

# Putting Labor into **LABOR DAY** Liturgies

Honor  
the  
*Sacredness*  
of Work



There are many ways that the Church can and does equip Christians for their work in the world. One common time for supporting Christians in the workplace and for highlighting aspects of Catholic Social Teaching that relate to work-life is during services held around Labor Day weekend.

The average church-going adult in the U.S. spends 50-60 hours at work, about that many hours at home with family members and doing family chores, and only 1-2 in church services.

Appropriately so, the Catholic Church has long viewed its mission as equipping Christians to live out their faith in their work lives and their home lives. This is right and good.

This resource guide has been developed to offer worship aides and suggestions for services held during Labor Day weekend, but the resources can be used whenever you choose. All items can be adapted or copied.

As the Roman Catholic current and former board members of Interfaith Worker Justice, we hope this resource is helpful to you. May God bless you in your ministry.

Mr. Tom Chabolla, Service Employees International Union

Mr. Bob DeRose, Barkan Neff Handelman Meizlish, LLP

Rev. Clete Kiley, UNITE HERE

Mr. Jeff Korgen, Dept. of Diocesan Planning, Diocese of Metuchen

Ms. Mary Heidkamp, Archdiocese of Chicago

Bishop Howard Hubbard, Diocese of Albany

Sr. Jean Miller, Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati

Mr. Todd O'Malley, O'Malley and Langan, P.C.

Fr. Sinclair Oubre, Apostleship of the Sea/Catholic Labor Network

Sr. Mary Prinisky, OP Commission on Justice

Mr. Bill Quigley, Center for Constitutional Rights

Ms. Kathy Saile, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Elena Segura, Office for Immigrant Affairs and Immigration Education, Archdiocese of Chicago

Mr. Thom Shellabarger, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Sr. Nancy Sylvester, Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

# Enduring Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

by Most Reverend Gabino Zavala, Auxiliary Bishop for Los Angeles and President, Interfaith Worker Justice

Catholic Social Teaching, stretching from *Rerum Novarum* (1891) to *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), has given us enduring principles to deal with “new things” as they arise in the economies of our time. Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* addressed the conditions of workers in a world that was in the midst of rapid technological change. This new economic structure had little or no regulations that produced not just gaping inequality between the industrialists and workers, but really two very different human realities. The teeming industrial towns had poor sanitation and housing; inhumane working conditions for men, women, and children; and, a political system unable or unwilling to address the new social environment wrought by economic change.

The class struggle in Europe and the United States pitted the opulence of rich against those struggling for survival. Pope Leo XIII, in his search for peace, condemned the violence of ‘class struggle’ and sought resolution in gospel values. The letter from the pope “On the Condition of Workers” had a huge impact in the Church and on the people of the United States that were fraught with concern over the rights of workers, wages, unions, and larger social conditions.

The lasting points made in Leo XIII’s encyclical and found throughout the church’s social doctrine begin with a correct view of the human person. Human persons are willed by God; they are imprinted with God’s image. Their dignity does not come from the work they do, but because they are as human.

The Holy Father wrote about the dignity of work and the rights and dignity of workers. Work is the way we procure the necessities of life for ourselves and our families; it is the way we realize ourselves through self expression; and finally, through work we contribute to the common good. Pope Leo XIII stressed:

1. the centrality of the human person
2. the errors of socialism and laissez-faire capitalism
3. the right to form trade unions and other associations
4. the right to limited working hours and to rest
5. the right to a just wage

*Caritas in Veritate*, an encyclical written in 2009 by Pope Benedict XVI, expresses similar concerns about our economic and social life in an increasingly globalized society. Facing the current economic crisis squarely, with so many people around the world lacking decent work and struggling for the necessities of life, the Holy Father offers a moral framework for economic life, a call to solidarity, and the challenge of working together to build an economy that is founded on gospel values. Pope Benedict clearly places the human person at the center of economic life as he reflects on creation, respect for life, rights of workers,

and the role of civil society.

Benedict notes: “The repeated calls issued within the Church’s social doctrine, beginning with *Rerum Novarum*, for the promotion of workers’ associations that can defend their rights must therefore be honored today even more than in the past, as a prompt and far-sighted response to the urgent need for new forms of cooperation at the international level, as well as the local level.” (#25) Instead of relegating labor unions to a by-gone era, he says it is “important...that labor unions – which have always been encouraged and supported by the Church – should be open to the new perspectives that are emerging in the world of work.”... “The global context in which work takes place also demands that national labor unions, which tend to limit themselves to defending the interests of their registered members, should turn their attention to those outside their membership, and in particular to workers in developing countries where social rights are often violated. (#64) On a related matter, Benedict says, “the dignity of the individual and the demands of justice require, particularly today, that economic choices do not cause disparities in wealth to increase in an excessive and morally unacceptable manner, and that we continue to prioritize the goal of access to steady employment for everyone.” (#32)

Benedict then responds to the question: What is meant by the word “decency” in regard to work? He goes on to say “It means work that expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman in the context of their particular society: work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both men and women, with the development of their community; work that enables the worker to be respected and free from any form of discrimination; work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children, without the children themselves being forced into labor; work that permits the workers to organize themselves freely, and to make their voices heard; work that leaves enough room for rediscovering one’s roots at a personal, familial and spiritual level; work that guarantees those who have retired a decent standard of living.” (#63)

The Catholic tradition, our social doctrine, asks us to look at social and economic issues from the perennial viewpoint of the value of human work that finds its intrinsic meaning in the dignity of the worker. Making the principles of Catholic Social Teaching applicable to everyday life is never easy. We need to develop ways to assess not just our own individual actions but wider trends in society both in public policy and economic activity. As Pope Benedict XVI writes: “The current crisis obliges us to re-plan our journey, to set ourselves new rules and to discover new forms of commitment, to build on positive experiences and to reject negative ones. The crisis thus becomes an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future. (#21)

# A Catholic Framework for Economic Life

*A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops November 1996*

As followers of Jesus Christ and participants in a powerful economy, Catholics in the United States are called to work for greater economic justice in the face of persistent poverty, growing income-gaps, and increasing discussion of economic issues in the United States and around the world. We urge Catholics to use the following ethical framework for economic life as principles for reflection, criteria for judgment and directions for action. These principles are drawn directly from Catholic teaching on economic life.

1. The economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy.
2. All economic life should be shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family and serve the common good.
3. A fundamental moral measure of any economy is how the poor and vulnerable are faring.
4. All people have a right to life and to secure the basic necessities of life (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, safe environment, economic security.)
5. All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions as well as to organize and join unions or other associations.
6. All people, to the extent they are able, have a corresponding duty to work, a responsibility to provide the needs of their families and an obligation to contribute to the broader society.
7. In economic life, free markets have both clear advantages and limits; government has essential responsibilities and limitations; voluntary groups have irreplaceable roles, but cannot substitute for the proper working of the market and the just policies of the state.
8. Society has a moral obligation, including governmental action where necessary, to assure opportunity, meet basic human needs, and pursue justice in economic life.
9. Workers, owners, managers, stockholders and consumers are moral agents in economic life. By our choices, initiative, creativity and investment, we enhance or diminish economic opportunity, community life and social justice.
10. The global economy has moral dimensions and human consequences. Decisions on investment, trade, aid and development should protect human life and promote human rights, especially for those most in need wherever they might live on this globe.

All of economic life should recognize the fact that we all are God's children and members of one human family, called to exercise a clear priority for "the least among us."

The sources for this framework include the Catechism of the Catholic Church, recent papal encyclicals, the pastoral letter Economic Justice for All, and other statements of the U.S. Catholic bishops. They reflect the Church's teaching on the dignity, rights, and duties of the human person; the option for the poor; the common good; subsidiarity and solidarity.

## Labor Day Litany

Reader: Friends, let us offer our prayers to God, who pronounced all creation good, who sent his Son to live and work as one like us, and who calls us to serve the poor and those oppressed. Lord, give success to the work of our hands.

**All: Lord, give success to the work of our hands.**

Reader: For all those who work:

**All: Lord, give success to the work of our hands.**

Reader: For those who are unemployed or underemployed, or have lost their jobs because of changing economic conditions, let us pray:

**All: Lord, give success to the work of our hands.**

Reader: For those who work in hazardous conditions without sufficient protection, let us pray:

**All: Lord, give success to the work of our hands.**

Reader: For migrant workers and all who work the land, let us pray:

**All: Lord, give success to the work of our hands.**

Reader: For all employers that they may seek to provide a just work environment:

**All: Lord, give success to the work of our hands.**

Reader: For those who face discrimination, harassment, or abuse in the work place, let us pray:

**All: Lord, give success to the work of our hands.**

Reader: For those who must balance job commitments with the needs of their family, let us pray:

**All: Lord, give success to the work of our hands.**

Reader: Loving God, through your Son you gave us an example to love one another as he loved us. Give us the strength to continue working to bring forth your kingdom here on earth – a kingdom of justice and peace, kindness and compassion, grace and mercy. Grant this through Christ, our Lord.

**All: Amen.**



*By Patrick Gorman, Director of Worship, Catholic Diocese of Madison, Wisconsin*

# Labor Unions and The Church

John Sweeney, President Emeritus, AFL-CIO

**M**y father was a bus driver, and my mother was a domestic worker. They were immigrants from Ireland who had come to this country hoping for just a small share of the American dream. In our modest home in the Bronx, there were three things central to our lives: our family, the Church, and the union.

Without the family, there would have been no love. Without the Church, there would have been no redemption. But without the union, there would have been no food on the table.

In our home, in the society in which I grew up, the words "family, Church, and union" weren't even hyphenated – you couldn't imagine one without the other two. Those were tough times. But working families, business people, church leaders and public officials shared certain understandings – a social contract, if you will.



*Without the family, there would have been no love.*



*Without the Church, there would have been no redemption.*



*But without the union, there would have been no food on the table.*

Here's what working people knew: If we got up every morning and did our jobs and kept our faith in God, and joined a good union, then we could earn a better life for ourselves and a better chance for our children.

Here's what business people knew: If they paid their workers fairly and plowed some of their profits back into their communities, they could count on loyal employees and loyal consumers.

For companies back then, good citizenship was good business. And here's what our leaders in the Church helped us promote, and President Kennedy said it best: "A rising tide lifts all boats."

If an employer mistreated its workers, the union was there, and the families were there, and the Church was there.

For almost 30 years after winning World War II, we all prospered because we prospered together. We were concerned with raising the standard of living for all Americans, not just accumulating enormous wealth for a fortunate few.

Our social compact was a formula for the strongest economy, the largest middle class, and the most successful society this world has every known. In the 1970's, we began drifting from our course. The oil embargo, global competition, new technologies and deregulation of the domestic economy put the squeeze on American business. They decided to compete, not by American teamwork, and know-how, but by driving down labor costs. Caught in an unforgiving global economy, corporate America began squeezing the last possible ounce of productivity out of workers, then throwing them on the scrapheap of unemployment or old age, with reduced pensions and health coverage.

The result? Since 1979, real earnings for workers have declined 12 percent. During that same period, 97 percent of the increase in household incomes has gone to the richest 20 percent, with middle income families and the poor left to fight over three percent. During the same period, productivity went up 24 percent and American workers should have been able to enjoy a substantial increase in buying power. Instead, the productivity was converted into increases in corporate profits – 64 percent between 1989 and 1995 – and in executive compensation – up 360 percent since 1980. The result is an alarming maldistribution of wealth.

The top 20 percent of households in our country now get half of the nation's total income and control 85 percent of all wealth. Workers and their families – 80 percent of all households – split the other half of total income and share 15 percent of the nation's wealth, mainly their mortgaged homes. And more than 12 million workers at the bottom of the wage structure have lost hope altogether, victims of a federal minimum wage that in real terms is now 25 percent below the 1981 level.

While productivity, profits, executive pay and the stock market keep going up, working family incomes keep going down, widening the gap between the rich and the rest of us and creating a dangerous atmosphere of social and economic conflict.

Workers are having to labor harder and longer just to keep even, and more and more family members are having to work in order to maintain living standards. Working families have little money to spend, they are loaded with debt and they have no time to spend with their children.

Threatened by restructuring, downsizing, pension raids, privatization schemes and runaway plants, their anger is exceeded only by anxiety over keeping their jobs. They are disgusted with business, government, and sometimes unions and even the Church and their disillusionment is straining the fabric of our society as surely as it is cannibalizing our families.

We've decided "America Needs a Raise," and we've dedicated ourselves to delivering one. We are trying to create a new and powerful voice for America's working families, by rejuvenating our unions. Then we intend to use that voice powerfully and persuasively to restore respect for workers and the work they do through better wages, more secure jobs, affordable healthcare and improved retirement income.

Our goal is to reclaim America, to restore the ability of working Americans to earn a decent living and to re-commit our nation to caring for the old, the sick and the young. We intend to rebuild the labor movement, so we can put some moral responsibility back into the heads of our business leaders and back into the souls of our elected officials. But I want you to know that we in the union movement cannot do it alone. When I was growing up, that wouldn't have been a question. Then, "alone" didn't mean unions as organization distinct from other parts of the community.

Then "Church" didn't mean something we did just on Sunday. It didn't mean a structure without a strong orientation to our economic well-being. It's time unions and the Church stopped trying to go it alone. Unions need aggressive participation by the Church in our organizing campaigns. In most cases, we're up against employers who are willing to break the law by firing, harassing and intimidating workers and the only way we can back them off is with the help of the Church. Likewise, we need the public support of the Church in bargaining situations where employers have forced us out on strike and then permanently replaced the workers.

We have to restore the ability to strike – without it we are doomed to collective begging, rather than collective bargaining. And we need the help of the Church to combat the politics of hate that is consuming our political process.

If we are to rescue America's families, we must restore our traditional institutions that support families and through them the traditional social compact between labor, business and government, with all of us working together and all of us speaking out.

I want to live in a country where you can raise a family without having to hold down three jobs to do it. Where you don't have to spend so much time at work that you have no time left to go to Church or to a ballgame or a movie with your kids or grandchildren. Where your lot in life is determined by what you do, and not by the color of your skin, or the accident

of your birth. I want my children and my grandchildren to look forward to pay raises instead of layoff notices. To go to college, instead of to a dead-end job. To enjoy life more, not less, than I've been able to.

My idea of a just society is one in which honest labor raises the standard of living for all, rather than enormous wealth for a few.

My notion of a moral nation is one which cares for its young, its old and its poor, and leaves the rich to fend for themselves. And my vision of a perfect movement, be it labor or the Church, is a movement which constantly examines and corrects its own imperfections. We need to do that in the American labor movement as well as in the American Church.

*Adapted from remarks given at the 1996 U.S. Catholic Conference Justice and Peace Symposium*



# Reflections of the Past Century on the Church and Labor Relations in the United States

Rev. Msgr. George G. Higgins (1916-2002) was the nation's most revered labor priest. A strong supporter of IWJ he wrote this piece for Labor Day 1999.

Father Vince Giese of Chicago reported a few years ago in *The New World* that one hundred years after Leo XIII issued his pioneering encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, "Social justice Chicago-style is in retrenchment." Summarizing the conclusions of a DePaul University seminar on the centenary of *Rerum Novarum*, he specified two areas in particular in which Church leadership in the second largest Archdiocese in the United States is said to be "on hold:" labor and race relations.

As we reflect on Labor Day, 1999, it is not only "Chicago-style" leadership which is currently in retrenchment. Across-the-board, Church leadership on this issue is "on hold."

Historically the Church and organized labor in the United States, have had a good working relationship, so much so that European visitors to our country have often singled out this fact as one of the most striking characteristics of our national tradition. But what about the future? Ed Marciniak, veteran labor leader and Catholic social actionist in the Chicago area, raised this question a generation ago in his fifties' essay, "The Catholic Church and Labor." "It's no secret," he wrote, "that the Church and organized labor are generally on good terms, but the future of the Church's closeness to the labor movement is not secure." Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore at the end of the 19th century started the Church's tradition of sympathy for working people and their unions, "but this could be lost."

I am too much of an optimist to concede that the Gibbons tradition has already been lost, but also enough of a realist to echo, with a new sense of urgency, Marciniak's warning that it could indeed be lost if present trends continue unabated. This is a real possibility, not a figment of Marciniak's imagination or of mine. Church-related programs in the labor field, with few exceptions, have been on hold for a generation or more – roughly since the end of the Vietnam War. After Vietnam, the direct involvement of Catholic activists in the labor field precipitously tapered off. Concerned priests, Religious and lay leaders in all parts of the country began to concentrate on a variety of social and economic problems which they considered to be more urgent. That shift was a natural development aimed at meeting the changing needs of changing times. To some extent, however, this redirection of our energies was based on the mistaken notion that the labor problem is a dead issue and that workers' basic rights are no longer in dispute. Such is not the case.

The fact is that the labor movement is currently very much on the defensive and numerically is weaker than it has been at any time since the twenties. The right of workers to organize continues to be a very live issue and, though seldom if ever challenged in principle, is being seriously challenged in practice. Hundreds of thousands of workers in the service trades, agriculture, and small industry are still struggling against very heavy odds to

achieve the basic protection and benefits of collective bargaining enjoyed by workers in the mass production industries since the late thirties or early forties.

To make matters worse, more and more employers – including some who have been negotiating with unions for many years – have recently set out to undermine the labor movement by hiring permanent replacements for workers engaged in legitimate strikes. This is perhaps the most serious threat the labor movement has faced since the enactment of our basic federal labor legislation in the mid-1930's. The labor movement, in alliance with a variety of religious, civil rights, and community organizations, has begun a major campaign to outlaw this nefarious practice and to recapture the right of workers to exercise their right to strike without recrimination. To this end, bills have been introduced in the Congress to guarantee the free exercise of the right to strike. Such proposals deserve the enthusiastic support of Catholic social action organizations.

The picture is not completely bleak. Church-related organizations, even during the post-Vietnam retrenchment period, have played an active role (but only intermittently and selectively) in specific labor struggles – e.g., the struggle of the California farmworkers to organize into a bona fide union of their own choice. By and large, however, the conclusion arrived at by the participants in the DePaul seminar still holds. In other words, retrenchment, rather than "Chicago-style" involvement in the field of Church-Labor relations is the order of the day. All of which suggests again that Marciniak's warning, sounded forty years ago, is still timely – in fact, alarmingly so. The Church's

tradition of sympathetic support for working people and their unions could in fact be lost. This would be a tragedy and a betrayal of our American Catholic heritage. We used to think of our Church in the United States as being overwhelmingly a Church of immigrant workers from Western and Eastern Europe – and so it was. Our record in supporting their economic rights and, specifically, their right to organize into effective unions was, if not always glorious, at least creditable – better perhaps than the performance of the Church in any other industrialized nation from the end of the 19th century until the middle of the 20th century. However, we are now in danger of misreading the demography of today's Catholic population. Now that so many of our second and third and fourth generation Catholics, descendants of the original immigrants, have moved up on the social and economic ladder, we may fail to recognize that we are still a Church of immigrants – millions of new immigrants, principally from Asia and Latin America, who need and merit the same kind and degree of support for their economic rights that the Church provided for our European forebears in earlier generations. It will be a tragedy of the first order if the Church fails to

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keep this tradition alive – that is to say, if, in Marciniak’s words, the Church’s sympathetic support for workers and their unions, started in the Gibbons era, goes into permanent decline. It is no exaggeration to add that if the Gibbons tradition is lost in this generation, it may be lost forever.

It remains to emphasize that even if the new immigrants and the great mass of women workers in the labor market were reasonably well off (and they are not, of course), there would still be a need for a strong and effective labor movement and a need for the Church to keep alive the Gibbons tradition of support for the movement. But why? What difference would it make, I asked myself as the author of the 1990 U.S.C.C. Labor Day Statement, if the American labor movement were to go into permanent decline? I took my answer from the writings of the late great Monsignor John A. Ryan, first director of the Social Action Department of the old National Catholic Welfare Conference. At the beginning of the Great Depression, Ryan wrote that effective labor unions are still by far the most powerful force in society for the protection of the laborer’s rights and the improvement of his or her condition. No amount of employer benevolence, no diffusion of a sympathetic attitude on the part of the public, no increase of beneficial legislation, can adequately supply for the lack of organization among the workers themselves.” I would add that neither can the great proliferation of post-Vatican II Church-related justice and peace programs adequately supply for the lack of organization of workers among themselves.

I have the impression that it is difficult for many Church professionals to come to grips with this reality – more difficult perhaps than it was for the pioneers involved in ‘Chicago-style’ social action in pre-Vatican II days.

I would tentatively argue that, proportionately speaking, the justice and peace work of the Church in the United States after Vatican II in general has tended to be a bit too clerical, too institutional, or if you will, too “churchy,” for lack of a better word. By the same token, it has yet to find an adequate method of developing effective independent lay leadership in the secular world – e.g., in the field of labor-management relations. Before the Council, paradoxically, the Catholic social action movement in the United States, though somewhat limited in scope and burdened with an inadequate, top-down type of ecclesiology, tended to emphasize more than we do today the layman’s independent role, as a citizen and a member of secular organizations, in helping to solve social and economic problems. At the present time—or so it seems to me – there is more of a tendency (despite our greater theological awareness of the Church as the “People of God”) to emphasize the role of the Church as an institution and,



more specifically, the role of the hierarchy and of Church professionals, both lay and clerical, in promoting justice and defending human rights. Both approaches, of course, are valid and are usually intertwined or interrelated. There is, however, a distinction between the two, and many laymen and women are disappointed that the latter top-down approach, in many cases, is being more heavily emphasized after Vatican II than it was by some of the “Chicago-style” pioneers who were working in this field before the Council.

I have raised the question of “churchy” versus secular social action because I think it has a bearing on the future of the Church’s involvement in the labor field. For the sake of greater clarity let me pose the question as follows.

Is it or should it be the primary (though not exclusive) function of church-related social action organizations to prepare their members to engage in social action on their own initiative in the secular arena or, conversely, should it be their primary (though not exclusive) function to make sure that the institutional Church and, more specifically, Church professionals are publicly committed to the cause of social justice? This strikes me as being a timely question and one that ought to be given careful consideration in any before-and-after reexamination of the impact of the Council.

It could also be argued, I think, that many of the pre-Vatican II people referred to above saw more clearly than some of today’s activists the distinction between “activism” and social action. By that I mean that some of the latter tend to put perhaps too much stock in advocacy of this or that form of prophetic witness and are perceived as not being sufficiently interested in promoting long-range programs of social education and structural reform which do not produce measurable results in the short run.

Under this same heading, I think we must be prepared to listen to those members of the laity who think that (again, proportionately speaking) the Church in the United States is devoting more time, energy and money to the training (and feeding) of Church professionals, both clerical and lay, and is devoting insufficient time and energy and money to programs aimed at helping lay people prepare themselves to play their own autonomous role as Christians in the socio-economic and political order.

I think it would be a mistake, of course, for the Church to get bogged down at this time in an academic, theoretical debate about the respective roles of the laity and of Church professionals in the field of social justice. Theologians can, should, and undoubtedly will continue to grapple with this question at their leisure. It would probably be an even greater mistake to draw too sharp a distinction at the practical level between the role of the laity and the role of the clergy in promoting justice and defending human rights. At the same time, however, there is a need, I think, to review our justice and peace policies and programs at every level to prevent them from becoming top-heavy with Church professionals, or, in more positive terms, to make sure that they are adequately oriented toward the formation of authentic and autonomous lay leaders who will exercise their apostolate, not in and through Church organizations, but in their secular occupations, and notably, for present purposes, in the field of labor-management relations.

## Called to Justice in Everyday Life

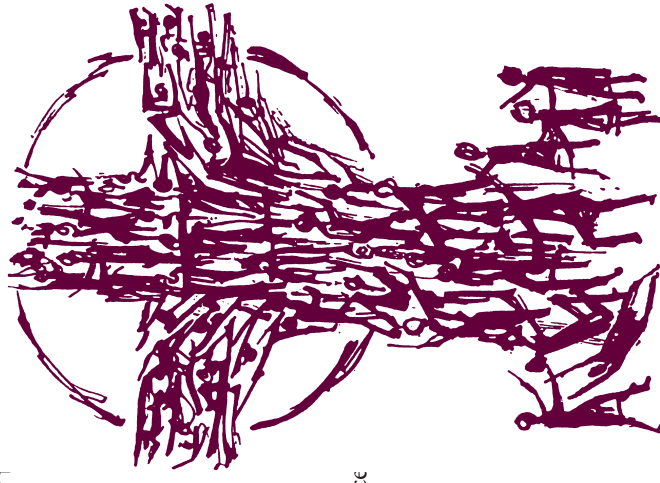


Catholicism does not call us to abandon the world but to help shape it. Catholics are everywhere in this society. We are corporate executives and migrant farm workers, politicians and welfare recipients, educators and day care workers, tradesmen and farmers, office and factory workers, union leaders and small-business owners. Our entire community of faith must help Catholics to be instruments of God's grace and creative power in business and politics, in factories and offices, in homes and schools, and in all the events of daily life. Social justice and the common good are built up or torn down day by day in the countless decisions and choices we make. This

vocation to pursue justice is not simply an individual task; it is a call to work with others to humanize and shape the institutions that touch so many people. The lay vocation for justice in the world cannot be carried forward alone but only as members of a community called to be the "leaven" of the gospel. Our families are the starting point and the center of a vocation for justice. How we treat our parents, spouses, and children is a reflection of our commitment to Christ's love and justice. We demonstrate our commitment to the gospel by how we spend our time and money, and whether our family life includes an ethic of charity, service, and action for justice. The lessons we teach our children through what we do as well as what we say determine whether they care for the "least among us" and are committed to work for justice.

## Workers are called to pursue justice.

In the Catholic tradition, work is not a burden, not just how we make a living. Work is a way of supporting our family, realizing our dignity, promoting the common good and participating in God's creation. This means often doing the ordinary well, making the most of our talents and opportunities, treating others fairly and with dignity, and working with integrity and creativity. Believers should be encouraged to choose their work based on how they can best use the gifts God has given them. Decisions made at work can make important contributions to an ethic of justice. Catholics have the often difficult responsibility of choosing between competing values in the workplace. This is a measure of holiness. Associations that enable workers, owners, or managers to pursue justice often make the witness of individual more effective.



Excerpt from *Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst Justice. A Pastoral Reflection on Lay Discipleship for Justice in a New Millennium*. Approved unanimously at the 1998 Catholic Bishops' Conference Meeting.



# Selected Biblical Passages on Justice for Workers

**Genesis I: 26-28, 2:15** God the Creator.

**Genesis 2:1-2** God rested on the seventh day.

**Exodus 3:7-8** God heard the cry of the Israelites.

**Deuteronomy 15:11** Open your hand to the poor and needy.

**Deuteronomy 24:14-15** Don't withhold wages of poor and needy laborers – including those of “aliens.”

**Psalms 72** God will judge people with righteousness.

**Proverbs 21:13** Don't close your ears to the cry of the poor.

**Ecclesiastes 4:1** God sees the oppressions that are practiced.

**Isaiah 30:18** God of justice.

**Isaiah 32:17** Justice will bring peace.

**Isaiah 58:6-8** The fast God chooses is to loosen the bands of wickedness.

**Jeremiah 21:11-12** Execute justice.

**Jeremiah 22:13** Woe to him who makes neighbors work for nothing and does not give them their wages.

**Jeremiah 34:8-14** Treat the alien well like God had treated the Israelites.

**Amos 5:22-24** Let justice flow like a stream.

**Amos 8:4-7** Woe to those who trample the needy...buying the poor for silver.

**Micah 6:8** God requires us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly.

**Matthew 6:24** You cannot serve God and money.

**Matthew 22:39** Love thy neighbor as thyself.

**Matthew 25:31-36** The Kingdom is for those who feed the hungry, welcome strangers.

**Luke 4:18-19** Anointed to preach good news to the poor.

**Luke 10:27** Love your neighbor as yourself.

**Luke 16:19-31** Rich man who doesn't see the poor at his gate.

**John 3:16-18** Love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

**Romans 12:21** Overcome evil with good.

**I Corinthians 3:6-9** Each will receive wages according to the labor of each.

**I Corinthians 12:26** If one member suffers, all suffer.

**Philippians 2:4** Look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

**James 5:4** The wages of laborers kept back by fraud cry out.

**II Timothy 1:7** God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love.

**II Timothy 2:6** The farmer that labors must receive the first rewards.

**II Timothy 6:18-19** Rich people are to be generous and ready to share.

# 10 Things You Can Do to Help Workers

- 1) Pray for all workers, especially those who work in sweatshops, are on strike, downsized, or locked out.
- 2) Invite a union leader to speak to the congregation at an appropriate time. Hundreds of congregations have participated in "Labor in the Pulpits" programs conducted jointly by interfaith groups and central labor councils. Labor leaders are recruited and trained to speak in parishes about the shared values between people of faith and labor unions.
- 3) Organize a worker rights training at your parish to learn how Catholic Social Teachings apply to worker rights in your city.
- 4) Seek to ensure that all the workers employed by the parish are paid wages that can support families and provide family health coverage.
- 5) Develop a construction policy for the parish (unless your diocese already has one) to make sure that repairs and construction work is done by contractors and subcontractors that treat workers justly.
- 6) Structure times for parish members to talk about how they practice their faith on the job. Most workers face challenging ethical questions at work. Structure opportunities for parish members to talk about their work lives and find support for ethical dilemmas.
- 7) Encourage parishioners to advocate for public policies that seek justice for all workers, including decent wages and health care benefits for all workers.
- 8) Boycott products produced by companies where workers are organizing to improve conditions and where boycotts are viewed as an effective means for encouraging a just resolution to the workers' problems. For a list of boycotted products, visit [www.unionlabel.org](http://www.unionlabel.org).
- 9) Invite someone from the Department of Labor to speak to workers in your congregation about workers rights that are protected under state and federal laws. Many workers, especially low-wage workers, are underpaid or taken advantage of because they don't know their rights or the correct procedures for filing complaints.
- 10) Investigate sweatshops in your own community. Many of us think about sweatshops as garment factories in Indonesia or Chinatown in New York City, and there are plenty of sweatshops in those places. But there are usually sweatshops in our midst—perhaps not garment sweatshops, but sweatshops nonetheless because of routine violations of labor laws. Talk with nursing home workers, restaurant workers, farmworkers, landscapers, poultry workers or other food processing workers. Find out about sweatshops in your midst.



## Interfaith Worker Justice

1020 West Bryn Mawr, 4th floor  
Chicago, IL 60660-4627  
(773) 728-8400 • [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)

## Interfaith Worker Justice Who We Are

This Labor Day resource booklet was produced by Interfaith Worker Justice. Formed in 1996, Interfaith Worker Justice educates and mobilizes the U.S. religious community on issues and campaigns to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions for workers, especially low-wage workers. The following are program priorities:

### Organizing and Supporting Local Interfaith Worker Justice groups:

There are 60 local worker justice groups affiliated with Interfaith Worker Justice. These groups involve people of faith in living wage campaigns, and support workers' rights to organize. They also conduct educational programs with area congregations.

### Developing Educational Materials:

Interfaith Worker Justice develops congregational resources such as bulletin inserts, worship aides and study materials. *Faith Works*, sent to members six-times a year, highlights work by people of faith to support workers.

**Seeking Shared Values Between Religion and Labor:** The National Interfaith Committee helps religious and labor leaders get to know one another and work together for improving conditions for workers. The organization coordinates an annual Labor in the Pulpit program around Labor Day, convenes meetings between union leaders and religious employers, and trains both religious and labor groups on how to work more effectively with one another.

### Acquainting Future Religious Leaders with Worker Justice Issues.

Interfaith Worker Justice works with key religiously affiliated youth training programs, such as the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, and offers internship opportunities for seminary students.

For more information call (773) 728-8400 or visit [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org).