



# Dignity and Work:

## 3. Calling for the Defence of the 'Right to Rest'

**The Church says that work is a means to the ends of personal fulfilment, family formation and social engagement. It is not an end in itself. Work is for the benefit of humanity, not the other way around. Time for relaxation with family and friends is a social benefit of work that must be protected as a 'right to rest':**

In the first place this involves a regular weekly rest comprising at least Sunday, and also a longer period of rest, namely the holiday or vacation taken once a year or possibly in several shorter periods during the year.

[*Laborem Exercens* n.19]

We are a hard-working nation. An Australia Institute study estimates that over half of Australia's workers are doing unpaid overtime – work that contributes \$128 billion to employers each year. Nearly half of all full-time workers feel overworked and want to work fewer hours, yet are failing to take leave to which they are entitled. On the other hand, one third of part-time workers and nearly half of all casual workers are seeking more hours, no matter how irregular those hours of work are. Households on less than \$40,000 per annum are far more likely to be seeking additional hours.

Anything that takes us away from family and intrudes on normal times of rest is a problem. But it is a particular problem for low-paid workers engaged on an irregular basis and having to work on weekends and public holidays. Think for example of those in the retail and hospitality sector who are regularly in the position of having to sacrifice time with family or friends.

Pope Francis says this intrusion of work undermines the 'true moment of celebration' that brings work to a pause and allows for personal reflection, the gathering of family and friends and important communal engagement in worship, recreation and cultural events:

The time for rest, especially on Sunday, is ordained for us so that we can enjoy what is not produced and not consumed, not bought and not sold. Instead we see that the ideology of profit and consumerism even wants to feed on celebration: it too is sometimes reduced to a 'business', to a way of making and spending money ... It harms true labour and consumes life.



## Dignity and Work Calling for the Defence of the 'Right to Rest'

We need to reject the notion that the weekend can be sacrificed to a '24/7 economy' or that Sunday is 'just another day' in the trading cycle. Most Australians work Monday to Friday between 8.00 am and 6.00 pm and Sunday remains predominantly a non-work day. It is the consensus of Australians that those having to work on weekends, particularly Sundays, should be compensated for their sacrifice of common time. An Essential Media Poll has found that 81 per cent of people surveyed believe that employees working irregular hours should receive penalty rates. Around 70 per cent oppose cutting weekend and public holiday penalty rates. If workers are required to work irregular hours, they should be fairly compensated.

It is time for us to rediscover the importance of the Sabbath for our own good and the good of our families and community. In their 2012–2013 Social Justice Statement, the Australian Catholic Bishops said that the biblical notion of Sabbath offers an antidote to the frenetic competition for time that intrudes so much into family life. It is not simply a prohibition against working on Sundays, but involves the promotion of personal and family fulfilment through worship, relaxation and freedom from the demands of the working week.

Sabbath informs our concern for social justice for the most vulnerable workers. For on the Sabbath, people are freed from the bonds of being producers or consumers. We do not have someone looking over our shoulder or watching the clock. On this day we are not defined by what we do or what status we hold in the workplace. It is also a time of equity and justice; everyone shares the 'right to rest', not just those who can afford it.

### Find out more

Read the Bishops' Statement, *The Gift of Family in Difficult Times*:

<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/files/SJSandresources/2012-SJS-Statement.pdf>

Read Pope Francis' words on Sabbath and the family:

[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150812\\_udienza-generale.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150812_udienza-generale.html)

Here is an interesting article, 'Recovering the Sabbath' from *ABC Religion and Ethics*:

<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/09/29/4096774.htm>

The Australia Institute paper, *Workin' 9 to 5.30*, can be found here: <http://www.tai.org.au/content/workin-9-530-unpaid-overtime-and-work-life-balance>

The Essential Media Poll on penalty rates can be found here: <http://www.essentialvision.com.au/tag/penalty-rates>

### Lend your support

Visit the 'Save our weekends' campaign: <http://www.saveourweekend.org.au/>



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