

## WORK AS SERVICE TO THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

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*Let them esteem work both as a gift  
and a sharing in the creation, redemption and service of the human community. (Art. 16)*

“The Son of Man came not be served but to serve.” As followers of Christ our work is to reflect the attitude of our Savior. Our work is not to be pursued for selfish ends but preeminently is to serve the needs of others - extending from our own family to our extended family of sisters and brothers who populate the global village.

The Church places great value on human work as our God-given means to improve the human condition. In **On Human Work (*Laborem Exercens*)**, Pope John Paul II observes that “...human work is...probably the essential key to the whole social question...of ‘making life more human’ [and on this basis] human work acquires fundamental and decisive importance.” This insight builds on that provided by one of the key documents of the Second Vatican Council, the **Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*)**:

*Throughout the course of centuries men have labored to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort. To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself such human activity accords with God's will. For man, created to God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all that it contains.*

Of course, human work justifiably does contain an element of self-interest; after all, most of mankind must work to sustain itself. The point is that God intends for our work to have a deeper meaning and purpose than that of only meeting our own needs. As William Droel and Gregory Pierce note in **Confident and Confident - A Challenge for the Lay Church**:

*In order to develop a spirituality of work, this layperson must understand that the basic economic motive in no way distorts the creative and redemptive dimensions of working. The recognition and balancing of motives provides the basis for a spirituality of work.*

Our service to the human community through our work has two dimensions - that of serving individual persons and that of working to improve human institutions so that those institutions best serve humanity and the rest of creation.

Fr. Daniel McLellan, OFM, in an article entitled *To Evangelize American Culture: A Franciscan Approach* (Franciscan Studies, Vol.47, 1987, St. Bonaventure, NY) offers incisive and compelling insights into a Franciscan approach to work as service. Here are some quotes from Fr. McLellan's piece:

*For Francis, work for the sake of personal wealth and power was work that oppressed, sin. Work leading a person to attend to the needs of others was grace.*

*Work is a gift and, like all God's gifts, needs to be ordered for the sake of the common good by those who have charge of that good.*

*The very nature of work as "grace" means that its fulfillment is only possible when it is exercised for the many.*

*Because it is grace, work is never task-oriented but person-oriented....  
The Franciscan doctor doesn't cure disease, she heals patients; the Franciscan professor doesn't teach theology, he teaches students; the Franciscan cook doesn't prepare meals, he feeds people*

### Dialogue Starters

1. How is your work (whether for pay or not) a service to the human community?
2. What do you think of Fr. McLellan's Franciscan perspective on work as service?