**Reshaping work**

The word of work is changing. There is much talk of re-balancing the economy, to reduce public sector jobs and move some roles into the private or third sector. It is hoped that the private sector will grow to provide work for the currently high number of unemployed people with particular hopes for growth in manufacturing and knowledge based jobs. There are also wider global shifts as countries like China, India and Brazil move more centre stage.

At the Churches and Industry AGM Jerry Blackett, CEO of Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Rt Revd David Urquhart, Bishop of Birmingham discussed these issues from their different areas of expertise.

**Jerry Blackett**

What’s happening to work is attracting a lot of attention currently. Locally there are glimmers of hope in retail, law, construction and manufacture and we must avoid talking things down because that doesn’t help. Nevertheless the West Midlands has slipped from the third to the sixth most prosperous region since the 1970’s. Much of that is the impact of the move from large scale manufacturing.

Recently there has been a fundamental shift in the social contract. An open and flexible economy for some time provided jobs and growing incomes but that ‘deal’ is being stressed. For some incomes have fallen or will fall before they come back. Our relationship between developed and developing economies is changing. What is the new ‘normal’? We may need more collaborative economies than competitive ones.

Locally the Local Enterprise Partnerships are developing. They can concentrate on narrow funding bids or be ambitious to influence mainstream budgets. There is local leadership in ‘green’ R&D, automotive industry and others but jobs will come from small businesses. We need to make it easy for people to start up companies.

By 2020 70% of people will live in cities. Cities are attractive because they offer hope and freedom. In the US new arrivals ‘plug and play’. They buy in to the US ideal and start ‘playing’ very quickly. In the US you can gain citizenship in 5 years in Europe it can take generations but Birmingham could become the ‘plug and play’ capital of Europe so that people come here to do business.

Birmingham is young & diverse and most of us are or were economic migrants within a couple of generations. There are enough jobs in Birmingham but 60,000 people migrate in everyday from outside the city. Many local unemployed young people are not fully skilled but we also have great opportunities for instance we’ve become a centre for Islamic Banking.

Yes we need to compete but we also need to collaborate.

**Rt. Revd. David Urquhart**

Cities thrive on many small firms and skilled citizens.

Jesus parable of the talents tells the story of a master who, before travelling overseas, entrusts his three servants with varying amounts of money, according to their ability – 5 talents, 3 talents, 1 talent. Each talent is worth a life time’s wages. On the master’s return the servants with 5 & 3 talents have increased their holding but the servant with 1 talent buried it so there is no increase.

The parable gives us three themes – ability, opportunity and character.

The master made a judgement about ability and then gave the servants a huge opportunity. Cities are places of cultural and artistic innovation but opportunities are very unevenly distributed. There are outside obstacles to taking opportunities and these are becoming more solid than in the past e.g. access to education, employment etc. There are also internal obstacles within human beings themselves which are about character. The third servant was afraid so couldn’t take the opportunity.

The parable is also about power and that is the real issue.

**Discussion**

The threat of redundancy tends to undermine ‘character’. People are encouraged to be selfish, actively or by default, and motivation is effected. It is vital that those in leadership encourage & give people the confidence to go on.

The concept of collaborative nations is interesting but institutions we work in are not very collaborative, except at the ground level. It is similar with the ‘Total Place’ approach to collaborative approach to using core budgets. There is a willingness on the ground but silos exist higher up.

Reductions in the public sector used to be driven by efficiency savings but now the drive is just about cutting jobs leading to a loss of empowerment and alienation. There’s also a loss of talent. How are we going to match business opportunities with the outflow of talent from the public sector. Potentially there are good opportunities for skilled people but this will push the lower skilled further down the chain.

Job creation is a priority for LEPs but there is a tension. Business needs to be competitive and keep costs down. They only create jobs if the business needs it. Jobs are a by-product of success.

Future shortages will be in energy and water which will need engineers. We have to remain true to who we are and act with courage, fairness and confidence. We mustn’t give up.