



Something of the CREATOR

An introduction to *The Vocation of the Agricultural Leader* document

“Give us this day our daily bread.”
(Mt. 6:11)

To all those who labor in order to produce “our daily bread,” to all those who work to provide nourishing food for the human family – farmers, harvesters, ranchers, food processors, marketers, and distributors – to each and every one of you, the Church extends its deepest expressions of gratitude and esteem for the noble work of feeding the human family of God.

All of our food, indeed all that nourishes us, comes first from our heavenly Father, through the gift of the earth and the work of human hands. On this fundamental point we cannot be mistaken: every good gift, including our daily sustenance, is from the Father above (James 1:16-17).

The farmer, therefore, holds a crucial place in the common family of man and a unique role in the fulfillment of God’s plan. For through their determined labor, those who work in agriculture cooperate with divine providence and make manifest God’s care for each one of his children. Their work is not merely an effort to meet a basic human necessity. Nor is it just an economic endeavor, reducible to solely questions of profit and cost. Instead, at its core, the commitment to agriculture is a vocation given by God, a unique and privileged way of life. Indeed, of all the occupations undertaken by men and women, the task of “tilling and keeping the earth” reaches to the depths of our relationships with God the Creator, with creation and with all of humanity.

The origins of the vocation of the farmer (and all who tend to food and fiber) extend to the foundations of the human community, the “pre-history” of the Sacred Scriptures, when Genesis records the moment when God placed man in the garden in order to till it and keep it (Gn. 2:15). The vocation to care for the earth and to bring forth its fruits emerges from the original condition of man within Creation. This privileged way of life precedes the trauma of original sin and provides an insight into the place of the human person within the broader order of creation. From the very beginning, whether through the cultivation of its fruits, the preservation of its lands or the contemplation of its beauty, man finds in his engagement with creation, an encounter with the Creator Himself. “For the heavens declare the glory of the Lord,” (Ps. 19.1) and through these created realities, we can discern the wisdom of the Creator at work (Rm. 1:20). Like every gift from God, creation itself shows us something of the Creator, his Wisdom and Provident care.

The Purpose of this Document: Agricultural Leadership

We employ the term “agricultural leader” in a broad sense, recognizing that the variety of situations around the world will call for unique insights about its meaning and significance. For agricultural activity is not solely concerned with the production of food, even if this constitutes the central expression; rather, agriculture takes place in a context of social, cultural and ecological ac-

Last year, before he was elected to the CRL Board of directors, Kelly Spiering hosted a special outdoor Mass at his family farm outside Powell, Wyo.. He spoke with CRL President Bishop Paul Etienne at the August 2nd 2015 event, whose homily celebrated the agricultural vocation.



tivities. Whether as a farm leader in a local community or a corporate executive participating in a global economy, every one involved in agriculture contributes to the common good of the human family, meets a fundamental need for nutritious food on a daily basis, and draws from the earth the resources it is destined by Providence to yield.

An “agricultural leader,” in this context, is simply someone who recognizes and affirms the responsibilities they have toward others, to God, and creation itself. We seek to engage the range of occupations and professions encompassing the broad sectors of agriculture and food production, including farm organizations and agribusinesses, farmworker organizations, regional and national policymakers, academia and research groups, nutrition advocates, and rural community leaders. Agricultural leaders are found all along the “food chain” that stretches from agricultural inputs to food production and distribution, including those who set policies or create the conditions for a safe, productive, healthy food system.

Our aim and purpose in this document is to serve as a spiritual guide for agricultural leaders in affirming the dignity of the farmer. We seek to encourage their commitments to the common good of all, including the care of the earth, and to foster an understanding of their work as more than simply a necessary task or business undertaking; rather, their work is a vocation, a form of life through which God can be known, served, and glorified. We share in the perspective of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *The Vocation of the Business Leader*, when it states:

“Business leaders who do not see themselves serving others and God in their working lives will fill the void of purpose with a less worthy substitute. The divided life

is not unified or integrated: it is fundamentally disordered, and thus fails to live up to God’s call.”¹

It is essential – especially in this age of secularization and the temptation to neglect God – to encourage a deeper reflection upon agriculture as a vocation, and the responsibilities this implies. In his most recent encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis calls each of us to a profound interior conversion, and to recognize that our encounter with Jesus Christ impacts our relationships with the world around us. “Living our vocations to be protectors of God’s handiwork,” he says, “is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience.” (LS, 217) His encyclical provides many of the insights for this document and establishes the context from which these reflections emerge.

We envision this document to be used as a prompt for prayerful reflection on the responsibilities of the agricultural leader. We hope that this document encourages you to enter more fully into a spirit of discernment, confident that “If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.” (James 1:5)

¹ The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *The Vocation of the Business Leader* (2013), §10.

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