

INTRODUCTION

This Resource Manual has been prepared to help Secular Franciscans come to appreciate that work is a gift from God. A gift that helps us to build up his kingdom and to grow in holiness; to build up the world and in the process become more the persons that God intended us to be. This is a very different approach to work than that found in our culture and one that comes to us from our Seraphic Father, who, in his Rule of 1221, devoted an entire chapter to work and spoke of those friar who had received "the grace of working."

Our Rule and Constitutions are in harmony with St. Francis' vision of work. Article 16 in the 1978 Rule asks us to "esteem work as a gift" while our 1990 Constitutions note that "Work is a gift and to work is a grace." This gift, this grace applies to much more than just our work as a livelihood. The Church's understanding of work is majestically broad, encompassing all that effort involved in fulfilling God's mandate to humankind in the book of Genesis to "fill the earth and subdue it." (see *On Human Work*, John Paul II, no.4) In practical terms, it means that all our activities in caring for our families and friends, in maintaining our homes, in serving others and trying to better our world through our participation in various organizations, and, of course, in our efforts on the job, when taken together, constitute our "work."

Our Rule asks that we experience work as "a sharing in the creation, redemption and service of the human community." Through our work God gives us the great privilege of being co-creators with the Father, bringing new life, new ideas, new artistic and scientific discoveries, into a creation which is yet being born. Our work gives us the opportunity to restore what human sin and ignorance have disfigured or destroyed and in doing so become co-redeemers with the Son. We strive through our Spirit-led work to serve the human community in all its forms, from the intimacy of our families to the global concerns of the United Nations, and further, to build bonds of "universal kinship" with all creation "animate and inanimate" (Rule, no.18). In so doing are acting in concert with the Spirit that is life.

Work is the central means by which we carry out our mission as lay persons to bring about God's plan for the world. This mission, which the documents of the Second Vatican Council say are the "distinctive task" of the laity, is "the renewal of the temporal order." We build up the Kingdom of God through our prayerfully-considered, Spirit-inspired initiatives within our families, our workplace and our communities.

Work is also the focal point of that mission. Through fitting work, God intends that we grow in our dignity and humanity. Too often, tragically, inhuman work serves to deny that dignity and crush that humanity. The prevalent social injustice experienced by those who work has led John Paul II, following in the Catholic social action tradition, to say that the question of work is "probably the essential key to the whole social question." The social question to which the Holy Father refers is that perennial one of how man is to live in harmony and justice in society where the common good is served while individual dignity preserved (*On Human Work*, no.3)

We hope that this Resource Manual helps you to appreciate the inestimable value of the good work you are already doing. We pray that it may inspire you to do more good works for the glory of God!