



Peace and all good! My name is Toby Harkleroad. I am a Secular Franciscan and I work as the Director of Campaigns for Franciscan Action Network.

I invite you to spend the next few minutes with me as I share with you about how one Franciscan, Dr. Gary Russell, is striving to “see things anew with the eyes of the heart” in terms of the economic systems that surround us.

As we proceed on our Lenten journeys we are called to pray and act as part of our toolkits for personal conversion. Specifically, almsgiving and fasting are traditional penitential practices that draw our minds and hearts to the poor.

As Franciscans we are especially attuned to those who are in poverty. On one hand, we Franciscans emphasize living voluntary poverty and simplicity in our own lives, but at the same time we weep for those who are poor due to marginalization, oppression, and negligence and we feel obligated to care for the poor.

Gary Russell is a Canadian who has had a life of work and passion for labor organizing which has been coupled with a second career as an economics professor. But, Gary says that he felt conflicted as a professor because he did not truly believe in the capitalist or Marxist theories that he was teaching about.

Now, in his 70s, Gary is on a quest to critique existing economic systems while promoting new ways of thinking about economics that are rooted in the 800 years of lived experience of Franciscans combined with the countless generations of experience of the indigenous peoples of Canada.

Gary recently became a Third Order Franciscan in the Anglican tradition, he is also a lay canon in the Diocese of Rupert's Land working as a volunteer on issues of justice and peace. Our Christian faith is intimately connected to how Gary views economic systems.

In reflecting on the economic thinking and practices of Franciscans and indigenous peoples, Gary has come up with 9 critiques of conventional economic systems. For instance, Gary observes that contemporary economics denies the principle of abundance that is present in both the Franciscan and indigenous traditions. Gary raises multiple questions to help us think through what it means for us as people of faith to focus on scarcity instead of seeing and being in awe of the abundance that God has created. In a sense, scarcity forces us to ignore the greatness of God and the belief that God pours out unlimited grace on all.

Gary is not alone in dreaming new ways of thinking economically. Spurred on by the Vatican, the "Economy of Francesco" is a project attempting to use Catholic Social Teaching and especially the teachings of Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* and *Laudato Si*.

While it is vital for us to minister directly to people on the economic margins, it is *also* vital for us to imagine and work for systems where poverty is not tolerated. We need to dream to have hope! Gary and the scholars working on the Economy of Francesco are leading us in dreaming. I encourage you to read and ponder Gary's thoughts on [Radical Grace and the Economy](#) and to learn more about the [Economy of Francesco](#) so that you too can dream of economic systems that utilize the eyes of heart to see the world anew.

May your Lenten journey continue, filled with the ABUNDANCE of God's unlimited grace!