

*As I have had occasion to say, "work is of fundamental importance to the fulfillment of the human being and to the development of society. Thus, it must always be organized and carried out with full respect for human dignity and must always serve the common good. At the same time, it is indispensable that people not allow themselves to be enslaved by work or to idolize it, claiming to find in it the ultimate and definitive meaning of life." It is on the day consecrated to God that men and women come to understand the meaning of their lives and also of their work.*

Sacramentum Caritatis ("Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist"), Pope Benedict XVI, 2007, #74.

It is the Church that insists, on the authority of the Gospel, upon those teachings whereby the conflict can be brought to an end, or rendered, at least, far less bitter; the Church uses her efforts not only to enlighten the mind, but to direct by her precepts the life and conduct of each and all; the Church improves and betters the condition of the working man by means of numerous organizations; does her best to enlist the services of all classes in discussing and endeavoring to further in the most practical way, the interests of the working classes; and considers that for this purpose recourse should be had, in due measure and degree, to the intervention of the law and of State authority.

**Rerum Novarum ("On the Condition of Labor and the Working Classes")**, Pope Leo XIII, 1891, #16.

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Now a State chiefly prospers and thrives through moral rule, well-regulated family life, respect for religion and justice, the moderation and fair imposing of public taxes, the progress of the arts and of trade, the abundant yield of the land-through everything, in fact, which makes the citizens better and happier. Hereby, then, it lies in the power of a ruler to benefit every class in the State, and amongst the rest to promote to the utmost the interests of the poor; and this in virtue of his office, and without being open to suspicion of undue interference – since it is the province of the commonwealth to serve the common good. And the more that is done for the benefit of the working classes by the general laws of the country, the less need will there be to seek for special means to relieve them.

**Rerum Novarum ("On the Condition of Labor and the Working Classes")**, Pope Leo XIII, 1891, #32.

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As regards the State, the interests of all, whether high or low, are equal. The members of the working classes are citizens by nature and by the same right as the rich; they are real parts, living the life which makes up, through the family, the body of the commonwealth; and it need hardly be said that they are in every city very largely in the majority. It would be irrational to neglect one portion of the citizens and favor another, and therefore the public administration must duly and solicitously provide for the welfare and the comfort of the working classes; otherwise, that law of justice will be violated which ordains that each man shall have his due. To cite the wise words of St. Thomas Aquinas: "As the part and the whole are in a certain sense identical, so that which belongs to the whole in a sense belongs to the part."<sup>(27)</sup> Among the many and grave duties of rulers who would do their best for the people, the first and chief is to act with strict justice – with that justice which is called distributive – toward each and every class alike.

**Rerum Novarum ("On the Condition of Labor and the Working Classes")**, Pope Leo XIII, 1891, #33.

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The labor of the working class – the exercise of their skill, and the employment of their strength, in the cultivation of the land, and in the workshops of trade – is especially responsible and quite indispensable.

Indeed, their co-operation is in this respect so important that it may be truly said that it is only by the labor of working men that States grow rich. Justice, therefore, demands that the interests of the working classes should be carefully watched over by the administration, so that they who contribute so largely to the advantage of the community may themselves share in the benefits which they create—that being housed, clothed, and bodily fit, they may find their life less hard and more endurable. It follows that whatever shall appear to prove conducive to the well-being of those who work should obtain favorable consideration. There is no fear that solicitude of this kind will be harmful to any interest; on the contrary, it will be to the advantage of all, for it cannot but be good for the commonwealth to shield from misery those on whom it so largely depends for the things that it needs.

**Rerum Novarum (“On the Condition of Labor and the Working Classes”)**, Pope Leo XIII, 1891, #34.

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If we turn not to things external and material, the first thing of all to secure is to save unfortunate working people from the cruelty of men of greed, who use human beings as mere instruments for money-making. It is neither just nor human so to grind men down with excessive labor as to stupefy their minds and wear out their bodies. Man’s powers, like his general nature, are limited, and beyond these limits he cannot go. His strength is developed and increased by use and exercise, but only on condition of due intermission and proper rest. Daily labor, therefore, should be so regulated as not to be protracted over longer hours than strength admits.

**Rerum Novarum (“On the Condition of Labor and the Working Classes”)**, Pope Leo XIII, 1891, #42.

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In all agreements between masters and work people there is always the condition expressed or understood that there should be allowed proper rest for soul and body. To agree in any other sense would be against what is right and just; for it can never be just or right to require on the one side, or to promise on the other, the giving up of those duties which a man owes to his God and to himself.

**Rerum Novarum (“On the Condition of Labor and the Working Classes”)**, Pope Leo XIII, 1891, #42.

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Now, were we to consider labor merely in so far as it is personal, doubtless it would be within the workman’s right to accept any rate of wages whatsoever; for in the same way as he is free to work or not, so is he free to accept a small wage or even none at all. But our conclusion must be very different if, together with the personal element in a man’s work, we consider the fact that work is also necessary for him to live: these two aspects of his work are separable in thought, but not in reality. The preservation of life is the bounden duty of one and all, and to be wanting therein is a crime. It necessarily follows that each one has a natural right to procure what is required in order to live, and the poor can procure that in no other way than by what they can earn through their work.

**Rerum Novarum (“On the Condition of Labor and the Working Classes”)**, Pope Leo XIII, 1891, #44.

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If a workman’s wages be sufficient to enable him comfortably to support himself, his wife, and his children, he will find it easy, if he be a sensible man, to practice thrift, and he will not fail, by cutting down expenses, to put by some little savings and thus secure a modest source of income. Nature itself would urge him to this. We have seen that this great labor question cannot be solved save by assuming as a principle that private

ownership must be held sacred and inviolable. The law, therefore, should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners.

**Rerum Novarum (“On the Condition of Labor and the Working Classes”)**, Pope Leo XIII, 1891, #46.

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The most important of all are workingmen’s unions, for these virtually include all the rest. History attests what excellent results were brought about by the artificers’ guilds of olden times. They were the means of affording not only many advantages to the workmen, but in no small degree of promoting the advancement of art, as numerous monuments remain to bear witness. Such unions should be suited to the requirements of this our age – an age of wider education, of different habits, and of far more numerous requirements in daily life.

**Rerum Novarum (“On the Condition of Labor and the Working Classes”)**, Pope Leo XIII, 1891, #49.

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Therefore, with all our strength and effort we must strive that at least in the future the abundant fruits of production will accrue equitably to those who are rich and will be distributed in ample sufficiency among the workers—not that these may become remiss in work, for man is born to labor as the bird to fly— but that they may increase their property by thrift, that they may bear, by wise management of this increase in property, the burdens of family life with greater ease and security, and that, emerging from the insecure lot in life in whose uncertainties non-owning workers are cast, they may be able not only to endure the vicissitudes of earthly existence but have also assurance that when their lives are ended they will provide in some measure for those they leave after them.

**Quadragesimo Anno (“After Forty Years”)**, Pope Pius XI, 1931, #61.

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Every one should put his hand to the work which falls to his share, and that at once and straightway, lest the evil which is already so great become through delay absolutely beyond remedy. Those who rule the commonwealths should avail themselves of the laws and institutions of the country; masters and wealthy owners must be mindful of their duty; the working class, whose interests are at stake, should make every lawful and proper effort; and since religion alone, as We said at the beginning, can avail to destroy the evil at its root, all men should rest persuaded that main thing needful is to re-establish Christian morals, apart from which all the plans and devices of the wisest will prove of little avail.

**Quadragesimo Anno (“After Forty Years”)**, Pope Pius XI, 1931, #62.

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It is obvious that, as in the case of ownership, so in the case of work, especially work hired out to others, there is a social aspect also to be considered in addition to the personal or individual aspect. For man’s productive effort cannot yield its fruits unless a truly social and organic body exists, unless a social and juridical order watches over the exercise of work, unless the various occupations, being interdependent, cooperate with and mutually complete one another, and, what is still more important, unless mind, material things, and work combine and form as it were a single whole. Therefore, where the social and individual nature of work is neglected, it will be impossible to evaluate work justly and pay it according to justice.

**Quadragesimo Anno (“After Forty Years”)**, Pope Pius XI, 1931, #69.

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In the first place, the worker must be paid a wage sufficient to support him and his family.

**Quadragesimo Anno (“After Forty Years”)**, Pope Pius XI, 1931, #71.

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In determining the amount of the wage, the condition of a business and of the one carrying it on must also be taken into account; for it would be unjust to demand excessive wages which a business cannot stand without its ruin and consequent calamity to the workers. If, however, a business makes too little money, because of lack of energy or lack of initiative or because of indifference to technical and economic progress, that must not be regarded a just reason for reducing the compensation of the workers. But if the business in question is not making enough money to pay the workers an equitable wage because it is being crushed by unjust burdens or forced to sell its product at less than a just price, those who are thus the cause of the injury are guilty of grave wrong, for they deprive workers of their just wage and force them under the pinch of necessity to accept a wage less than fair.

**Quadragesimo Anno (“After Forty Years”)**, Pope Pius XI, 1931, #72.

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Hence it is contrary to social justice when, for the sake of personal gain and without regard for the common good, wages and salaries are excessively lowered or raised; and this same social justice demands that wages and salaries be so managed, through agreement of plans and wills, in so far as can be done, as to offer to the greatest possible number the opportunity of getting work and obtaining suitable means of livelihood.

**Quadragesimo Anno (“After Forty Years”)**, Pope Pius XI, 1931, #74.

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We consider it our duty to reaffirm that the remuneration of work is not something that can be left to the laws of the marketplace; nor should it be a decision left to the will of the more powerful. It must be determined in accordance with justice and equity; which means that workers must be paid a wage which allows them to live a truly human life and to fulfill their family obligations in a worthy manner. Other factors too enter into the assessment of a just wage: namely, the effective contribution which each individual makes to the economic effort, the financial state of the company for which he works, the requirements of the general good of the particular country ... and finally the requirements of the common good of the universal family of nations.

**Mater et Magistra (“Mother and Teacher”)**, Pope John XXII, 1961, #71.

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Experience suggests many ways in which the demands of justice can be satisfied. Not to mention other ways, it is especially desirable today that workers gradually come to share in the ownership of their company, by ways and in the manner that seem most suitable. For today, even more than in the time of Our Predecessor, “every effort must be made that at least in future a just share only of the fruits of production be permitted to accumulate in the hands of the wealthy, and that an ample sufficiency be supplied to the workers.”

**Mater et Magistra (“Mother and Teacher”)**, Pope John XXII, 1961, #77.

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Consequently, if the organization and structure of economic life be such that the human dignity of workers is compromised, or their sense of responsibility is weakened, or their freedom of action is removed, then we judge such an economic order to be unjust, even though it produces a vast amount of goods, whose distribution conforms to the norms of justice and equity.

**Mater et Magistra (“Mother and Teacher”)**, Pope John XXII, 1961, #83.

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The government should make similarly effective efforts to see that those who are able to work can find employment in keeping with their aptitudes, and that each worker receives a wage in keeping with the laws of justice and equity. It should be equally the concern of civil authorities to ensure that workers be allowed their proper responsibility in the work undertaken in industrial organization, and to facilitate the establishment of intermediate groups which will make social life richer and more effective.

**Pacem in Terris (“Peace on Earth”)**, Pope John XXIII, 1963, #64.

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The varieties of crime are numerous: all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where people are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons: all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilization; and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honor of the creator.

**Gaudium et Spes (“The Church in the Modern World”)**, Vatican II, 1965, #27.

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For when people work, they not only alter things and society, they develop themselves as well. They learn much, they cultivate their resources, they go outside of themselves and beyond themselves. Rightly understood, this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. People are more precious for what they are than for what they have. Similarly, all that people do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, a more humane ordering of social relationships has greater worth than technical advances. For these advances can supply the material for human progress, but of themselves alone they can never actually bring it about.

**Gaudium et Spes (“The Church in the Modern World”)**, Vatican II, 1965, #35.

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As the Church solemnly reaffirmed in the recent Council, “the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person.” All people have the right to work, to a chance to develop their qualities and their personalities in the exercise of their professions, to equitable remuneration which will enable them and their families “to lead a worthy life on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level” and to assistance in case of need arising from sickness or age.

**Octogesima Adveniens (“A Call to Action”)**, Pope Paul VI, 1971, #14.

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Human work is the key to the solution . . . of the whole “social question.” To consider work is of decisive importance when trying to make life “more human.”

**Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1981, #3.

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We must pay more attention to the one who works than to what the worker does. The self-realization of the human person is the measure of what is right and wrong.

**Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1981, #6.

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Work is in the first place “for the worker” and not the worker “for work.” Work itself can have greater or lesser objective value, but all work should be judged by the measure of dignity given to the person who carries it out.

**Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1981, #6.

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We must consequently continue to study the situation of the worker. There is a need for solidarity movements among and with the workers. The church is firmly committed to this cause, in fidelity to Christ, and to be truly the “church of the poor.”

**Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1981, #8.

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Work remains a good thing, not only because it is useful and enjoyable, but also because it expresses and increases the worker’s dignity. Through work we not only transform the world, we are transformed ourselves, becoming “more a human being.”

**Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1981, #9.

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Workers not only want fair pay, they also want to share in the responsibility and creativity of the very work process. They want to feel that they are working for themselves — an awareness that is smothered in a bureaucratic system where they only feel themselves to be “cogs” in a huge machine moved from above.

**Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1981, #15.

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Work is a duty, because our Creator demanded it and because it maintains and develops our humanity. We must work out of regard for others, especially our own families, but also because of the society we belong to and in fact because of the whole of humanity.

**Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1981, #16.

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We inherit the work of the generations before us, and we share in the building of the future of all those who will come after us. All this should be kept in mind when considering the rights that come with work or the duty to work.

**Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1981, #16.

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Yet the workers’ rights cannot be doomed to be the mere result of economic systems aimed at maximum profits. The thing that must shape the whole economy is respect for the workers’ rights within each country and all through the world’s economy.

**Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1981, #17.

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Created in God’s image, we were given the mandate to transform the earth. By their work people share in God’s creating activity. . . . 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 and contributing to the realization of God’s plan on earth. The Christian message does not stop us from building the world or make us neglect our fellow human beings. On the contrary it binds us more firmly to do just that.

**Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1981, #25.

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It is in their daily work . . . that persons become the subjects and creators of the economic life of the nation. Thus, it is primarily through their daily labor that people make their most important contributions to economic justice.

**Economic Justice for All**, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986, #96.

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All work has a threefold moral significance. First, it is a principle way that people exercise the distinctive human capacity for self-expression and self-realization. Second, it is the ordinary way for human beings to fulfill their material needs. Finally, work enables people to contribute to the well-being of the larger community. Work is not only for one’s self. It is for one’s family, for the nation, and indeed for the benefit of the entire human family.

**Economic Justice for All**, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986, #97.

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The Church fully supports the right of workers to form unions or other associations to secure their rights to fair wages and working conditions. This is a specific application of the more general right to associate. In the words of Pope John Paul II, “The experience of history teaches that organizations of this type are an indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrial societies.”

**Economic Justice for All**, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986, #104.

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Recognition that the “social question” has assumed a worldwide dimension does not at all mean that it has lost its incisiveness or its national and local importance. On the contrary, it means that the problems in industrial enterprises or in the workers’ and union movements of a particular country or region are not to be considered as isolated cases with no connection. On the contrary they depend more and more on the influence of factors beyond regional boundaries and national frontiers.

**Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (“On Social Concern”)**, Pope John Paul II, 1987, #9.

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Interdependence must be transformed into solidarity, based upon the principle that the goods of creation are meant for all. That which human industry produces through the processing of raw materials, with the contribution of work, must serve equally for the good of all.

**Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (“On Social Concern”)**, Pope John Paul II, 1987, #39.

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Solidarity helps us to see the “other” whether a person, people or nation not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our “neighbor”, a “helper” (cf. Gen 2: 18-20), to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God. Hence the importance of reawakening the religious awareness of individuals and peoples.

**Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (“On Social Concern”)**, Pope John Paul II, 1987, #39.

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In our time, the role of human work is becoming increasingly important as the productive factor both of nonmaterial and of material wealth. Moreover, it is becoming clearer how a person’s work is naturally interrelated with the work of others. More than ever, work is work with others and work for others: it is a matter of doing something for someone else. Work becomes ever more fruitful and productive to the extent that people become more knowledgeable of the productive potentialities of the earth and more profoundly cognizant of the needs of those for whom their work is done.

**Centesimus Annus (“The Hundredth Year,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1991, #31.

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The obligation to earn one's bread presumes the right to do so. A society that denies this right cannot be justified, nor can it attain social peace.

**Centesimus Annus (“The Hundredth Year,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1991, #43.

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Work should not leave people poor but should provide wages sufficient to achieve a standard of living that is in keeping with human dignity. Workers have both an obligation and a right to work, as well as a right to participation, association, and economic initiative. This includes the right to choose to join a union and to bargain collectively.

**A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and Respect the Dignity of All God's Children**, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2002.

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As I have had occasion to say, “work is of fundamental importance to the fulfillment of the human being and to the development of society. Thus, it must always be organized and carried out with full respect for human dignity and must always serve the common good. At the same time, it is indispensable that people not allow themselves to be enslaved by work or to idolize it, claiming to find in it the ultimate and definitive meaning of life.” It is on the day consecrated to God that men and women come to understand the meaning of their lives and also of their work.

**Sacramentum Caritatis (“Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist”)**, Pope Benedict XVI, 2007, #74.

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The market has prompted new forms of competition between States as they seek to attract foreign businesses to set up production centres, by means of a variety of instruments, including favourable fiscal regimes and deregulation of the labour market. These processes have led to a downsizing of social security systems as the price to be paid for seeking greater competitive advantage in the global market, with consequent grave danger for the rights of workers, for fundamental human rights and for the solidarity associated with the traditional forms of the social State.

**Caritas in Veritate (“In Charity and Truth”)**, Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, #25.

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There is no doubt that foreign workers, despite any difficulties concerning integration, make a significant contribution to the economic development of the host country through their labour, besides that which they make to their country of origin through the money they send home. Obviously, these labourers cannot be considered as a commodity or a mere workforce. They must not, therefore, be treated like any other factor of production. Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance.

**Caritas in Veritate (“In Charity and Truth”)**, Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, #62.

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What is meant by the word “decent” in regard to work? It means work that expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman in the context of their particular society: work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both men and women, with the development of their community; work that enables the worker to be respected and free from any form of discrimination; work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children, without the children themselves being forced into labour; work that permits the workers to organize themselves freely, and to make their voices heard; work that leaves enough room for rediscovering one’s roots at a personal, familial and spiritual level; work that guarantees those who have retired a decent standard of living.

**Caritas in Veritate (“In Charity and Truth”)**, Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, #63.

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Yet we desire even more than this; our dream soars higher. We are not simply talking about ensuring nourishment or a “dignified sustenance” for all people, but also their “general temporal welfare and prosperity”. This means education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labour that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives. A just wage enables them to have adequate access to all the other goods which are destined for our common use.

**Evangelii Gaudium (“The Joy of the Gospel”)**, Pope Francis, 2013, #192.

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It is vital that government leaders and financial leaders take heed and broaden their horizons, working to ensure that all citizens have dignified work, education and healthcare. Why not turn to God and ask him to inspire their plans? I am firmly convinced that openness to the transcendent can bring about a new political and economic mindset which would help to break down the wall of separation between the economy and the common good of society.

**Evangelii Gaudium (“The Joy of the Gospel”)**, Pope Francis, 2013, #205.

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If we reflect on the proper relationship between human beings and the world around us, we see the need for a correct understanding of work; if we talk about the relationship between human beings and things, the question arises as to the meaning and purpose of all human activity... Underlying every form of work is a concept of the relationship which we can and must have with what is other than ourselves.

**Laudato Si’ (“Praise Be”)**, Pope Francis, 2015 #125.

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We were created with a vocation to work. The goal should not be that technological progress increasingly replace human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity. Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment. Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work.

**Laudato Si’ (“Praise Be”)** Pope Francis, 2015 #128.