



PATHWAY

WALKING alongside

strengthening congregational community ministries

» The Jobs! Ministry «

» THE JOBS! MINISTRY, THE FALLS CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

The Jobs! Ministry began in 1992 as members of The Falls Church in Virginia began recognizing that there were people in the church who were suffering the painful experience of being unemployed. Joblessness often carries a stigma, leaving the unemployed to suffer alone. The Director of Parish Ministries decided to hold a meeting with church members to discuss the issue, and out of that, employment training began.

The original concept of the ministry was to teach classes, but the ministry has now expanded into a comprehensive employment assistance program with classes, support groups, career counseling, and a job resource center open six days a week. In addition, the church's pastoral care office offers a preliminary counseling session to anyone in the Jobs! Ministry.

Goals of the ministry

The Jobs! Ministry seeks to provide both spiritual and practical help for those in transition in employment. Their core curriculum designed to develop practical skills includes tips for:

- Resume writing,
- Interviewing, and
- Developing a job search strategy.

The spiritual and psychological support is found in classes focused on helping participants discover:

- God's plan for their lives,
- Strategies for stress management, and
- Ways to recover self-esteem.

In addition to classes, the ministry seeks to connect participants to others in similar life situations through support groups for the purpose of offering mutual encouragement, shared prayer, and accountability. The Jobs! Ministry provides participants access to a fax machine, copier, computers with internet connection and word-processing programs, publications with job listings, and a career counselor through the Career Resource Center. These resources aid individuals in their job searches and application processes.

Funding the ministry

This is not a ministry with a large budget, but it is one of large faith. It has been sustained for 16 years without paid staff. The operating costs are approximately \$10,000 a year, with the church supplying \$6,000 and private donors the rest. Former graduates of the ministry have contributed back to it financially after finding stable employment. Many of the expensive items (including the building, board room table, computers, and large printers) were supplied by businesses and government offices within the community that were replacing furniture and equipment. When the search for space began in 1994, the director was hoping for a room that could fit two desks, but as with everything surrounding this ministry, he received more than he could have asked for or imagined. Space for offices, a training room, and resource center was discovered in a former strip mall owned by the church.

Recruiting volunteers

There are three directors who donate their time to this service. The Jobs! Ministry is also served by 25 volunteers six days a week, including an administrative assistant. Volunteers are recruited both by personal contacts and church publications. They are asked to commit to being involved in at least one full eight-week course. Any necessary training is provided for the volunteers. Some of the volunteer instructors bring experience in areas such as human resources, but the most valuable gift they have to offer is sharing in the pain and difficulty of those they serve.

MORE ON BACK

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Structure of the program

Three sessions, eight weeks each, of classes are held each year. The program starts at 7 p.m. each Tuesday, and after a time of networking, praying, studying, or using computers, the formal presentation begins at 7:30 p.m. and always begins with prayer and a short Bible study. The presentation may be a talk from a professional, testimony of someone else who has gone through the process of a job change, or lessons on resume writing or other practical skills. Part of the time is spent in small groups of three to seven people, which take different forms depending upon the group. For some the focus is accountability, and for others it may be support or prayer. The session ends promptly at 9:30 p.m. with a prayer, but many participants choose to stay longer. In most of the weeks between formal classes, informal support groups often meet.

Promoting the program to the community

The ministry started out primarily as a service to members of the church but has evolved into a valuable community resource. The Jobs! Ministry advertises in the Shepherd's Guide, brochures, radio, website, and by word of mouth. In the beginning, more than 50 percent of those served came from within the church, but since 1996, more than 50 percent of the participants have come from the surrounding community. The number of participants can vary dramatically from session to session. The smallest session included nine people and the largest included 120 participants.

Program as evangelism

All are welcome to participate in the ministry, regardless of religious affiliation, and all who participate will receive spiritual support during the process. Through this ministry they have been able to help people discover God's call in their lives, receive prayer, and enjoy fellowship with other believers. This ministry has also helped the church to better understand and care for, both physically and spiritually, those who are dealing with job loss and transition.

Stepping Stones

Brief descriptions of how to implement specific ministries. For each of the five broader areas above, many ministries can be envisioned. We have identified a few of these for each area and have articulated the steps for how that ministry might be planned.

Backpacks

The *Walking Alongside* Web site provides a Backpack of additional resources and examples for this specific ministry. Included are published articles, Web sites, selected books, testimonials and existing ministries with con

Food for the Journey

A short devotional based on scripture that can be used in church bulletins, as a Moment for Mission during worship or as an introduction to a Bible study.