



# Your Work Matters To God

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



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

*Pope John Paul II*

## What Is Your Work?

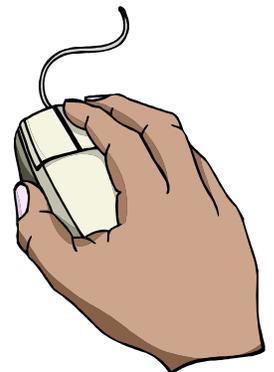
When we speak of work, we mean your **occupation**: whatever **primarily occupies your time** at this point in your life, paid or unpaid. You are called to **ministry** in your current occupation, whatever it is.

Many have **traditional jobs**, in many different fields. Others are **homemakers** and/or **parents**. **Seeking a job** is an occupation. Being a **student** is an occupation itself (not just preparing for one). Those who are **retired** have different occupations: as gardeners, travelers, grandparents, book readers, community volunteers, and many more.

You don't have to have an especially "noble" job to serve God through your occupation. Through our work, we can find meaning, serve others, and make the world a better place.



In his encyclical *On Human Work*, Pope John Paul II coined the term "spirituality of work." For most of my life the term "spirituality" referred to such religious acts of saying prayers, reading the Bible, meditating, and going to church. When one felt inclined to deepen one's spiritual life, it usually meant getting away from the world—to a retreat or monastic setting—and to spend time in study, meditation, and prayer. But here John Paul II talks of "a spirituality of work which will help all people to come closer, through work, to God, the Creator and Redeemer."



William E. Diehl, *The Monday Connection*

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.

U.S. Bishops,  
*Everyday Christianity:  
To Hunger and Thirst For Justice*



**Whatever your life's work is, do it well....  
If it falls on your lot to be a street sweeper,  
sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures,  
like Shakespeare wrote poetry,  
like Beethoven composed music;  
sweep streets so well that all the host of  
heaven and earth will have to pause and say,  
"Here lived a great street sweeper,  
who swept his job well."**

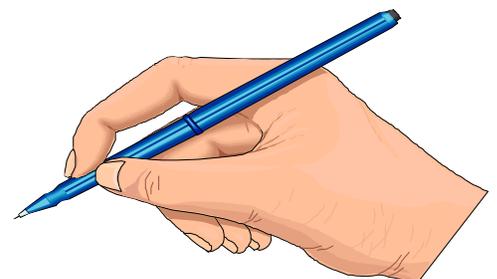
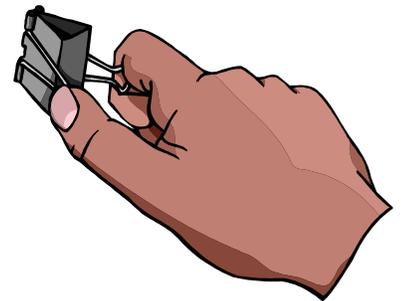
**Martin Luther King, Jr.**

...life as a Christian steward... requires continued involvement in the human vocation to cultivate material creation. This productivity embraces art, scholarship, science, and technology, as well as business and trade, physical labor, skilled work of all kinds, and serving others. So-called ordinary work offers at least as many opportunities as do supposedly more glamorous occupations. A woman who works at a supermarket checkout counter writes: "I feel that my job consists of a lot more than ringing up orders, taking people's money, and bagging their groceries.... By doing my job well I know I have a chance to do God's work too. Because of this, I try to make each of my customers feel special. While I'm serving them, they become the most important people in my life."

*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*  
U.S. Bishops

...the most common and, in many ways, the most important Christian witness is often neither very visible nor highly structured. It is the sacrifice of parents trying to raise children with concern for others; the service and creativity of workers who do their best and reach out to those in need; the struggle of business owners trying to reconcile the bottom line and the needs of employees and customers; and the hard choices of public officials who seek to protect the weak and pursue the common good. The Church's social mission is advanced by teachers and scientists, by family farmers and bankers, by sales persons and entertainers.

U.S. Bishops, *Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst For Justice*



# Justice In Work

*Excerpts from the U.S. Bishops' 2013 Labor Day Statement:*

Labor Day is an opportunity to take stock of **the ways workers are honored and respected**. Earlier this year, Pope Francis pointed out, "Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person.... It gives one the ability to maintain oneself, one's family, to contribute to the growth of one's own nation." Unfortunately, millions of workers today are denied this honor and respect as a result of unemployment, underemployment, unjust wages, wage theft, abuse, and exploitation.

Even with new indicators of some modest progress in recovery, the economy still has not improved the standard of living for many people, especially for the poor and the working poor, many of whom are unemployed or underemployed.... For every available job, there are often five unemployed and underemployed people actively vying for it. This jobs gap pushes wages down. Half of the jobs in this country pay less than \$27,000 per year. More than 46 million people live in poverty, including 16 million children.... **Is it possible that this is happening here in the United States?** In many places, wealth and basic needs are separated by only a few blocks or subway stops.

Most people want to live in a **more equal society** that provides opportunities for growth and development. The current imbalances are not inevitable, but demand boldness in promoting a just economy that reduces inequality by creating jobs that pay a living wage and share with workers some profits of the company. It also requires ensuring a strong safety net for jobless workers and their families and those who are incapable of work. As individuals and families, as the Church, as community organizations, as businesses, as government, we all have a responsibility to promote the dignity of work and to honor workers' rights.

Catholic teaching has consistently affirmed the right of workers to choose to form a union. The rise in income inequality has mirrored a decline in union membership. **Unions**, like all human institutions, are imperfect, and they must continue to reform themselves so they stay focused on the important issues of living wages and appropriate benefits, raising the minimum wage, stopping wage theft, standing up for safe and healthy working conditions, and other issues that promote the common good. The Church, in accord with her principles on the life and dignity of the human person, wishes to collaborate with unions in securing the rights and dignity of workers.

We honor the **immigrant worker** by remembering that the building of America has been carried out by so many who fled persecution, violence, and poverty elsewhere, coming to America to offer their talents and gifts to support themselves and their families. We welcome the stranger, the refugee, the migrant, and the marginalized, because they are children of God and it is our duty to do so. But at the same time it is important to end the political, social, and economic conditions that drive people from their homelands and families. Solidarity calls us to honor workers in our own communities and around the world.

The pain of the poor and those becoming poor in the rising economic inequality of our society is mounting. Therefore, on this Labor Day 2013, let us renew our commitment to promote the dignity of the human person through work that is honorable, pays just wages, and recognizes the God-given dignity of the working person.

At the end of Mass we are commanded "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord." We leave with a sense of mission to show one another honor by what we do and say. On this Labor Day our mission takes us to the millions of people who continue to suffer the effects of the current economy.

- **Owners, managers, and investors** face important opportunities to seek justice and pursue peace. Ethical responsibility is not just avoiding evil, but doing right, especially for the weak and vulnerable.
- Decisions about the use of capital have moral implications: Are they creating and preserving quality jobs at living wages? Are they building up community through the goods and services they provide? Do policies and decisions reflect respect for human life and dignity, promote peace and preserve God's creation? While economic returns are important, they should not take precedence over the rights of workers or protection of the environment.
- Investors should examine ownership, management, and economic decisions in the light of the Catholic call to protect life, defend those who are poor, and seek the common good. These decisions promote human dignity or undermine it.

U.S. Bishops,  
*Everyday Christianity:*  
*To Hunger and Thirst For Justice*



Human work is the key to the solution... of the whole "social question." To consider work is of decisive importance when trying to make life "more human."

*On Human Work,*  
Pope John Paul II

# 10 Ways To Balance Your Life On the Job



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.



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.



**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.



**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."



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.



**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.



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



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.



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.



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.*

## Make me an instrument of peace at work

Where there are indifference or hatred,  
let me sow compassion and love.

Where there are fraud, waste, and abuse,  
let me sow accountability and help restore justice.

Where there are stress and burnout,  
help me sow purpose and divine calm.

Where there are darkness and confusion,  
help me find wisdom and clear sight.

Where there is sadness, help me promote healing and joy.  
May all my tasks be done in harmony with all Creation.

May I always work in balance,

true to myself and my purpose, on the level with others,  
giving to others, loving others, as I give to and love myself.

May my workplace be sacred space,  
where love and compassion ripple out from each small act that I do,  
right here, right now, and always

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