NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Extending an apology to those caught in the unemployment epidemic

April Gutierrez | Dec. 26, 2013 Young Voices

"I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures." -- Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium [1] *(49).*

At the end of 2009, my husband was literally the poster person for the unemployment epidemic in our country, pictured holding our newborn son on the cover of *The New York Times* [2], after losing a full-time job in ministry. Until Sept. 3 of this year, I was receiving unemployment checks. I was out of work for five months. I took my son out of his preschool to be home with me and tried to find ways for us to get out whenever possible. We frequented the zoo, as we already had a membership, and went to the public library in between my hours at home trying to decipher the necessary unemployment paperwork and applying to jobs in the area.

One of the most prevalent emotions I experienced both when my husband was unemployed and during my recent period of unemployment was tremendous isolation and loneliness. My life had changed so significantly, and all of my friends continued living the life I knew and missed -- dinners out, work banter, the daytime busyness. We awkwardly no longer knew what to say to one another, so visits were less frequent.

After months of being unemployed, a friend and former co-worker whom I hadn't seen in years stopped by. When she arrived, we shared a meal and caught one another up on general updates, then while sitting at the dining room table she invited my husband and me to tell our story, the full story, listening intently to every aspect. She then did something incredibly powerful -- she apologized. She'd had no hand in the wrongdoing that led to my situation. But she knew we would never receive an apology, reconciliation or even acknowledgement from those who did. She apologized for our church, perhaps for the good we'd all failed to do, saying simply that we deserved better. My husband cried, and he's not a crier.

When I was a child, I remember finding the words to express my regret or sorrow for something I had done quite challenging. Even now, I much prefer to try to fix a situation than have to say I'm sorry. So to have someone apologize for something that was in no way her own fault was profound and exactly the healing I needed. I realized I would never receive an apology from those who had wronged me, and she knew this, too. Our faith can lead us to be that healing force as an intermediary grace by acknowledging a wrong happening on a systemic level through a very personal message in a request for forgiveness.

On Dec. 28, while many of us will still be decking the halls celebrating the Christmas season, 1.3 million unemployed people currently receiving benefits will lose them. This number does not include the additional million or more who will lose them in early 2014, as well.

This week, Rex Huppke said in his *Chicago Tribune* column "A sincere message for the jobless among us [3]": "I am sorry to each and every one of you, all 1.3 million, who will be losing your unemployment benefits. You deserve help, not a political brushoff."

It is all too often that we look at our ongoing unemployment crisis and say, "That's so messed up. That's such a problem." The word *that* in the preceding phrases is an outstretched arm, keeping this terrible phenomenon at a safe distance. When I was out of work, I heard those phrases often. Something changes when someone says "*I'm* sorry," "*We're* sorry." The difference is involvement, an acknowledgement that in some indirect way, I have contributed to this, even if only through the good I've failed to do. When we take responsibility, things may actually change. The jobless in our families, our communities and our nation need to hear "*We're* sorry."

I am sorry and want to honor the dignity and worthiness in all who are unemployed.

Let Your God Love You

Be silent.
Be still.
Alone.
Empty
Before your God.
Say nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God look upon you.
That is all.
God knows.
God understands.
God love you
With an enormous love,
And only wants
To look upon you
With that love.
Quiet.
Still.
Be.
Let your God --
Love you.

-- *Edwina Gately, from* Whispers: Conversation with Edwina Gately *(Chicago: Source Books, 2000), by Edwina Gately and Jane Hammond-Clarke*

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