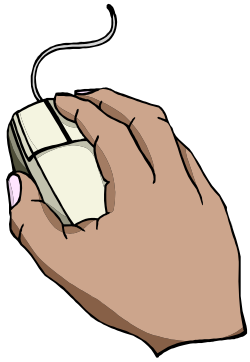
Stewardship at St. Joseph

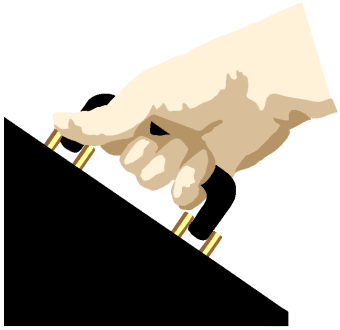
Faith & Work

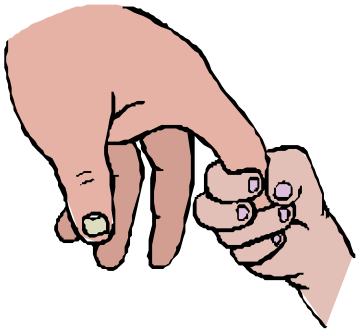
August 2004





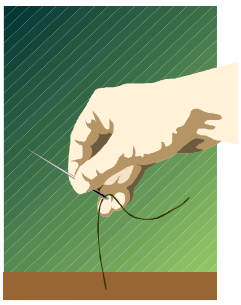

Our Work Matters To God

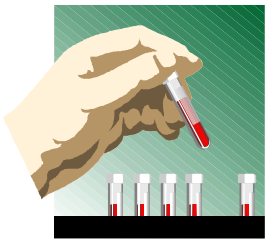


Our Work Matters To God

Workers are called to pursue justice. In the Catholic tradition, work is not a burden, not just how we make a living. Work is a way of supporting our family, realizing our dignity, promoting the common good and participating in God's creation. This means often doing the ordinary well, making the most of our talents and opportunities, treating others fairly and with dignity, and working with integrity and creativity. Believers should be encouraged to choose their work based on how they can best use the gifts God has given them. Decisions made at work can make important contributions to an ethic of justice. Catholics have the often difficult responsibility of choosing between competing values in the workplace. This is a measure of holiness. Associations that enable workers, owners, or managers to pursue justice often make the witness of the individual more effective.



From *Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst Justice.*
A Pastoral Reflection on Lay Discipleship for Justice in a New Millennium.



What Is Work?

When we speak of work, we mean your *occupation*, what primarily occupies your time. For many, this is a traditional paid job, in any number of fields.

However, there are many other occupations, and their work matters to God, too. Homemakers and parents have occupations. So do students, who have a current occupation, and are not just preparing to have one.

Those who are retired spend their time in a variety of ways that are occupations, such as traveler, book-reader, caretaker, or volunteer.

Those seeking employment have an occupation as a job-seeker.

How is God working through your occupation?

How can every worker discover the connection between his or her everyday work and how that work contributes to what God wants done in the world? ...How does the work of the backhoe operator, the bank teller, the journalist, or the mortgage banker contribute directly to God's work?

Through work we serve people. God uses your work to meet the needs of people. This is more obvious for certain jobs, but is just as true for those whose work contributes to life in more abstract or indirect ways. We need to realize that God uses our work, whether or not anyone tells us, "I thank God for what you are doing!"

Through work we meet our own needs, and those of our family. If you are doing legitimate work to meet your legitimate needs, then you are fulfilling something important that God wants done in the world.

Through work we earn money to give to others. As God gifts us, we are called to share that abundance with others who are in need. Every Christian, no matter what his level of lifestyle, should use part of his or her money to meet the financial and material needs of others.

Through work we love God. If you want to love God through your work, then you need to determine that what you are doing in your job is something God *wants* done, and that you are doing your job *because* God wants it done.

Adapted from *Your Work Matters To God*
by Doug Sherman and William Hendricks

Your Work Matters To God

Human beings do not serve work; work serves human beings.

Pope John Paul II

10 Ways To Balance Your Life On the Job

1. Surround yourself at work with "sacred objects"–not necessarily "religious objects" that might offend or distract others–but objects that remind you of the deeper meaning of your work and why you do it.

2. Live with imperfection at work–your own and that of others. Practicing this discipline will remind us that we are all human ... and not God.

3. Assure the quality of your work. While our work is human and therefore by definition imperfect, we cannot allow that to be used as an excuse for doing less than the best work of which we are capable at any given time.

4. Give thanks and congratulations at work. This discipline involves recognizing both the ordinary and extraordinary contributions of others–and of ourselves–in the workplace.

5. Build support and community in the workplace. This is the discipline of offering welcome, being loyal, showing compassion in the workplace ourselves, and then working to build a community of people there who do the same.

6. Deal with others as you would have them deal with you. This is just the "golden rule" that says if we want honesty, good service, generous negotiation, fair competition and just compensation we have to practice them first ourselves.

7. Decide what's "enough" in the workplace and stick to it. This includes deciding what is enough money, enough time, enough effort, enough success (or failure)–and then sticking with those decisions when we are tempted to want "more."

8. Balance your work, personal, family, church, and community responsibilities. This spiritual discipline helps us learn to say "no," so that when we say "yes" we can keep our promises.

9. Work to make "the system" work. This discipline is what Christians call the virtue of "social justice." It means making sure that the institutions and organizations in which we work are functioning in such a way that we–and everyone else–can do their best work.

10. Engage in ongoing personal and professional development. Reading a good book or journal, exercising regularly, continuing your education, interacting with colleagues, even following the contemplative spiritualities are all ways to make our work more spiritual.

Publisher, businessman, community organizer, husband, and father, Greg Pierce is co-publisher of ACTA Publications and author of *Spirituality@Work: 10 Ways to Balance Your Life On-the-Job*. This article originally appeared in the Summer 2001 article of *The Works*.

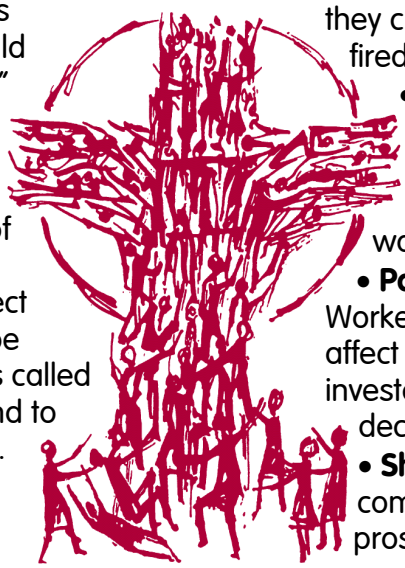
Everyone's Work Matters To God

Faith and Worker Justice

At a time in our country when many prosper as never before, it is too easy to forget the plight of those who cannot make ends meet and who labor hard, but never reach economic security. For people of faith, celebrating the value of labor and protecting the rights and dignity of those who work is not simply a political or economic agenda, but a sacred trust. The Bible roots the meaning of work in the very creative act of God who shaped the universe, built a dwelling for the human family, and then rested.

The great prophet Isaiah saw this divine creation as still in progress, the building of a "new heaven and a new earth." Planting a vineyard and hoping to enjoy the fruit of its vines—building a home and looking forward to a peaceful old age and retirement with dignity—all of these were divine activities now entrusted to human beings (Isaiah 65:17-25.)

No wonder prophets such as Amos roared with anger at those who would "sell the laborer for a pair of sandals" or "trample the head of the poor into dust of the earth." (Amos 2:6-7). Economic justice for all goes hand-in-hand with respect for the dignity of labor.



Religious principles of equity, respect and economic justice for all cannot be forgotten. The religious community is called upon to assert the dignity of labor and to defend the rights of those who labor. Corporations and labor work most effectively when they can cooperate and build together. The task of the religious community is to urge them both, to help them both, to grow in a moral context.

As people of faith, we can uphold the dignity of each person by asserting the dignity of labor:

- **Fair compensation for work.** We must advocate for a living wage, one that could keep a family out of poverty.
- **Job security.** In a global marketplace, companies should not only consider their bottom line, but also the effect that global decisions have on the lives of employees.
- **The right to organize.** Workers should know that if they choose to organize a union, they will not be fired or harassed for their efforts.
- **Family-friendly schedules.** Jobs should pay enough that people do not have to work extraordinary hours in order to raise their families. In addition, companies should seek ways to support workers' family obligations.
- **Participation in workplace decision-making.** Workers have a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. They are also more productive and invested in their work when they are included in the decision-making process.
- **Sharing in the benefits of a company.** When a company prospers, workers should share in its prosperity.

Honor the hands
that grow the crops.
- Dolores Huerta

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Resources on this page provided by **National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice**, 1020 West Bryn Mawr, 4th floor, Chicago, IL 60660-4627
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