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Sanctifying Ordinary Work: the Job of Looking for a Job

When he retired, Marco started helping the unemployed in his hometown of Verona, Italy, to find work. "I am happy that God is making use of my talents to continue helping other people."

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A baker who after decades of work becomes allergic to flour; a single mother with a newborn baby; an

orphan who grew up with his grandparents... What do all these people have in common? They are all looking for work now, and Marco's job is to help them find it.

Of course, this was not always Marco's profession; he started this venture only after he retired. After studying literature and working for several years in the publishing industry, both on the editorial side as well as in finance, Marco taught literature in a middle school for a number of years. Later on, he was in charge of personnel for a food industry, doing training for companies.

But ever since he retired, Marco has been helping the unemployed in Verona, the city where he has always lived, to get back into the work force through the *Assegno per il lavoro* project. "I get to know these people and try to do a sort of professional

coaching," Marco says. "I reinvent their stories and try to find their strong points and talents."

The people Marco has helped come from a variety of backgrounds. He says it's increasingly common to find people who are advanced in their professional lives and who have been overwhelmed by recent events. "Sometimes I meet a person who has worked in the same position for decades," Marco says. "At the age of 55, they are suddenly unemployed because their company has closed down. It's very complicated to reinvent yourself at that age."

"What I try to convey to people who are looking for work are the things that I have experienced first-hand. After working in the publishing industry for a number of years, I embraced the opportunity to start teaching at the age of 40.

"But I've also learned a lot from the work I'm doing right now. Some people I try to find work for present a lot of challenges; that's what happened to me with one of the first persons I helped. We did a 24-hour course together, spread out over three months. He spent most of the time complaining about the obstacles he was encountering. But at the end of the course, he was very grateful, especially since I always gave him a chance to vent his concerns. I realized that, although the end of a course might not result in a job, many people are happy because they have succeeded in discovering things about themselves."

But how can a person keep their spirits high at such a difficult moment, when the search for work feels like a hopeless enterprise? Marco, who says he inherited a spirit of initiative from his father (who died at the age of 102), insists: "The

right attitude is that of an inner yes to reality." Besides helping people develop the skills needed for their job search, "I think about how I can help these people on a human level. A lot of them are often alone. Although some of them don't have faith, we can also share a moment of prayer together. I always carry several rosaries with me in case we can pray to Our Lady together."

"For me, the inner challenge is to be another Jesus in the place where I find myself, even in the midst of the most difficult and daunting situations, and even with people who have registered for a job-search program without any real hope of finding work."

"I have been a member of Opus Dei for more than fifty years," Marco says, "and I am happy that God is making use of my talents to continue helping other people. I realize I am

called to be Christ for them,
accompanying these people who are
looking for work."

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