



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO GROUPS OF THE "POLICORO PROJECT"
OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Monday, 14 December 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I cordially welcome you. Thank you for coming in such numbers!

The Policoro Project was born 20 years ago, a fruit of the Ecclesiastical Congress of Palermo. The project came about for a specific purpose: to identify answers to the existential question of so many young people who risk passing from having no *work occupation* to having no *life occupation*.

In its attempt to combine the Gospel with the practicality of life, this Project immediately represented a great initiative for the advancement of young people, a real occasion for local development on a national scale. Its powerful ideas marked its success: training young people, launching cooperatives, creating intermediaries, such as "community animators", and a long series of tangible actions, a visible sign of effective, active commitment over these 20 years.

With its practical attention to the territory and to the search for shared solutions, the Policoro Project has shown how the quality of "free, creative, participative and mutually supportive" work expresses and always makes the *dignity* of human life itself grow (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 192). We must not lose sight of the urgency to reaffirm this dignity! It is proper to each and all. Every worker has the right to see himself protected, and in particular, young people must be able to cultivate the confidence that their efforts, their enthusiasm, the investment of their energy and their resources will not be futile.

How many young people today are victims of unemployment! When there is no work, dignity is at risk, because not only does the lack of work prevent a person from bringing the bread home, it prevents one from feeling worthy of earning one's livelihood! Young people are victims of this today. How many of them by now have stopped looking for work, resigned to the continuous rejection or indifference of a society that rewards only the privileged — even if they are corrupt — and impedes those who deserve to establish themselves. The reward seems to go to those who are self-assured, even though this security was acquired by corruption. Work is not a gift conceded to a few with a recommendation: it is a right for everyone!

You certainly represent a tangible sign of hope for the many who have not resigned, but have decided to commit themselves with courage to create or improve their own work opportunities. My invitation is that you continue to promote initiatives to involve youth *in a communal and participative way*. There is often so much solitude behind a work project: sometimes our young people have to face a thousand difficulties without any help. The family, which also supports them, — often also economically — cannot do very much, and many are compelled to give up, discouraged.

You can do your part here. To the question, “What does the Church have to do with my situation” — which you have said and heard so many times — the answer has been “testimony”. And here you can give your own testimony, shoulder to shoulder with those in need of courage, of support. Support the new energy outlaid for work; adopt a style of creativity that draws minds and arms around the same table; think together, plan together, receive together and give help: these are the most effective ways to express solidarity as a gift. And here the Church plays her part, because she is Mother of all! The Church gathers everyone around the table.

Thus, young people rediscover the “vocation” to work — the vocation to work, which is one of the traits of human dignity; there is no vocation to laziness, but to work —, the lofty sense of commitment that also goes beyond its economic result, in order to build the world, society and life. Often the idea of work as “fulfillment” of the person has been confused with a certain model of wealth and wellbeing, which takes on inhuman rhythms. Let it not be so for you: it is better to educate the younger generations to seek the right proportion. One learns what is truly necessary at the school of the Gospel, so that our life does not slip through our fingers, following the idols of a false wellbeing.

Therefore, the correct way is found at the school of the Gospel. It's true, Jesus did not directly teach us how to invent work opportunities for ourselves, but His word does not cease to be timely, practical, alive, capable of touching the whole man and all men. It speaks to us today as well: it exhorts us to make of our ideas, of our plans, of our will to do and to create good news for the world.

Your task is not simply to help young people find an occupation: it is also *the responsibility to*

evangelize, through *the sanctifying value* of work. Not of any work! Not of labour that exploits, that crushes, that humiliates, that mortifies, but of labour that renders man truly free, in keeping with his noble dignity.

Thank you for your commitment. I entrust you to the intercession of St Joseph the Worker. May the Face of God's mercy, which always illumined the Holy Family entrusted to him in custody, shine on your path and show you ways of creativity and hope. I have your work close at heart, because it pains me to see so many young people without work, unemployed. To think that here in Italy, for 25 years almost 40% of young people have been unemployed! What does a young person without work do? He gets sick and has to go to the psychiatrist, or he falls into addictions or commits suicide — the statistics of youth suicides are not published, cover-ups are used to avoid publishing them — or he seeks something that gives him an ideal and becomes a guerrilla. Just think: these young people are our flesh, they are the flesh of Christ and therefore our work must continue to support them and to suffer within ourselves the hidden, silent anguish, which so troubles their heart. I assure you of my prayers, I am close to you: count on me for this, because this greatly touches me. And please, do not forget to pray for me, because I too am in need of prayers.

Our Lady watched St Joseph as he taught Jesus how to work. Let us pray that Our Lady may teach us to help find work, to work for so many young people.