas began helping the unemployed find work long before the recession hit in 2008. But since the unemployment rate shot up from 6.6 percent in October 2008 to 10.1 percent the following year to 9.5 percent today, the groups say the “ministry needs and opportunities” are growing.

Career Solutions founder David Rawles, author of *Finding a Job God's Way*, says jobs ministries can reach people at their lowest point. He knows of people who have committed suicide after becoming unemployed and others who came to faith after taking career classes at churches.

“Most people don’t realize just how deeply affected people are, and the church is not doing near what it could do,” says Rawles, a former human resources executive at GTE and Disney who developed career coaching curriculum for churches.

So far this year, Christian HELP has seen a 47 percent increase in Orlando-area job seekers over 2009. In addition to employment seminars, the ministry provides Bibles and food, as many families are left at the brink of homelessness after job losses.

“The counselors are trained to ask, What brought you here today?” says Christian HELP Executive Director Sandi Vidal. “It’s really opened a door to ask what people’s needs are and then to talk with them about what God wants for them and how that impacts their search.”

Madison and her husband were living in a hotel and had only a bag of rice left to eat when she walked into Christian HELP. After losing a \$350,000-a-year job and having a heart attack that depleted her savings, the Washington, D.C., resident had moved to central Florida to take a position that ultimately fell through.

She found a job within two days of meeting Vidal, thanks to one connection that led to another, but she laments that many churches were insensitive to her plight. One ministry told her it was her fault she was unemployed because she hadn't been attending church services regularly. "We need as Christians to take people in and look at the whole problem," Madison told *Charisma*.

An outreach of Holy Cathedral Church of God in Christ led by Bishop C.H. McClelland, Word of Hope Ministries in Milwaukee has offered job placement services since 1996. Unemployment has long been high in its inner-city community, but the recession brought a wave of new needs.

"We understand that as the number grows we may have to develop other strategies because there are more people coming," says Vice President Prentiss McClelland.

Charismatic entrepreneur Tim Krauss estimates that less than 40 percent of churches offer some form of employment ministry, but he hopes to change that through his Job Connection. The online service enables churches to list available jobs in their areas while weeding out scams.

It costs \$195 to set up, with a monthly service fee ranging from \$95 for churches of 6,000 or less to \$245 for larger congregations. So far, more than a dozen ministries are on board, including Willow Creek Community Church and Salem Baptist Church in Chicago, and Second Baptist Church in Houston.

The Job Connection ministry at Resurrection Life Church in

Grandville, Mich., got roughly 2 million hits the first two weeks after the website launched, says Geoff Brown, facilitator of the outreach. He estimates that roughly one-in-five of Resurrection Life members are unemployed, as Michigan has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation.

“At the very least [the ministry has] provided a better hope,” says Brown, who became the first to find a job through the ministry. “And I think that’s the biggest thing I needed after nine months of unemployment–hope.”