



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#203 - December 1, 2023

## A Best Practice: Faith and Work

Our history has often been that we pay attention to children and youth; yet, when they “grow up” and enter the work-world, we leave them alone.

Likewise, our history has often shown a split in our words and actions: the sacred and the secular.

- Church is holy.
- The secular is “bad.”

The reality – and our faith – has always told us the opposite. Very few things are either/or; rather they are both/and.

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“This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age.”

~ *Gaudium et Spes: The Church in the Modern World, #12*

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## Our Call Today in Adult Faith Formation

As we continually plan for adult formation processes, are we paying attention to the spirituality of work?

Spirituality of Work: the understanding that all human activity, in one form or another, presents us with the opportunity to grow in our relationship with God.

**Why** do we need to pay attention to the work lives of our parishioners?

- Dorothy Sayers (novelist, playwright, Christian apologist: has remarked: “In nothing has the church so lost her hold on reality as her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation... How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his/her life?”

- Our church leaders have continually reminded us of the sanctity of work: “The unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance: indeed, they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ.” (St. John Paul II in *Christifideles*, #17)
- In their Pastoral Letter, *Economic Justice for All* (1986), the U.S. bishops say: “The road to holiness for most of us lies in our secular vocations. We need a spirituality that calls forth and supports lay initiative and witness not just in our Churches but also in business, in the labor movements, in the professions, in education and in public life. Our faith is not just a weekend obligation, a mystery to be celebrated around the altar on Sunday. It is a pervasive reality to be practiced every day in homes, offices, factories, schools, and businesses across our land. We cannot separate what we believe from how we act in the marketplace.”
- One of the goals of adult faith formation is to help people do social analysis. Our workplaces form us. What are the driving principles of much of our work world today:
  - Efficiency
  - Self-interest
  - MoneyIs that the good life? Is that the life of today’s follower of Jesus?
- Jesus was fascinated by work. Look at the parables!

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“Enter the house of Nazareth, approach the workbench where, beside Joseph and under the maternal glance of his mother, the Son of God worked. God-made-man knew the experience of human work...”

~ St. John Paul II, *Angelus Prayer*, Vatican, March 1984

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- In the Judeo-Christian tradition, almost nothing is clearer than the reality that God works.
  - “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)
  - “By the seventh day God had finished the work, and so God rested.” (Genesis 2:2)
  - “My father has never stopped working, and that is why I keep on working.” (John 5:17)
- One of the most important parts of our liturgy is The Dismissal when we are sent forth to go out into the world to carry out a mission that is central to why we had come together to celebrate the Mass in the first place – to help transform the world along the lines that God intended and Jesus preached.

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“...work – at least all good work – includes all the activity we do to help make the world a better place, a place more like the way God would have things;  
what Jesus of Nazareth called the kingdom or reign of God.”

~ Gregory F. Augustine Pierce in *The Mass is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World*

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## Things Parishes and (Arch)dioceses Might Do

- **Recognize people for their work in the world.** During liturgies we bless and commission lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, catechists, etc. Do we also bless and commission adults for their careers and work in the world? Plan for the variety of professions and work within your parish. You might link the blessing to an event/remembrance in our society; e.g. during the beginning of May we observe National Nurses Week; National Tradesman Day is observed annually on the third Friday in September; National Small Business Day is observed annually on May 10.
  - Invite people to Book Clubs that discuss books that touch upon today’s reality of work and what we might do about it. One you might explore: *Spirituality at Work: 10 Ways to Balance Your Life on the Job* by Gregory F. Augustine Pierce.
  - **Gathering those in like-professions.** Invite people to dinner or a gathering by professions. Suggest questions for small group conversations, such as: What is your work doing for you? What is your work doing to you? They might want to talk about issues related to their profession, for instance, the ethical issues which lawyers face. After this initial gathering, do some people want to remain together in a support group?
  - **Witness talks.** Invite parishioners to share with others, “How I talk about my faith at work;” “how my faith influences me at work,” etc. These provide opportunities for people to feel that their church/parish cares about their daily lives.
  - **Work-Life retreat.** Julie V. Burkey, D.Min., Adjunct Professor of Pastoral Theology at Seton Hall University where she created the course, *Theology of Work*, suggests a retreat centered on work. Some of the possible topics could include:
    - God the Creator Labors and Rests (The Creation Story: Finding Meaning in Work)
    - Jesus Christ Models Work in Word and Action (Faith in Action: Doing the Right Thing @ Work)
- **Revisit and stress the dignity, the call and responsibility of the laity** in the Vatican II documents, *The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (Christifideles Laici)*, Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic exhortation that followed the 1987 Synod on the Laity, and the US bishops’ documents, *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity* (1980) and *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium* (1995).
  - Once in a while, include a prayer of the Faithful similar to: “That we might help bring about your kingdom in our workplaces by how we perform our work and the example we give to others, we pray to the Lord.”

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- The Work of Human Hands: A Liturgical Model (Offering out Sacrifices: Overcoming Difficulties and Hardships)
- A Pentecostal Model of Work: Inspired to Take Action (Working with the Spirit – Personal and Group Discernment)
- A Resurrection Model of Work: Finding Joy in Work (Making Sense of our Stories)
- A Trinitarian Model of Work: Collaborative Work (Putting It All Together)

This retreat provides an opportunity for people to share their stories and experiences of work. Many of the participants might decide to form small groups which meet on a regular basis.

## ➤ Respond to the needs of the unemployed.

- Host Job Fairs which match employers with people who are searching for jobs.
- Within the Job Fairs, provide help with writing/revising resumes.
- Invite parishioners to support groups which explore, “I’m out of work and I feel\_\_\_\_\_.” Bringing people together (in face-to-face groups, through online discussion groups, etc.) to share their feelings, struggles, joys and hopes can be supportive and faith-filled. Begin groups for those who are unemployed, the families of the unemployed, the employers who have had to let people go from their jobs, etc.
- Schedule on-site speakers concerning various issues to help people deal with unemployment and its various implications.
- Record these speakers to post them on the parish website, so that they are available for people when they’re needed.

- Rather than sitting at home, people who are unemployed might appreciate a place to gather at their own parish. Create a coffee house atmosphere. Invite people for given hours each day to drop in for coffee, prayer, discussion; a time to just be with other people.
- It might be ideal to organize service/outreach projects of people helping others. Invite those who are unemployed to take a leadership role. Don’t forget reflection times to give people a chance to talk about what is happening to them during these times.
- When was the last time your adult faith formation program/process explored prayer? The many ways, forms, methods we have of prayer? Prayer, of course, is always a part of our lives, but, at crisis times people have a tendency to turn to prayer. This might provide the opportunity to explore our rich tradition of prayer and deepen people’s awareness of all we richly possess.

Open the church, the chapel, once a day or once a week. Encourage your parishioners to take time for stillness/quiet for prayer. You might offer different forms of prayer on different days: quiet time, Liturgy of the Hours, Taize Prayer, Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina, etc.

- Many television news shows are currently giving tips for saving, for cutting costs. Host a conversational Swap Meet. Invite people to bring their best ideas of how they’ve changed their lives, simplified their lives – what’s working, what’s not.
- Have we ever explored the role of leisure in our lives in our adult faith formation programs? During unemployment, this, of course, is not leisure that has been chosen, but people find themselves in a new situation. When we live in a world that glorifies work, puts all our identity in work, we don’t know how to live Sabbath time. Perhaps this is a time that we can all learn again (or for the first time).

What flows from this, of course, is self-identity and self-esteem. If people define themselves by their work, that

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influences all their relationships – family, friends, neighbors, parish, God. Exploring this would be crucial in a faith context. Jesus said, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Jesus was calling each of us to be our best selves. How do we do that?

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Work may be the most potent vehicle for fulfilling our spiritual life because, for many of us, it presents the best opportunities to meld community and social and economic productivity with personal belief and individual talent.

~ Rabbi Jeffrey K Salkin in *Being God's Partner: How to Find the Hidden Link Between Spirituality and Your Work*

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**Reflection Questions about Work** (adapted from *The Mass is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World*)

- What do you think is the purpose or meaning of life? What is the purpose or meaning of your specific life?
- How does your work fit in with the overall sense of purpose in your life? What do you do when you find that it doesn't?
- Have you ever experienced the kingdom of God in your workplace? What was it like? How long did it last?
- In The Dismissal at the end of Mass, what and where are you being sent forth to do? (Be specific; don't use the words, “to love and serve the Lord.”)
- In what ways does your work help build the kingdom of God on earth? In what ways does it prevent the kingdom from coming to fruition?
- If people tried to bring about the kingdom of God in their jobs each week, how would they feel by the time they returned to Mass? Would they be willing to be sent forth again right away? What might they need first?
- Write your own Prayer of the Faithful, with your own daily work in mind.
- What is your “work of human hands” that you offer to God at Mass? Describe how you feel about what you are offering. Is your work good enough to offer to God? Why or why not? How does it feel to know that your work is found acceptable and will be transformed into the body and blood of Christ?
- How do you treat others at work in a spiritual manner?
- How do you decide right from wrong at work?
- How do you balance your life – work, personal time, responsibilities to family, parish and community?
- Draw a line down a sheet of paper. On one side list all the things you like about your work. On the other side list all the things you don't like. On which side do you find God?
- Name one time you experienced the presence of God in your work. What did it feel like? How did it affect your work? What happens when you try to repeat that experience?
- Have an imaginary conversation with Jesus about your work. What would you tell him about what you do? What might he say if you started complaining about it? What if you started bragging about it?
- Name a saint – canonized or not – whose work in the world you admire. What is it about that person's work that draws your attention?
- Describe how your parish sends you forth into the world of work. Do you feel equipped to carry out your mission with a spirituality of work? Why or why not?
- Which do you care more about: people noticing you or people noticing your work? Why? What do you want them to notice about you? What do you want them to notice about your work?

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## Prayers about work

- [Litany of Work: Saint Joseph, the Worker](#)
- [The Litany of Work](#)
- [Prayers for the Workday](#)
- [25 Prayers for the Workplace](#)
- [Prayers For Work](#)
- [Prayers About Work](#)
- [Closing Prayers About Work](#)
- [Prayers about Work](#)
- [45 Short Prayers For Work](#)
- [5 Prayers for Your Workplace](#)
- [Prayer before Work](#)
- [Prayer Ideas About Work for Church Services](#)

- [Balancing Faith and Work: The Dynamic Leader](#)
- [Theology of Work Project](#)
- [The Mass Is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World](#)
- [Work Anniversary Milestone Moment](#)
- [New Job Milestone: Connecting God's Presence at Work](#)



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“Awareness that our work is a sharing in God’s work ought to permeate even the most ordinary daily activities.

By our labor we are unfolding the Creator’s work.”

*St. Pope John Paul II  
Laborem Exercens #30 (On Human Work) 1981*

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## Some Resources

- [GEMS #1: The Sunday-Monday Connection](#)
- [Virtue and Affluence: The Challenge of Wealth](#)
- [Justified by Work: Identity and the Meaning of Faith in Chicago’s Working-Class Churches](#)
- [National Center for the Laity](#)
- [Finding God @ Work](#)

Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com)

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found in:

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*  
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Lifelong Faith Studio: <https://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <https://www.seasonsofadultfaith.com>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
  - <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/books.html>
  - [https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons\\_of\\_aff\\_-\\_journal\\_special\\_issue.pdf](https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_-_journal_special_issue.pdf)