

## As Franciscan Christians, Are We Ever Unemployed?

By Pauline Cahalan, SFO

We hear it daily on the news. “The unemployment rate is 6%, higher than at any time in the last decade. More people need food banks, shelters, and other financial assistance.” Those of you reading this, or someone in your circle of most significant persons in your life, may be among the growing number of Americans losing jobs due to lay-offs, downsizing, companies going out of business, etc. This is a tough time for many people among them those who have always worked, are unemployed, and cannot find a new job. Lives are filled with much frustration, fear, and shame, (There must be something wrong with me that I keep applying but no one hires me.). Air steeped in heightened anxiety fills many homes, choking out any sense of love, respect, and understanding, which may have been there before. Children come to school unable to concentrate because they hear and see parents in a constant state of negativity. Tempers are short and flair easily over things that would have seemed insignificant when a regular paycheck appeared-holes in the knees of jeans that aren’t supposed to have them, spilling most of the last carton of milk, car problems on the day of an important appointment, “Where is God in all this?” one might ask. “If there is a God, why does s/he allow these kinds of stressful hardships in my life?” These kinds of stresses can really test our faith. It is easy to be a Franciscan Christian believer when things are going along fairly smoothly. Those true tests come when they are not. Our gift of freewill allows us to choose how we react emotionally, spiritually, and physically to the tough times. If we choose to let negativity reign supreme in our minds and hearts, it will. And that negativity will be reflected to all those around us and, perhaps, pull others into that circle of negativity also.

As Franciscan Christians I believe we are never unemployed. In our society where “work” is always judged by whether we are making money at something or not, it is very different to be counter cultural. And yet, to practice true Franciscan spirituality we must understand that God put us here to further his/her kingdom, According to the Commentary for Chapter 1 of the Rule, as part of the Franciscan Family we share a “...common charism” which “strives for holiness and binds together the laity, religious and clergy in the life and mission of the Church.” “Work” is what we feel inspired by God to do to make this world a better place. Yes, this can be for pay. However the world and its people have so many needs that can only be met by people giving freely of their time and talents without receiving money for their efforts. The rewards of this type of work do not have a monetary value. They help us grow spiritually because they are why God put us here. We can get so caught up in the need to have a paying job, and the time and energy given to that job, that we fail to even be open to other ideas of what God might have us do. I’m sure many of you reading this are wondering, “Doesn’t she realize I’ve got at least one house or rent payment, car payment(s), utilities, phones, data lines, charge cards, etc., not to mention day to day food and clothes?” Yes, I do because I, as a **Secular** Franciscan have some of those same things. But I also know that many people in the U.S. could simplify their lives without so much stuff and still live much better than the larger portions of the world’s population. Some questions for reflection are: 1. Do I/we really need all the things I’ve/we’ve got just to live? 2. If I/we scaled back, perhaps have a big garage sale or donate some things, and maybe even sell this home and move to something smaller, what kind of life could I/we have? 3. How much money do I/we really need to make if I/we scale things back? 4. If we are used to two

incomes before, do we still need that or could we place more value on homemaking, childrearing, and volunteer work? 5. How open am I to doing something entirely new, even if it is uncomfortable in the beginning? 6. Am I so filled with anxiety and fear that these feelings crowd out just getting up each day and asking God, “What would YOU have me do today? You know I’m anxious about finding work for pay but what work can I do to help YOU today?” Then calming your mind to be open to God’s wisdom.

In a delightful little book Sr. Mary Kraemer, OSF looks for words within words and makes prayers out of them. One that seems appropriate year round involves the word “Imaginative”.

*“I...I am called to my own Epiphany—my “God-insight.”*

*Magi---Beckoned by the magi, I allow myself to be led.*

*In...The knowledge of this fact frightens me. In my head, I am terrified.*

*At...In my heart, I am at peace.*

*Native...Only if I let go of my native surroundings can I be guided by that star.*

*Imaginative....My imaginative God, the magi let go of the fear in their beings and at your decreed time were led in your chosen way. It meant leaving their native security and facing the terrifying unknown. I ask to be blessed with that gift” (pg. 53).*

RELECTION QUESTIONS: Please refer to the title and those in the second paragraph.

Kraemer, Sr. Mary, OSF. Inwords Journeying Inwards with Ecclesiastes. (1995). Resurrection Press, Ltd., P.O. Box 248, Williston Park, NY 11596.