

Leader's message November 2009

by Richard Kiniry

In early October I spent a day down the Jersey Shore with family. They were looking for a rental for next summer, which was settled fairly quickly. So we had time to sit on the quiet beach enjoying a glorious day with the sun, sky and ocean as the birds enjoyed the bather-free sand and surf. I was uncomplicatedly happy.

As we drove back to Philadelphia, I started thinking about my (our) overly busy life (lives) and about how much is missed when I (we) put off enjoying the day for activity that I (we) allow to fill my (our) time. Not that work isn't often enjoyable and worthwhile but for too much of the time work is toil and there are so many other activities that feel like work and fill our free time. Nature, family, friends, music, art, sport are forced into small spaces that become part of a hectic life.

With that in mind I want to offer the idea that alternate approaches to living are not only good for a person's health and happiness but can have effects on our larger community.

There are a number of reasons for stepping out of the "rat race." The world won't end if we stop and smell the roses. Life is short, and we miss a lot if we stay busy with not only work but also with the silly, ready-made leisure activities our culture offers. Being less obsessed with our own agenda and taking time to appreciate our surroundings and those with whom we work or play can expand our living and it adds a note of appreciation to others' lives. It is hard to "bring out the best in others" if we don't take the time to notice, listen and appreciate.

Beside that there is our socioeconomic reality. Technology has replaced human muscle as the source of productivity. And as a result there are fewer jobs and lower wages in traditional employment. We do the world a favor if we work less and leave a job to others. France has instituted a 35-hour work week that – besides leaving more time for leisure – creates jobs. For every seven workers on a 35-hour week, one new job is created. And as we know the French are famous for enjoying quality living.

There is also an environmental aspect. The rat race of modern living has been created by using human beings and nature's resources as so much fodder for the industrial machine and that machine has run its course. It is no longer tenable. New approaches to work and use of resources must be found and that creates a need for work that is both "green" and expresses human freedom – ways of taking nature and daily living away from the machine. Individuals can be creative in finding new ways of serving human needs that are respectful of nature and that operate at a pace that opens up time for diverse interests such as a day at the beach. We can decide we don't need many of the things the machine has convinced us are essential, exchanging those things for time spent with our fellow human beings.

Again, life is short and being more deliberate in the way we live can create more happiness and serve as an act of kindness to the earth.

