

Meeting in community to transform your workplace

Trustee Directors Mal Shaw and Stephen Doel explain how Transform Work encourages, and in some cases initiates, Christian workplace groups. A group normally begins by a few Christians coming together in their workplace to pray, to read the Bible together and to understand God’s purposes for their organisation. This often now develops into a recognised Diversity and Inclusion Employee Community within the organisation.

Christians who work in secular organisations often feel isolated with a sense of disconnect between their church life and their daily workplace, where even talk of religion is unusual. Whilst they may understand the importance of their work to the Kingdom of God and even be encouraged by their local church to be fruitful on their frontline, they can feel they are making little impact as Christians in their organisation.

A clear message of the Bible is that when Christians are in community with one another, they are more open in their faith and often powerfully influence the values of the world around them.

As soon as Jesus left his temptations in the desert, he called together a community of 12 disciples as the first Christian community (Mt 4:18ff). The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples starts with community – Our Father (Mt 6:9). Jesus taught, challenged and developed his disciples as they followed him. At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus prayed to his Father firstly for the disciples, then for all who will believe, “that they may be one as we are one” (Jn 17:11).

Paul similarly builds and develops Christians in community. He addresses his letters primarily to churches in cities, to the community of Christians whether in Rome, Ephesus or Philippi. As Christians we are born into a family of believers, living our Christian lives through community, and this can be lived out in secular workplaces.

In today’s workplaces, we can also experience the power of Christian community by gathering in Christian Workplace Groups and Christian Professional Sector Groups. In Transform Work, we are looking to do nothing less than transform nations through Christian communities in the workplace.

Christian Workplace Groups

Christian Workplace Groups are groups of Christians who all work in the same secular organisation, meeting together with a common aim and purpose. They come from all areas and levels of the organisation to pray, to read the Bible together and to understand God’s

In Transform Work, we encourage the formation and development of Christian Workplace Groups according to a ladder of maturity that we have seen work well. Groups often start with a single Christian in an organisation, or maybe there are two or three Christians meeting quietly together. We encourage them to think, pray and dream about the potential of a Christian Workplace Group in their organisation, and how they can achieve this. The stages through which we support them ultimately result in an officially recognised group which is actively celebrated by the organisation as an asset (another name for blessing!).

GROWTH STAGES OF A CHRISTIAN WORKPLACE GROUP	
Development Level	Characteristics - stage of development
Initial contact	A number of Christians have made contact with each other within the workplace; there is a desire amongst these Christians to meet together and explore how they might support each other.
Early Formation	The group has formed but managers have not yet been approached. Occasional meetings between Christians have taken place, sometimes outside of the workplace. Initial discussions have considered how a Christian Workplace Group might be formed and what it might do.
Organisational Acceptance	Managers are involved and have accepted that there are a number of Christians within the organisation who would like to meet regularly as a group and have agreed to this. This involves making facilities available for Christians to meet, including onsite meeting rooms, online communications such as MS Teams, use of internal social media and Intranet.
Formal Recognition and Integration	Senior managers have accepted that the Christian Workplace Group can be a positive influence within the organisation. Consequently, the group is now recognised as part of the organisation’s diversity framework and involved in regular meetings with senior managers and other staff network groups.
Organisational celebration	Senior managers see the contribution that the Christian Workplace Group makes as a positive opportunity to develop the organisation internally and are prepared to use it as an example of good practice with external bodies.

purposes within their organisation. Christian Workplace Groups supplement the mainstream churches, bringing a clear focus to the mission of the church in the workplace. There is no division by denominational difference, just Christians together in the workplace.

Value of Christian Workplace Groups

Being part of a Christian Workplace Group (CWG) gives Christians a level of confidence that helps them live out their faith at work. Simply putting

a weekly Christian group meeting in their company diary provides a non-verbal and non-combative opportunity to tell colleagues that they are a Christian. It is far easier for a Christian at work to invite a colleague to join a meeting in a local room in the workplace, or onto a virtual call, than to come to a church building.

Typically, Christian Workplace Groups meet weekly for prayer and fellowship, seeking to understand and pray into God's purposes for the organisation. Meeting with other Christians in their workplace validates their whole-life faith as they share experiences, pray together and learn the relevance of the Bible to their work.

As the group becomes more mature, they can bring more of the light of the Kingdom into the workplace and influence the culture as salt. Many groups hold Christmas and Easter events, open to the whole company and sometimes the local community. They may actively pray with senior leaders including the CEO; they may hold fundraising events such as a collection for the local foodbank during Lent or work with organisations like Christians Against Poverty. As they become more trusted, they can work with HR on company policy, changing the culture of organisations through God's grace to ultimately transform society.

Case Study – Arm Limited

The Christian Workplace Group at Arm, an IT company, was formed in the year 2000, when an employee sent an email to the whole company asking if there were any Christians there. Shortly afterwards, around 20 Christians were meeting regularly together in their Cambridge office. They would eat together, pray together and read the Bible together – all with a purpose of living out their faith when they went out of the room to write code, send emails, be in meetings and work with colleagues. They walked alongside each other through struggles inside and outside work, prayed for the leadership of the organisation and for colleagues.

Initially they were accepted by the company. However, over time there was an increasing resistance to faith of any type in the organisation. This reached a nadir when the group wasn't allowed to promote a carol service they organised in a local church inside the company as it contained religious content.

However, the recent focus on Diversity and Inclusion – combined with an increasing interest in spirituality during the pandemic – has changed this. Over the last five years, the group has been officially recognised by the company as a D&I Employee Community, moved from being a Cambridge-based group to having CWGs at offices around the world, and now holds its annual carol service on the company premises – linking offices together globally on Zoom.

Recently Arm's CWG joined the Transform Work community and is now able to share their experiences with other similar organisations – as well as learning from them. A member of Arm's CWG shared:

I've been a Christian for just over 35 years now and so far in my career I haven't felt it right to join a group like this at work. I think it's good this group exists and really great to see it on the company's D&I Intranet page as an Employee Community.

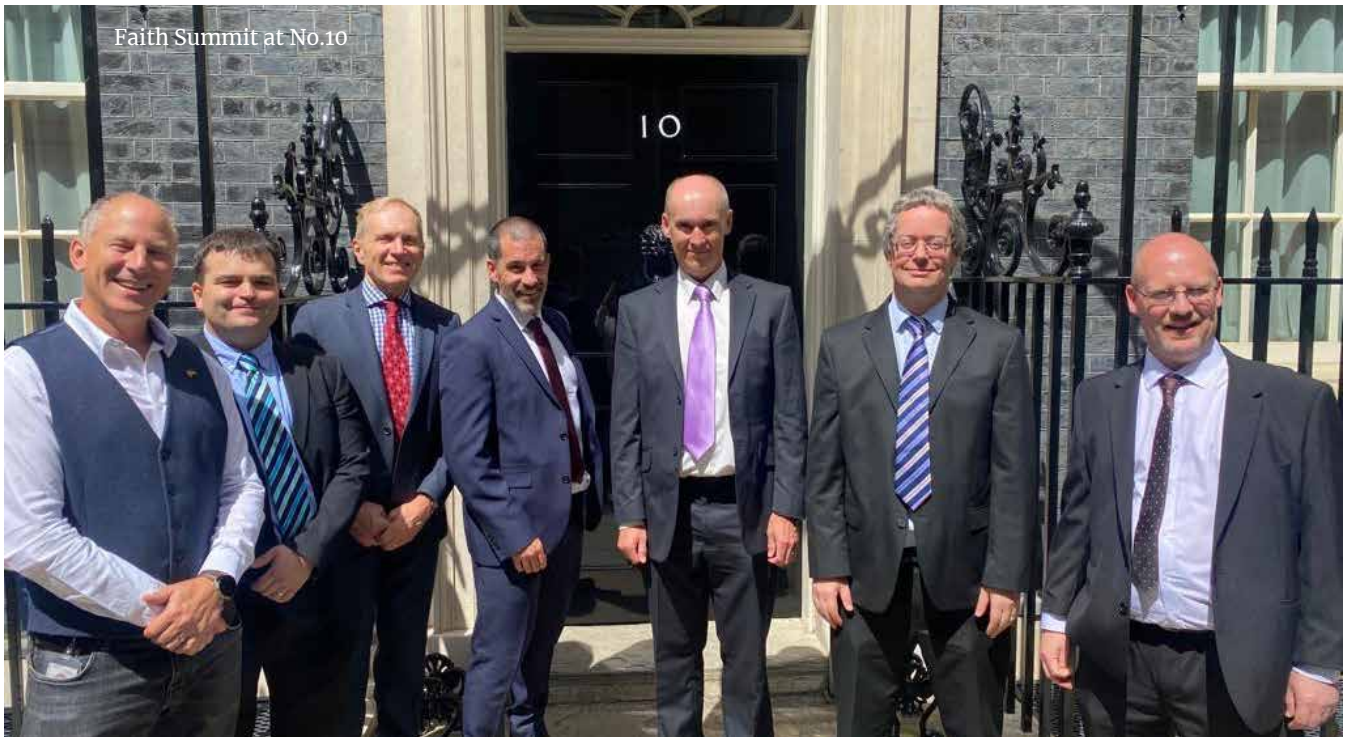
Multifaith

Many Christian Workplace Groups operate in a multifaith environment in the organisation as one of the Employee Resource Groups, supported by the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion teams in HR. These CWGs work with groups of different faiths for common causes but stay distinctive in expressing Christian belief.

In 2021, Transform Work started an initiative called Faith Friendly Workplaces, the aim being to develop best practice on faith for HR teams, and to incentivise a focus on faith by developing a faith benchmark whereby organisations can assess themselves on how well they support people of faith. This will include an annual competition which organisations can enter to gain recognition as the most Faith Friendly Organisation. The faith benchmark is initially being launched in conjunction with the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation who already have a ten-point index – the REDI Index.



Transform Work is also working with the All-Party Parliamentary Group for international Freedom of Religion and Belief, including holding a Faith Summit in the House of Commons and No 10 Downing Street last summer, where we met with two of Rishi Sunak's advisors on the opportunities that faith brings to UK society. This was launched at a Faith at Work conference in March, hosted by Salesforce with around 120 attendees, including HR Diversity Leads. Baringa Partners LLP took first prize, followed by Rolls-Royce. Other shortlisted organisations included British Telecom, Phoenix Assurance and St James Place.



Christian Professional Sector Groups

Christian Professional Sector Groups operate across professions and industry sectors, including National Government, Local Authority, Healthcare, IT, Finance, the Arts, Firefighters, Truckers and more. Christians working in a particular sector meet together, share resources and seek to influence Christian values within their sector. They may also bring together leaders of Christian Workplace Groups across a particular sector.

Bringing Christians together in community across a professional sector enables communal prayer to be more specific around the needs of a particular industry. For example, a sector group of teachers can pray together into discipline and nurturing of children; a sector group of lawyers can pray for integrity across the profession.

Some of these Christian Professional Sector Groups have been in existence for a long time, including Christians in Government and the Christian Medical Fellowship. Others have been directly inspired by Transform Work and following initial support operate independently, an example being the Defence Christian Network. Transform Work has increasingly been instrumental in starting Professional Sector Groups including NHS and Local

Authority Networks, and we continue to directly support their development. Our aim is to bring sector groups to life and then help them to become independent.

Regardless of their source, Transform Work seeks to bring sector groups together, help them complement each other and increase their joint impact. We operate a common shopfront for them, available through the Transform Work web site, and we work with them on shared initiatives, one example being the development of workplace prayer materials and opportunities during the annual global Church of England's Thy Kingdom Come initiative.

Case study – NHS Christian Network

The NHS Christian Network was launched in December 2021 under the inspiration of Karen Flood, then a surgeon based in a hospital in Leeds, who had a vision for every Christian working in the NHS to be connected to other Christians, with a sense that God was calling her to make this vision a reality.

There have been regular network meetings over the past two years bringing together those who are leading Christian workplace groups in the NHS and individuals working in the NHS who do not know of any Christian colleagues.

One lady who works for an NHS community services provider in a staff wellbeing and inclusion capacity shared a powerful testimony of how God had worked through her in her workplace as she delivered 'wellbeing sessions' to both front line workers and senior leaders. God gave her words of knowledge and prophetic words for her colleagues that she shared and had significant impact on her colleagues.

However, she did not think that her employer would let her set up a Christian workplace group; they were not open to this and there was no process to establish a group. The group prayed over this and amazingly she attended a workplace event where she happened to be placed next to the Chair of the Board of Directors. She had the opportunity to explain directly that she wanted to start a Christian Workplace Group and the issues she was having. The Chair responded that they also were a Christian and would provide the necessary support.

The group is now regularly meeting to pray for the organisation – something she did not think possible before joining the NHS Christian network. This is one of many examples of how bringing Christians from a sector together to support one another can lead to tangible change at a local level.

Bristol

Mal is a local Transform Work Ambassador for the Bristol area and provided this insight into the work in that area, where Transform Work supports around 30 groups. Ambassadors pray for and provide encouragement and resources to CWG Leaders, connecting group leaders together by holding local events, often in one of the organisations. They are available to visit groups in their meetings, to speak at events, and to provide support if the group has challenges. This is largely a volunteer role.

Bristol has a wide range of FinTech companies and major Financial Services organisations, where we support the growth of Christian Workplace Groups. Whilst some groups had challenges with meeting during lockdown, with many suddenly working from home, the group at Aviva found that they could extend their community by reaching out using the internal social media channel Yammer. This helped them reach out nationally with sites in London, York and Norwich.

On the Aztec West business park to the north of Bristol there are a wide variety of businesses, and we are working with Christians in these businesses to develop a community. One of these organisations is Atkins Consultancy, a local base of a global organisation. The Bristol group at Atkins has reached out nationally and engaged with HR to review and update company policy in areas including wellbeing, harassment and discrimination. During lockdown, the group ran Hope Explored online which attracted colleagues globally.

Bristol has an umbrella organisation called Together4Bristol or T4B, a coming together of local churches and local Christian missions, with workstreams based around eight 'spheres of life'. We have been engaged with T4B in the Business sphere for a long while, building a network of Christian Workplace Groups within the city. The sphere includes other Christian workplace missions including chaplaincy and breakfast talks, and we seek to support each other through prayer and shared initiatives.

In total, we support around 30 Christian Workplace Groups across Bristol Diocese, in a wide range of business sectors. We lead WhatsApp groups for ongoing dialogue with the group leaders, where we share experiences, pray into issues and opportunities for joint initiatives. We also meet together every quarter to encourage each other and pray for organisations across the Bristol region.

About Transform Work

Transform Work has operated as a charity now for 20 years, helping to develop over 750 Christian Workplace Groups and 60 Christian Professional Sector Groups. We operate mainly in the United Kingdom and are growing partnerships in the United States and Europe. Many of the groups we support are part of global organisations and can therefore influence widely.

With the help of a grant from a trust, we are investing in a part-time Scottish Ambassador for a year to kickstart and


develop a sustainable base in Scotland. This will be based around three new sector groups in Universities, Local Authorities and Energy, with a target of 30 new Christian Workplace Groups with an average of ten members – a total of 300 Christians engaged in Christian workplace ministry.

We primarily support groups through a network of Ambassadors, largely voluntary, who provide guidance, encouragement and in-depth support to the workplace and sector group leaders, drawing on lessons and experience. Ambassadors help individual groups to engage with their management and guidance on how to hold internal events. They bring the group leaders together for networking and signpost helpful resources for the leaders.

How you can get involved

You can help us extend our mission in a number of ways:

- through prayer: we issue a free newsletter to anyone who is keen to support our mission – our web site is www.transformwork.net
- through donations: a link is available on our web site, but we would be happy to talk in more detail to explain wider opportunities.
- through becoming either an ambassador, or an associate (someone who helps us with a specific skill set such as IT or event speaking).

If you are interested in helping us, please contact us at office@transformwork.net. 



Mal Shaw is a programme delivery consultant who has worked with many major financial services companies delivering technology, organisational and product change. He has also worked on an advisory basis for engineering and government change programmes. He has run Workplace Christian groups in a variety of organisations and is a Trustee and Transform Work Ambassador for Bristol, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.



Stephen Doel is a senior operations leader, COO and Executive Board Director with more than 25 years experience in the semiconductor and life sciences industries. He's used to leading diverse, multi-site teams across a wide range of organisations, has spun out two not-for-profit companies in open source and education respectively, and acquired and integrated several businesses to continue the company's growth. He has run Workplace Christian groups for many years, is a volunteer on the Executive Team of Faith in Business, and a Trustee and Cambridge Ambassador for Transform Work UK.