

**WHY WORK IS NOW PART OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN WAY OF LIFE**

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*Let them esteem work both as a gift  
and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community. (Art. 16)*

What is the source of article 16 concerning "work" found in our 1978 Rule? In the preceding article, we learned that in previous Secular Franciscan Rules hardly any mention is made of work and then, only tangentially, in relation to obligations to fast. In contrast, the original First Order Rule of 1221 and 1223 had entire sections addressing the friars' attitude toward work. St. Francis mentions the "grace of working" for friars primarily as an antidote to idleness, which he considered as the greatest enemy of the soul. Work was also a means for the friars to provide good example and to further identify their lot with the *minores* who labored hard to sustain their existence.

But why is work now included as a positive element of our 1978 Rule? To discover the answer to that question, we need to consider the decade-long process of developing of our new Rule. The process was precipitated by the events of the Second Vatican Council. All Orders in the Church were called to reinvigorate themselves by both returning to the charism of the order's founder and by adapting the Church's new understandings of herself and of the world realized through the efforts of the Council. We see both these movements, the recovery of the old and embrace the new, present in the development of our present Secular Franciscan rule.

The call in our 1978 Rule to a life of "conversion" (art. 7) is a prime example of a return to our original charism - recovering the original meaning of "penance" as an on-going change of heart rather than a collection of penitential practices. In terms of embracing the newness of vision presented by the Council, Fr. John C. Haughey in Converting 9 to 5: A Spirituality of Daily Work, notes that as a result of the Council, the Church found "new clarity" about "its role in the world, the vocation of the laity, the extension of the understanding of ministry, and the autonomy of the secular." All these elements concern laypersons and represent profoundly good news for lay women and men. A layperson's ordinary life in the world was no longer understood by the Church as an obstacle to but rather as the very means of attaining holiness. The laity no longer had to attempt to emulate the monastic ideal in their pursuit of holiness and of the kingdom or be burdened with guilt about being spiritually second-rate. Our spiritual path was no longer to move away from the world but to grow in holiness and help bring about God's kingdom right where we were - in and through our involvement in the world through our on-going relationships and commitments in our families, our communities and our work. This new and positive appreciation of the role of the laity is called a lay or "secular" spirituality. This spirituality embodies an appreciation and reverence for the incarnational presence of God in the mundane that is eminently Franciscan in its vision of the goodness of all creation.

Secular spirituality represented a dramatic change in understanding concerning the role of laypersons in fulfilling their vocation and mission. And, not surprisingly, given our natural resistance to change, this new spiritual orientation was not quickly incorporated into the new Secular Franciscan Rule. In *"De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam" The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation*, Robert M. Stewart, OFM, observes that seven years after the process of developing the new Rule began, an International Commission reviewing the latest draft most strongly criticized the 1974 Rule draft for its failure to include one

of the greatest fruits of the Second Vatican Council – the development of a spirituality for laity. This Commission also noted that the draft "contains little that would not also be appropriate within a rule for a canonical religious Franciscan group."

In response to this critique, the next Rule draft included the addition of an entirely new section called "*In the Midst of the World.*" Here we see mention made of "work" for the first time in development of the new Rule:

*Like all members of the Franciscan Family, we are sent to the entire world. As seculars, we have our own vocation: living in the midst of the world, engaged in various duties and works of the world, it is our duty to enlighten and to direct all temporal realities to which we are closely united, in such a way that they may work and prosper constantly according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer. Also, as members of secular society, we will know how, according to the gifts given by the Lord, to take our share of responsibility, bringing to this management of temporal things the spirit of the Beatitudes. By our witness and our action,*

*joined*  
*with that of other men and women, we will work in these different sectors towards the realization of the plan of God for the world. It is first of all in our family that we will live the Franciscan spirit, striving to make it a sign of the world already renewed in Christ. women We will make our work a participation in the development of creation, the redemption of men and, and a service to the whole human community. Finally, aware that it belongs to the whole Church to make people capable of building the temporal order well and of orienting it toward Christ, with a clear distinction of the rights and duties of ecclesial communities, the secular fraternities will assume their apostolic and social responsibilities and commit themselves to concrete evangelical choices.*

We have answered our question of how work became part of our new Secular Franciscan Rule. Work is included because it is now understood to be an integral part of the Church's wonderful new vision of the vocation and mission of the laity. "Christ's redemptive work, while of itself directed toward the salvation of men, involves also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the church is not only to bring to men the message and grace of Christ, but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the gospel." (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 5) This mission is given by the Church particularly to the laity as their "distinctive task." (Ibid.) In carrying out our mission to renew the face of the earth through our work not only on job but also in our families and communities, we ourselves are renewed, fulfilling our vocation to grow in holiness.

St. Francis, who so thoroughly embraced the goals of the Fourth Lateran Council that its symbol (the Tau) became his own, must be pleased to see the effort made to make our new Rule faithful to Vatican II's empowering and challenging vision of the vocation and mission of the laity. Perhaps he is even delighted - because this vision itself is so very Franciscan in nature - seeing the world in a positive light as "an incarnation of the love of God."

### Dialogue Starters

1. Our Rule presents "work" is a positive light - as a gift to esteem. Why is work valued so highly in our 1978 Rule when previous Rules were all but silent about it?
2. What is Franciscan about working to sustain and improve the world?