

# PUTTING PEOPLE ON THE ROAD TO WORK



I have a job. Why should I care about the employment of others? The answer comes when we expand our vision beyond ourselves to include our "neighbor" and the common good.

There are many roads into poverty, and many people are but one unfortunate circumstance away. One of the major highways out of poverty is regular employment with sufficient income to sustain life and dignity for individuals and families.

A pillar of Catholic Social Teaching is the dignity of work. We support policies, laws, programs, and practices which help people to achieve gainful employment. Employment, in turn, promotes the health and well-being of families and society.

In the current era of high unemployment, the toll is heavy on both individuals and society. Individuals and families are often thrown into desperate circumstances. Demands (and costs) on social safety nets skyrocket. The health, viability, and stability of villages, towns, and cities - all are negatively impacted. When poverty increases, everyone pays the price.

We have a choice. We can turn a deaf ear to the needs of our stricken brothers and sisters, leaving them fall back on charity, government aid, and social services for survival. Or we can advocate for policies and programs which put people on the road to work.

For people living in poverty (including the working poor), secondary support systems are often necessary to obtain or maintain employment. Among these are job training, affordable child care, and transportation to and from work. These are enablers to employment self-sufficiency.

When governments are forced to tighten their belts, programs to help the poor and working poor are at greater risk of indiscriminate cuts, because advocates for the poor do not have the political influence of powerful, special interest groups.

As Catholics, we must be vigilant, encouraging our representatives to apply prudence and intelligence to budget decisions. Short-sighted decisions can have serious long-term repercussions for individuals, families, and society as a whole.

Budgets are moral documents. They make profound statements about our values and priorities. As Catholics, we have a moral obligation to assure the government does not systematically ignore or oppress our brothers and sisters in need. Fighting poverty by putting people on the road to work - that is a goal that enriches us all.

