

# A Blessing on Our Homes

## WORKING AT HOME - THE STUDY

Figure 1.

Ted Baker

Fareham Borough Council, Civic Offices



© the copyright holder. Photo credit: Fareham Borough Council

Figure 2.

Espresso

P. J. Crook (b.1945)

County Hall, Leicestershire County Council Artworks Collection



© the artist / Bridgeman Images. Photo credit: Leicestershire County Council Artworks Collection

Figure 3.

Woman Spinning  
Thomas Stuart Smith (1813–1869)  
The Stirling Smith Art Gallery & Museum



Photo credit: The Stirling Smith Art Gallery & Museum

Figure 4.

Crafts – Soft Toys  
**unknown artist**

Glenside Hospital Museum



© the copyright holder. Photo credit: Glenside Hospital Museum

Figure 5.

Interior Study  
Mary Dawson Elwell (1874–1952)  
Ferens Art Gallery



© the copyright holder. Photo credit: Ferens Art Gallery

## A Blessing on Our Homes

Given the subject matter the following rubric may or may not seem appropriate:

---

**Make each place special for a day by placing a symbol in the room being blessed.**

This could be a candle (careful if there are children in the house), a family photo, a significant ornament or statue, a cross, a vase of flowers etc... This will help to bring your attention to that place each time you pass or enter.

---

## Study: Working at Home

### *Scripture*

*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So, God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.* Genesis 1: 31 -2: 3

### **Opening Prayer**

We give thanks for the gift that is home,  
We bless the one who gave us life that we might experience love  
We bless the ones with whom we live and share that love.  
We bless this day and watch for the blessings it holds in wait.  
We bless those we know and love now in their own homes.  
May we always be truly grateful and ever-loving good Lord. Amen.

One phenomenon that has been turbo-charged by the restrictions imposed to combat the Covid 19 virus is “working from home”. The advent of computer technology has been the great driver of this practice. It brings advantages for business in reducing the overheads incurred in providing office space, car allowances etc. It can also have benefits for the employee; especially a saving of the time, money and stress associated with commuting. Other possible advantages might be, greater flexibility in working hours and sometimes assisting with childcare in some instances etc.

Some homes enjoy the luxury of a dedicated space to act as a study, home office or craft-room. Most however, are having to commandeer spaces already in use for other purposes and this is less than ideal in many instances and can be regarded as an intrusion on home life that breaches the sanctity of home as a “work free zone”.

So, over time the home has been drawn into the functioning of the economy in ways previously unknown. Although of course this statement is not entirely true. The manner of work and the instruments that enable some work to be done at home may have changed; but working from home has always existed. And like those other unsung and unpaid contributions to the welfare and prosperity of society: child-care, housekeeping and care of elderly or needy relatives, this work has mostly been undertaken by women. That said other activities related to DIY, gardening and motor mechanics, again not solely the preserve of men, were once type cast as such.

This reflection ranges a little wider than previous ones in addressing activities over locations. Some of these activities we call earning a living; and although many of them take place beyond the home they form part of our contribution to the household. We can lose sight of this and either become obsessed with the work and our own personal satisfaction, ambition or career in ways that might eventually imperil the stability of home. Or the work we do may be so tiring, tedious, time consuming and unrewarding financially that it is hard to give ourselves the credit we are due for doing it all for the benefit of those we love.

Our relationship with the idea of work has always been ambiguous. Even in the Book of Genesis we hear of how God works to bring creation into being and takes a deserved rest on the seventh day. Yet when Adam and Eve fall foul of God’s plans the prospect of perpetual manual labour is imposed as one sanction.

Jesus, as we know was raised by an artisan; for Joseph was a craftsman. The word we tend to translate as carpenter encompasses all kinds of trades related to building. Joseph was an all-rounder; and it is more than likely that Jesus picked up many of these skills too.

Jesus’ first preference for followers was among fishermen, but he also welcomed someone with a more tarnished occupation, Matthew the tax collector. This call incidentally is captured beautifully in a famous Caravaggio painting found in the church of Saint Louis in Rome.

Saint Paul was proud of the fact that his work as a tent maker ensured that he wasn’t beholden to other benefactors when he was on his missionary tours.

This idea of self sufficiency lay behind the way of life adopted by the earliest monks and has been most clearly expressed in the phrase *ora et labora*, prayer and work sitting side by side in the Rule of Saint Benedict. Work in this context was never the main purpose of the monastic life but nonetheless an essential part of it. It was more than a matter of utility. Work was seen as a means of strengthening the monk against tendencies to idleness. More positively it was invested with a spiritual meaning. Work is a good, even Godly part of a balanced human life. It contributes to fulfilling the mandate we received to be good

stewards of creation and in doing this we share in the gifts of creativity, ingenuity and collaboration.

It is entirely appropriate then for us to invest the tasks we perform in the home with dignity. Likewise, we have good reason to develop our skills in hobbies and crafts and see them as more than pastimes and as a way of expressing our creativity.

Taking this perspective comes into its own, in a particular way, in the context of preparing for and adjusting to the, often stressful processes associated with retirement. If we have already embraced the home as a valid and enjoyable place to spend productive time. This can include intellectual development. Engaging if we choose in true life-long learning, U3A (University of the Third Age) etc

### **Hymn Verse**

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,  
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe:  
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,  
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

### **Blessing Prayer**

There may not be a place dedicated to work in this home  
But we take the opportunity to acknowledge  
The contribution of everyone to the family budget,  
Earning income from outside work or at home.  
But because it's a home we want to say thank you  
for the other kinds of work we do.  
Children who discover that homework is not just a chore,  
But part of enabling us to live happier, healthier and more interesting lives.  
Tasks like cleaning, cooking, washing, decorating and gardening  
Also deserve a thank you and a willingness to play our part.  
So, we give thanks today not for a room or a place,  
But for what we do to help provide this home  
With so many of the things we enjoy, need and value.  
Amen.

## ARTWORK NOTES

Figure 1. **Fareham Borough Council, Civic Offices** (1992) Ted Baker, © the copyright holder. Photo credit: Fareham Borough Council.

The juxtaposition of a 20th tower block of Council Offices with a row of cottage style properties handily suggests how life has changed exponentially from one in which many people lived in a rural setting and try to recreate it even in urban settings. It also acts helps to illustrate one of the points made above namely that there has also been a shift over recent days and months in the opposite direction with domestic dwellings assuming a larger role in the pattern of working life. How permanent this may become for some remains to be seen.

Figure 2. **Espresso** P. J. Crook (b.1945) County Hall, Leicestershire County Council Artworks Collection © the artist / Bridgeman Images. Photo credit: Leicestershire County Council Artworks Collection.

One aspect of working away from home that won't be missed by many is commuting. What is interesting about this scene is the possibility that the railway travellers are heading in the opposite direction from the similarly suited hoard outside the carriage. I once remember reading a quote saying that when you are going in the opposite direction of the majority you will probably be accused of running away. But every so often economies and societies make big shifts that only a few perceive are going on.

Figure 3. **Woman Spinning** by Thomas Stuart Smith (1813–1869), The Stirling Smith Art Gallery & Museum, Photo credit: The Stirling Smith Art Gallery & Museum

Finally, we reach an image that reflects more specifically on the artisan activities that have long been associated with a domestic setting, many like spinning are tasks undertaken by women. Now, the Old Testament may not be the obvious place to look for too many positive images or attitudes towards women; but one comes close in this regard and it is the final chapter of the Book of Proverbs 31: 10-31. Given the social context it at least demonstrates some appreciation of the too easily disregarded and disparaged contribution of women in strictly patriarchal societies. There is even a hint here of women as canny entrepreneurs.

Figure 4. **Crafts- Soft Toys** unknown artist Glenside Hospital Museum. © the copyright holder. Photo credit: Glenside Hospital Museum

The fact that this painting forms part of a collection associated with a hospital suggests that the women making crafted toys were volunteers. But it still allows us to recognise the entrepreneurial spirit that motivates many small businesses today. Some make it on to the Dragon's Den to be put through the ringer even humiliated in pursuit of their dreams. A great number of these ideas germinate in a domestic setting and again illustrate that home economics does not only refer to cookery lessons at school. Providing for the family and fulfilling our own potential can demand a great deal and it deserves recognition.

Figure 5. **Interior Study**, Mary Dawson Elwell (1874–1952), Ferens Art Gallery. © the copyright holder. Photo credit: Ferens Art Gallery

And yes, some people do enjoy the luxury of a room dedicated to their work, be it the artist's studio, the writer's garret, a 'gentleman's study' as in this painting, a n office in the box room, space on a landing or, as in my case, a bedroom converted into a study/library. Indeed, it is a luxury to have more space than many others enjoy and is best not taken for granted. But such rooms represent the potential we all have, especially when circumstances allow or even by sheer determination, to pursue activities which may not produce Family income but still allow us the joy, the satisfaction and the pleasure of using our skills, our interests and our creativity.

### **CRAFTY KIDS**

Today you are invited to think about children who live in countries where there are no supplies of water in their homes. They sometimes have to risk drinking water that can make them very ill. Some children are given the job of walking long o to collect water for the family. We are very lucky to live in a home where water is available all the time and that is something to be very grateful for. It makes us think about so many of the things we have that make our lives healthier, happier and more interesting. So perhaps it is a good day to say thank you to our parents for the work they do at home and at work to help us. Use your imagination to come up with a way of saying thank you. How about giving them a small book of IOU's that promise to do some small but tasks around the home, so you play your part.