

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



Office for Human Dignity & Solidarity—Immigration Ministry

**SESSION FIVE**

# Collaborators in God's Work

The Dignity of Human Work



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## PART ONE

# Introduction

## Introduction and Greetings

One of the fundamental rights of human beings is work. Work gives dignity to the person, provides for sustenance and is, above all, a collaboration in the creative and vivifying mission of God.

## Initial Prayer

Loving God, you allow us to collaborate in building your creation through the work of our hands. Grant us the grace to be able to continue to offer the fruit of our hands and the sweat of our brows as praise to the glory of your creation. Help us to continue committing to struggle so that all people will have work to sustain the needs of their families. Open the hearts of legislators so that favorable economic conditions may be set and work created so we can joyously continue to construct our society and our church. We ask you this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Reading from the Word of God

We instruct you, brothers, in the name of [our] Lord Jesus Christ, to shun any brother who conducts himself in a disorderly way and not according to the tradition they received from us. For you know how one must imitate us. For we did not act in a disorderly way among you, nor did we eat food received free from anyone. On the contrary, in toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you. Not that we do not have the right. Rather, we wanted to present ourselves as a model for you, so that you might imitate us. In fact, when we were with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat. We hear that some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others.

Such people we instruct and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and to eat their own food.—**THESSALONIANS 2:6–12**

## Commentary

Every person has a right and a responsibility to seek their own sustenance and that of their family.

Later we will return to these readings to see how the light of God indicates the way we should follow.

### PART TWO

## Listening

### From Everyday Life: Things that Happen

Nothing can bring her down. Marisol came to the United States when she was so young that she cannot remember any other place. Nor can she be nostalgic of a homeland she does not know. She knows the United States as her only home. But she has no documents. Somehow, she has been able to finish her bachelor's degree and continues her studies. She works wherever she can and, of course, she does not have social security or health insurance. She is bilingual and her dream is to become a lawyer. She participates in the youth group at her parish and has unstoppable enthusiasm and energy.

Carlo Albán is an Ecuatorian who also came to the United States at a young age. Someone discovered his talent for the theatre and encouraged him to go to an audition for the musical *Oliver*. He got the role, which terrified his parents because they were afraid his undocumented status would be discovered. He also went on to be hired as an actor on *Sesame Street*, where he worked for several years. He always lived between the fear of being caught and the pressure to look like as any other adolescent. His family spent 12 years and a lot of anguish in order to obtain citizenship.

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#### FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

Do you know other cases similar to those of Marisol and Carlos? Have you felt afraid of being discovered or insecure in your place of work, school or community?

Do we seek work where we want, or do we have to resign ourselves to doing what other people don't want to do? How many people around us are out of work because of the economic crisis?

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### From Everyday Life: Things that Happen

In 1986, Congress approved the Law of Immigration Reform which has explicit prohibitions for employers to hire undocumented workers. The law imposed requirements to verify the immigration status of the workers and imposed sanctions

on those employers who did not obey it. There were also sanctions for immigrants using false documents in order to evade the law of worker verification laws. The government demanded every employee to fill out an I-9 form to establish their right to work in the United States.

E-Verify is a verification that works with the collaboration of the Immigration Service and the Social Security Administration. A study done by the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity of the University of California in Berkeley, titled, *Border, Jails and Job Sites: An Overview of Federal Immigration Enforcement Program in the U.S.*, indicates the following concerns about the current verification systems in work places:

- Current regulations may allow employers to exploit immigrant workers
- While U.S. Immigration and Border Enforcement (ICE) cannot accurately prove that employers were hiring illegally, the employers can always threaten the employees with reporting them. As a consequence, many workers were often afraid to demand their rights and did not dare to report on the abuses of the labor laws.
- The raids affirmed the authority of the employers, but did not pay attention to the likely unjust working conditions.

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**FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION**

Do you know the rights of workers and what to do in case abuses occurs?

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## PART THREE

# Learning

## Enlightened by the Word

Let us read the initial Bible passages Thessalonians 2:6–12 again.

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### FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

What phrases or expressions resonate most with me? How do I understand the passage? Do I give myself to it joyfully, or do I see it as a burden? Do I think there are jobs that are not as dignified as others?

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## Understanding the Passage

The exhortation to the Thessalonians opens with great solemnity, as a serious issue, appealing to the preceding issues. The vantage point today is the disorder certain individuals cause in the community by their irresponsible behavior. An absurd consequence of thinking that Parusia was imminent resulted in passivity, in not doing anything while hoping for the holy advent of God. Its warning is hard and realistic; that those who don't want to work should not eat or, in the same manner, if they believe that the imminent coming of the Lord excuses them from working, it should also exclude them from eating.

Paul places his own personal witness before them, that of a worker who earns his keep by the sweat of his brow. It is possible that, by the time the letter was written, the example of the hard work of Paul was already legendary among the Christians of a mostly Greek society that despised manual labor as something for slaves and, therefore, produced a great number of social parasites. It was then to the Christian parasites that Paul and followers asked to work quietly and earn the bread they eat, and asks them to stop going around in circles and not do anything but spread rumors.

## Enlightened by the Doctrine of the Church

Work is an expression of our dignity and our participation in God's creation. Human beings have a right to a decent work, to just salaries and private property. The economy exists in order to serve human beings and not the other way around (*Series Faith and Human Development: Biblical Guide*, USCCB, Washington, DC 1998).

A person has a right to leave his native country for several reasons—as well as to return to it...Even if immigration in a certain way is an evil, in certain circumstances, as it is said often, it is a necessary evil. Everything possible must be done—and much is certainly done—so that this evil, in the material sense does not carry within it other

greater evils in the moral sense; moreover, so that within the limitations of what is possible, would even bring good to the personal, family and social life of immigrants, both for the country of origin as for the country of arrival. What is most important is that the person who works away from his native country, as an immigrant or as a temporary worker, will not find himself at a disadvantage in the area of rights to work in comparison with other workers of that society. Migration for reasons of work cannot ever become a way for financial or social exploitation. The immigrant worker must work under the same conditions and criteria as a worker who is not an immigrant. The value of work must be measured evenly and not in relation to nationality, religion or race. All these circumstances must absolutely yield before the fundamental value of work, which is joined to the dignity of the human person. Once again we must repeat the fundamental principle: the hierarchy of values, the deep meaning of the work itself, demand that the capital be in function of work and not work in function of the capital (John Paul II, *Laborens Exercens*).

The use of E-Verify on the part of employers is for the most part voluntary. There has been an attempt, however, to make it obligatory in recent years. The USCCB considers that the general objectives of E-Verify have a certain worth, but the Conference considers that the expansion of the program could only be required if: 1) the starting point is part of a comprehensive wholistic immigration reform; 2) if errors can be significantly reduced; 3) if the opportunities of abuse of the program on the part of the employer can be controlled; 4) the workers have a just and significant opportunity to correct false identifications as undocumented. The Catholic bishops consider that it would be morally and politically irresponsible to amplify the use of E-Verify without first entering into a comprehensive immigration reform. The bishops urge the Congress to resist to be involved in an approach of mere implementation of the laws in the extremely complex topic of unauthorized immigration, and instead to approve immigration reform laws that will ensure that the laws are rooted in family reunification, they respond to the labor needs of the country and respect the dignity of immigrants among us (Archbishop José Gómez).

## In the Light of Contemporary Theological Reflection

Among the principle obligations of the worker are honesty, interest for productivity, solidarity with co-workers, responsibility for not evading work, and not claiming sickness or unjustified absences. Accepting one's own responsibility in work, employed or self-employed, as well as responsibility in the family and community to recognize that no one else will do the work that one must do, is very important. Study, technical preparation and training, must not be undertaken because of one's own self interest, in order to acquire money or ensure one's own self future. The fullness of the human being is attained in the self giving to others. No one remembers the person who lived only for themselves (Fr. Mike Boehm).

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## FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

What ways does work lend dignity to the person? Under what conditions is work dehumanizing? Why is lack of employment unfair? Are there jobs that are more or less fair? What kinds of work do the majority of immigrants that you know do? What do they think about their jobs?

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## PART FOUR

# Proclaiming

## Leadership

One could think that we do not exercise leadership in the area of work. And yet, it is always good to be prepared for leadership and, above all, to recognize the good practices in order to lead groups effectively and pastorally. Just as much as if we are managers in a job, or if we are leaders of the community, there are certain good practices for team work.

What are the best leadership practices for team work? Which ones show more respect for the dignity of workers?

- Responsibility
- Trust
- Listening
- Team work
- Praise
- Flexible controls
- Acknowledgment of good ideas
- Making resources available to those who need them
- Problem solving together
- Making clear why collaboration is important for the organization
- Direction: objectives, results, measures
- Support: approval, guidance, constructive criticism, encouragement

Other practices and values:

- Keeping an open mind
- Accepting new ideas
- Risk taking, accepting challenges



- Seeking creative problem solving
- Learning from mistakes
- Including different perspectives
- Reflection
- Intuition
- Openness to change

## Ground Rules for a Good Working Session

### Respect:

- Valuing the persons and the process as much as the results
- Punctuality
- Showing consideration for others

### Fairness:

- Giving equal opportunity and time to all

### Listening:

- When others are speaking, listen. Don't pretend to listen, while you are only thinking of what you can say.
- Listen in order to understand
- Do not interrupt

### Openness:

- To the points of view and opinions of others; to new possibilities and results
- To each person regardless of position or age

### Privacy:

- Confidentiality: what is said here remains here
- Speaking from one's experience

### Commitment:

- Being present in mind and body. Notify others if you are going to be absent
- Self-control and responsibility

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### FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

Which ones of these practices do I see in my own work behavior? What would I need to learn and improve in myself in order to be a better leader?

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## PART FIVE

# Final Prayer

Our Lord and our God, you created us for yourself so that, with you, we can continue the work of Creation. Help us deepen our awareness of the profound dignity inherent in this call. Give us gratitude for everything you give us that allows us to work: our minds, our hands, and our hearts. Give us a great and generous heart to love our work, since it is your own hands and heart that we are extending there. When we grow discouraged because our work is hard, when we feel tired and overwhelmed, remind us of your Word: Come to me all who are tired. When we feel discouraged because of our lack of work or the uncertainty for our own future and that of our families, give us your word of support that you will always be with us. We see around us so many persons who suffer because they do not find appropriate employment and cannot confront the injustice of low wages due to the insecurity of their immigration status. Grant us compassion and solidarity in order to accompany them and to struggle for justice. Amen.

