

TODAY'S Catechetical LEADER

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The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers: A Meditation

Maureen A. Kelly

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected – the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

-Themes of Catholic Social Teaching, USCCB

"The economy must serve people. . ."

Once upon a time a dynamic speaker raised for me the issue of worshiping at the altar of the economy. His not-so-subtle innuendo was the embodiment of the opposite of this principle: the economy has become many individuals' and groups' god. We serve the economy. What has to happen for the economy to grow? We have to want more and often we have to pay more.

I am thinking of Jim T. who was in upper management at a large company which was leaving the United States to go where labor and materials were cheaper: "make more, pay less, and be more profitable." Jim was mandated to let many of the people he managed go. Some of them were long-time friends and colleagues. Yes, there was career counseling and placement but there were also age, experience, and job availability factors which assured that many of these people would not find appropriate satisfying work. Jim was told he would not lose his job. He would be asked to move with the company; his family would be relocated; he would get a raise; the cost of living would be less and more comfortable since servants were a "dime a dozen." Jim's family was ambivalent. His wife was nourished by her neighborhood ties and being near family and friends. Their daughters were doing well in school and were at the age that friends were significant but also where immersion in another culture might be very beneficial. A part of Jim's new responsibility was to hire workers to replace the ones he was letting go at a much lower pay rate. He was uncomfortable with this. He was also uncomfortable about having his family uprooted. One of the major factors that he and his wife had to figure in was if he did not take the job which was being offered, he would lose a large percentage of retirement and savings for his daughters' college years. He would also have to be re-tooled for another job or career and he was 46.

"The right to productive work. . ."

One of the poignant and non-reflective remarks which is being made around the immigration issue is that new immigrants (legal or not) serve the American economy by doing jobs which American citizens do not want to do. Although Jim faced a dilemma, he had a lot of choices. More often than not the new immigrant does not have those same choices. Amy is a young single mom. She has a college degree and her own cleaning business. She loves it and is very good at it. She charges \$30.00 an hour and has to refuse clients. Rosanna is a young single mother. She has a college degree. She has a work

visa. She cleans houses for minimum wage because that is the only job she can find. She does a good job but it is not satisfying work for her. Steve works as a clerk at a coffee shop and a party goods store. He will tell you. "I love what I do. I like the people. I have a roof over my head, clothes on my back, good food, and friends. What more could I want?" Kevin is a highly paid lawyer in a law firm. He has a huge house; his kids go to the best schools. He rarely sees them and is losing contact with family and friends, especially his wife. If you met him he would tell you "I have to keep doing this just to keep up with the economy."

Questions For Discussion Or Reflection:

- If you were Jim what choices would you make?
- Of the people described here with whom do you most identify?
- What stories could you add to this article?
- In what ways do you see the economy as serving you? As something you serve?
- How would you describe the productivity of your own work experience?

It's All In the World!
Helping Your Learners Grapple with Scripture
Bill Huebsch

The goal of this article is to help you make Scripture an integral part of your lives and those of your learners. I hope to be able to help you teach learners how to understand the Bible, according to their age level, as a collection of books, presenting it as a library. I hope to help you learn some simple methods for teaching about Sacred Scripture and using it in religion sessions. And I hope to help you foster a real love of Scripture in your life and the lives of your learners.

To start with, teaching Scripture to learners of any age is an activity, not a mere course of study! Learners must be actively engaged in the process, exploring the text and getting to know the Bible itself.

If you teach younger children, for example, try this: Read to or tell your primary age children the parable of the Good Shepherd from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15, verses 1–7, using a children's Bible (you might show third graders how to find it in a Bible of their own). Ask the children what the shepherd in the story does. Why does he go after the sheep? How does that make the children feel? Most modern children know very little about sheep. Using the Internet, bring them into your classroom! Help them understand the deeper meaning of this parable by guiding them to write a play which teaches the same point, but using a metaphor other than sheep.

There are other key points which you should teach whenever you are introducing a learner to the Bible.

- Teach them that the Bible is the written word of God and that we should listen with reverence when it's being read at Mass, a prayer time, or any time.
- Show them how to read Scripture passages and how to integrate those passages in their daily lives.
- Create activities with the Bible in your sessions and use methods that are age-appropriate and engage your learners.

The revealed word of God is the heart and soul of faith formation. Keep a copy of the Bible on the prayer table or station and occasionally hold processions with the Bible to demonstrate our reverence for the word and the honor which we give to the Scriptures. Enthroned Sacred Scripture with a short ritual in which your children take turns playing roles.

Use Scripture in your prayer experiences to help familiarize your learners with the words of Scripture and to foster the practice of linking the Scriptures to their lives.

Music is another excellent way to teach Scripture. Excellent songs based on the psalms, the gospels, and other Scripture passages are available for every age. For example, if I were to ask you to recite Psalm 139, you would possibly not know it off-hand. But if I were to hum a few lines from that great Dan Schutte song, “You Are Near” you would recognize it instantly: “Yahweh I know you are near, standing always at my side. You guard me from the foe, and you lead me in ways everlasting...” Music is a wonderful, memorable way to teach Scripture. Most parish hymnals have a “Scripture index” in the back showing from what part of Scripture each song is derived. Use it!

Now pause here and ask yourself an important question: How often do you read and meditate on Scripture? Do you make it the guide of your life? This is key because you are the teacher or parent. If you yourself aren’t in love with Sacred Scripture, how will you ever pass this love on to your learners?

Our own *General Directory for Catechesis* said it perfectly in article 85: “Catechesis must lead to ‘the gradual grasping of the whole truth about the divine plan’ by introducing the disciples of Jesus to a knowledge of Tradition and of Scripture.”

A bit of background for you. The Catholic Bible is made up of sixty-six books. If you look at the contents page of your Bible, you will find that there are many different kinds of books.

- Some contain myths, legends, and parables meant to instruct.
- Others include biblical history and theology; poetry and romance.
- Still other books contain sagas or prayers or visions.

So we can consider the Bible to be a library with many different kinds of books – all inspired by God.

Begin by showing the learners that the Bible is divided into the Old Testament, the biggest part: 39 books, and the New Testament, with 27 books. The Old Testament tells us how God created the world and gradually prepared his people for their salvation. The New Testament describes the life, miracles, and teachings of Jesus, as well as his passion and resurrection. It also relates the story and teachings of the early Church.

Take another pause now and do this: Choose your own favorite passages from the gospel. What do they tell you about who Jesus is for you at this moment?

Learn how to teach the Bible at various age levels.

- Primary age children are developing the skills that allow them to put pieces of knowledge together and to think in concrete concepts. Faith stories help shape their beliefs and values. Stress the teachings of the Old Testament stories and the parables of Jesus with hands-on activities – such as coloring pages, various kinds of puzzles, cutouts, etc. (whose degree of challenge depends on the age); music about the theme or the characters in the Scripture story; objects that relate to the story. Make a gen-

eral timeline to show what place each of the major figures had in the history of the Bible. When you tell stories or read from the children's Bible, show them the general area the story is in.

- For intermediate age children, story also plays an important role, and they want to know what is really true. They are very concerned about what is fair, and this influences their view of God. Stress the stories in the Bible, especially the parables of Jesus and the accounts of his miracles, that speak of God rewarding those who are faithful. Pray with psalms that refer to God as faithful, merciful, and just. Help them look up stories in the Scripture and act them out. Use Scripture-based word puzzles (crosswords, word searches) for introducing, reinforcing, or reviewing a theme.
- Middle school learners are beginning to develop skills that allow them to think abstractly and reflect more deeply on faith stories and their meaning. Engage these learners in faith sharing based on the Sunday reading. Invite them to write or act out contemporary versions of some of the Scripture stories, especially the parables. Their longing for relationships is extended to God. Talk about relationships (not necessarily marriage relationships) in the Bible that led the persons closer to God (for example, Abraham and Sara; Moses and his wife Zipporah; David and Jonathan, his brother by adoption; Elizabeth and Zechariah; Mary and Joseph; Paul and the convert Lydia). Help them find where these examples are located in the Bible.
- Because the faith experience of youth is growing and their relationship with God is deepening, prayer and service to others becomes more meaningful. Help them find and read about persons of virtue from Scripture whom they can imitate in those areas. Especially focus on the life of Jesus and the call to discipleship. Encourage them to address the question of their vocation, to listen to the voice of the Spirit. Share with them gospel music and music based on the psalms that is relevant for their age.
- Make study of the Scriptures part of a comprehensive faith formation program for adults. Foster faith sharing on the parish's Question of the Week – based on the Sunday readings – in small groups, including parish ministry groups, small Christian communities, prayer groups, and so on. Both while studying and while reflecting on the readings, the adults will become more familiar with how to use the Bible.

Parts of this article are drawn from Into the Fields: Teacher and Catechist Formation from Twenty-Third Publications. See Chapter 6 of Year I for more information and formation.

AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM HOCKER, THE TREE OF LIFE IMPORTS

Tom Hocker is the founder of The Tree of Life Imports (www.thetreeoflifeimports.com), a company that works with Latin American communities to help provide equal opportunity for all to work, including women and the rural poor. All The Tree of Life products are hand made by artisans in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. Tree of Life Imports is committed to fair trade and economic justice. In his interview session, Tom gladly shares an in-depth background of Tree of Life Imports.

Harcourt Religion Publishers: Tree of Life Imports was founded fifteen years ago during El Salvador's civil war to bring the art of La Palma to American consumers. Can you tell readers how Tree of Life Imports evolved?

Tom Hocker: In April, 1985, I went to El Salvador for a month to have my first up close and personal look at a civil war. Of course, the American Civil War had been a living family memory since my maternal grandfather fought under Robert E. Lee, and my grandmother went to her grave having never forgiven Abraham Lincoln for what he did to the South. I served in the US Army during the Vietnam War, but never went there. In some way to compensate, I came to look upon the conflicts in Central America as my war.

At this time I had been working for a number of years as a photographer for a very large steel mill. My attention had been caught during the preceding year by two media presentations on Central America: a radio interview of an American doctor who had spent a year with the leftist insurgency in El Salvador and had written a book, and the viewing of a movie, *El Norte*, the story of a brother and sister fleeing army massacres in Guatemala for Los Angeles.

The US government was sending over two billion dollars a year to El Salvador to support reconstruction and military operations against the Liberation Front. It was part of President Reagan's bulwark against a Communist tide washing in from the south. I was curious about how this money was being spent. In preparation for my trip I visited various refugee and political groups in the Chicago area in order to cultivate personal contacts, which would help to introduce me to the needs of this struggling population. One woman who had fled El Salvador and led cultural awareness activities informed me about the crafts movement in the village of La Palma and suggested that I meet the artist, Fernando Llort, who had developed the techniques and organized the villagers. Before she offered to make a personal referral she wanted to verify that I did not work for American intelligence agencies. We had lunch with my parish rector and that reassured her. Never mind that we could have rented the costume for a deception.

I was very aware of Archbishop Romero's assassination and the murder of the American church women by right wing and government connected agents. Also the other side of this fight, the leftist guerillas, had attacked a party of off-duty US Marines. In each case, the political and military repercussions were so severe that I concluded before my visit that all armed parties understood that it was too much trouble to harass visiting Americans. I went down there with no official sanction or ties to any group; To quote the great Bob Dylan "on my own, like a rolling stone, a complete unknown, no

direction home.”

Upon my arrival Llort invited me to stay in his home, and he took me up country to meet the artisans, many of whom were related to his wife. She had been a poor girl from the country and their marriage scandalized his wealthy family in this very class conscious country. Foregoing material comfort he had retreated to a remote, mountainous area looking for a spiritual direction. La Palma was right in the middle of a contested zone of conflict, heavily garrisoned by the government army with the guerillas occupying the heights around the town. To be able to pass through army road blocks on the way, I needed a safe conduct pass from military headquarters. That required several visits and some bluffing about my lack of press credentials. Curiously, although the pass specified a very narrow time window of permission, it worked for multiple visits over the next year, probably on the grounds that anyone important enough to get it in the first place was still important.

By showing up at various aid agencies, both church related and other, I was able to tag along on various excursions to all parts of the country. In another zone of intense conflict I met a parish priest from the US. He told a story of great suffering with carefully chosen words. All of his catechetical leaders had been murdered by the army because anyone with leadership skills on a grass roots level was a potential threat. His sadness filled up the room. In the capital I met Maryknoll priests who had been transferred out of Guatemala for their safety. Their parish ministry had been performed in the highlands, home to Mayan indigenous villages where the government army had massacred large numbers of people. They told me of hearing horrifying confessions from guilt ridden parishioners who had beaten their neighbors to death. To execute suspects, the soldiers put them inside a circle of other men who had to strike them with clubs or be shot down right there if they refused.

After only two weeks it was obvious to me that most of the US funds were not being spent in the country. Either the money was being rerouted to wage war in Nicaragua – despite a Congressional ban on such a diversion – or it was going offshore to unnamed bank accounts. Any aid to individuals came from NGOs; there was no physical rebuilding. Furthermore the army was fighting the war on the cheap: few planes, no missiles, no tanks, not even trucks. We were paying for just beans and bullets. That was enough damage; don't misunderstand me. A telling image was this: if a small patrol wanted to get down the road, the sergeant flagged down some farmer's pickup for a ride. I just wondered what Congress was being told about the appropriations.

Later in '85 I left the company in a downsizing program and worked freelance in photography for awhile. I continued to return to El Salvador and included Guatemala in my itinerary. I started buying quantities of the crafts for resale in the US, showing them to various retailers in the gift market. I gradually concentrated on a religious selection because many church people were aware of the struggle for justice in Central America. I felt that I could not just take photos and leave. I needed to make an ongoing commitment and connection to all the people who came to mean a lot to me. The civil war in El Salvador came to an end in 1990, following one last desperate campaign the year before.

I traveled in and out of El Salvador and Guatemala many times during seven years that I knew the civil wars there. I confronted many military roadblocks which were there to see if my papers were in order. Often these were in areas where they could be attacked with out warning and so they were seriously armed and ready. If on a bus I had to step out and line up – men on one side, women on the other, with my hands over my head. Then some sixteen-year-old soldier with a US supplied assault rifle would pat me down. In all this time no one ever personally leveled a weapon at me. In the words of Martha Stewart, “this is a good thing.” In one locale in El Salvador there was a long bridge, perhaps the only major bridge left not blown by the guerrillas – at each end was a concrete bunker with a machine gun aimed down the road. As our vehicle approached I am sure that the soldier manning it had his finger on the trigger. I trusted that he had the safety still on. Well, no guts, no glory.

HRP: In your travels to the countries where artisans create Tree of Life Imports, what has touched you most? I am sure readers would like to envision the lives of the artisans that are creating Tree of Life’s wonderful products. Could you briefly paint a picture or pictures for us, in words, of a glance at “the day in the life of” of an individual(s) providing their services?

TH: Let’s start with the art, the work of human hands, and my reverence for the commitment that is necessary to produce it. I partner with artisans in three countries – three different cultures – to bring to market their creativity in three different activities: painting, weaving, metal smithing. Picture the raw material: pots of paint and a slab of wood, skeins of thread, lumps of silver. The motions are simple, but very precise. The gestures are small, but cumulative in effect. The creator’s faith in the end result is unshakable; there may be tiny flaws, but the end result will have impact with its exceptional beauty. A woman – or a man – can take pride in what she extends toward you, and it is my joy to hand it on to you.

All this material is lifeless without an infusion of their spirit, an impulse toward both faith and beauty that has persevered despite poverty and war.

Shall we say that their spirit is informed by the Spirit? That is appealing if you look for purpose and validation in the chaos and violence of life. Purpose is affirmed one act of compassion at a time. That is how we sustain community. In the end we want someone to care about us – almost desperately at times. This we earn by caring about others. (Jesus loves us, I know, we don’t have to earn it.) Hopefully fair trade enlarges just a little more the circle of people for whom we have compassion. I cannot tell you exactly how the intention to create art consecrates the mundane steps, the daily labor to shape material – the stuff of life. But it does. A woman sits at a table with blank wooden crosses, a brush and a row of baby food jars containing paints. She is under a porch roof in front of a simple house with three rooms. Perhaps she has running water because either her neighbors cooperatively ran a pipeline down from a spring in the mountains or because government spending reached the village level finally. Otherwise she has to carry all the water she uses in a jug on her head some distance from a creek that cows are standing in. She draws in or stamps a design in the wood and she fills in every area of color by hand. A layer of varnish completes the process. Then she signs the back of the

cross. A local boy sells her firewood from his donkey. She cooks with a small fire built under a flat clay griddle which heats the tortillas she mixes up from corn kernels she grinds with a stone. She speaks Spanish, this is El Salvador.

In neighboring Guatemala she will speak Quiche or another native language, but barely little Spanish. She will sit at a loom instead of painting and she will weave fabric for book marks sold by Harcourt or a priest's stole sold by a church supply company. Otherwise her life is like the above description. Both women will probably have numbers of flowers in her yard – brilliant blossoms all year round, since there is no frost. Her husband will more likely be living with her instead of having gone to the US. That's because living within the Indian culture tends to isolate them from the main stream, and he is less flexible in adapting to life here. There is a large internal migration in Guatemala of both men and women to the capital, a vast sprawling urban with such little cohesiveness where murder and robbery are rampant.

The third area in which I work is Taxco in Guerrero, Mexico, legendary for its silver work. It is a medium-sized town of some prosperity since it supplies much of the jewelry for the country. I have selected small family-run workshops to cooperate with, producing both their designs and some of my own. Narrow cobblestone streets run up steep slopes between colonial building four hundred years old. In little courtyards men heat silver nuggets with blow torches and cast the glowing liquid into molds. They cut out strips, solder pieces, buff, and polish – the results are solid, brilliant, and will last a lifetime.

HRP: Do you correspond directly with the artisans? If so, what languages do you speak or do you use a translator?

TH: All of my conversations with our craftspeople are in Spanish; no one speaks English. Furthermore in Guatemala I am immersed in areas of indigenous culture so intact that the native language is still from the Mayan linguistic family. The women are generally less fluent in Spanish than the men as women often do not receive the same education provided to their male counterparts. I have visited homes in outlying areas along with the director of the group. I would speak in Spanish with no response from the women weaving until he translated into Quiche' and then they would reply. To visit them we drove along dirt roads to the end, and then walked in a path way through corn fields for a couple of miles.

HRP: How do you think the Tree of Life products tie into the Catholic market? Not only are these products beautiful for decorating the home or using for events and activities, but they hold a timeless tradition that goes hand in hand with the Church. Each piece also possesses a lesson of justice. How do you see this affecting those who buy/use them?

TH: The deep connection between this art and the Catholic market or the Catholic sensibility is ex-

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pressed in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Another concept, solidarity, ties into this question of who is my neighbor? How can we more fully share the experience of another human? Art has long served to encourage this sense of inter connectedness during conflict the women of El Salvador painted joy and beauty into every wooden cross. Those of Guatemala were weaving continuity into every row of thread even though their lives could have been shattered at any moment. The silver smiths feel that the well-made ring is good; it will endure, and they will endure.

At Tree of Life we need to share these narratives more widely. Every piece reflects a life story. We invite Catholics to incorporate these pieces of art into their own personal traditions in order to merge their story with the larger flow of stories we call history.

To learn more about Tree of Life Imports and to see photos, visit www.treeoflifeimports.com. You can also purchase mini table runners and bookmarks at www.harcourtreligion.com.

THE FIGHT IN THE FIELDS: CESAR CHAVEZ AND THE FARMWORKERS MOVEMENT

Written by Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, The Fight in the Fields offers insight into the plight of California migrant farmworkers during the Depression and describes how Cesar Chavez led the movement against the exploitation of Mexican and Filipino workers.

With excellent black and white photography, the book is a companion volume based on "The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Struggle," a PBS documentary created by filmmakers Rick Tejada-Flores and Ray Telles.

The book explores Chavez's life events and his work. His family lost their Arizona farm in 1938 during the Depression and were compelled to move to California to become migrant workers. Workers endured exploitation, racism, and brutality and Cesar led "La Causa" as the founder of the United Farm Workers union (founded in 1962). He was dedicated to nonviolent protest and fought for basic human rights by organizing protests, strikes, and the grape and lettuce boycotts.

Chavez proved to be a legacy and schools, buildings, parks, and streets are named after him. His life's work should be experienced by students of all ages. LA Times claims it to be "A necessary and important book."

Order yours today!

The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement.....0-15-600598-0

Call 1.800.922.7696 or go online at www.harcourtreligion.com/onlinecatalog

Ideas for Teaching The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

By James McGinnis

Issues like minimum wage legislation, unions and strikes, immigration and guest workers, the expansion of technology jobs and many of them being shipped overseas, and the expanding gap between rich and poor in our nation make this principle of Catholic social teaching ever more important – and challenging to teach.

To help students grow in appreciation of the dignity of all work, discuss ways of showing appreciation for the maintenance and service workers at your school and parish and have these workers share their stories with the students and the sense of satisfaction they get from their work. Since Labor Day is a holiday rarely acknowledged at school, consider celebrating April 23 – the anniversary of the death of Cesar Chavez in 1993. Honor all the workers at school in some way.

Use the story of Cesar Chavez to discuss the Church's teaching on the right of workers to unionize and speak on their own behalf. Harcourt's book *Harvesting Hope* by Kathleen Krull and its Spanish version *Cosechando Esperanza* is a beautifully illustrated story of Cesar Chavez. Then there's the story of 12-year-old Iqbal Masih, the victim of child labor in the carpet industry of Pakistan who organized widely against the exploitation of children, brings the issue even closer to children. April 16 is the anniversary of his assassination. Google "Free the Children – Child Labor" for on-going efforts to extend what Iqbal started.

Help students understand how difficult it is for a parent not to be able to provide for their family, because they are unemployed or underpaid. To help them understand the need for a "living wage" instead of the "minimum wage," have older students calculate what fulltime work at minimum wage would bring in and then try to budget for a family, or even just for themselves, on that wage. Use Jesus' parable in Matthew 20:1-16 to see the fairness of paying everyone the "usual daily wage."

Discuss with students and encourage them to discuss with their parents whether it's best to always shop for the lowest prices. Perhaps it's better, as much as possible, to shop and eat at locally owned stores and restaurants and buy produce from local farmers, so as to enable these workers to compete with giant chain stores and agribusiness.

To help students begin to see that all labor, both paid and volunteered, is participating in the creativity of God, begin each day with a prayer that everyone will do their best that day to teach, learn, do chores, help others, and work so that together God's will will "be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The Tree of Life Imports: Mini Table Runners & Bookmarks

Founded fifteen years ago during El Salvador's civil war, Tree of Life Imports was created to bring the art of La Palma to the American market. Tree of Life Imports has focused on providing – to several Latin American communities – equal opportunity for all to work, including women and the rural poor. All Tree of Life Imports products are hand made by artisans in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. The company is committed to fair trade and economic justice. They pay a fair price that has allowed artisans to greatly increase their standard of living.

Colorful, 3-foot, hand-woven cloth Mini Table Runners (10-pack) are perfect for parish families to use in their homes. A fair-trade product, created by Guatemalan artisans, they serve as a meaningful link to the Acting for Justice Principle.

Woven Bookmarks (10-pack), also a fair trade product, created by Guatemalan artisans and are perfect for family members to use to keep their place in the Bible or other books.

Woven by women and men in the highlands of Guatemala, patterns and techniques are handed down in ongoing Mayan traditions. Fair trade in these crafts supports families and preserves community life in remote villages. Your purchase of these wonderful bookmarks and mini table runners promotes unity, dignity, and respect.

Order yours today!

Woven Bookmarks (10-Pack).....0-15-901869-2
Mini Table Runners (10-Pack).....0-15-901800-5

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