

## **Labor Day**

### **From Education for Justice**

**Compiled by Adrienne Curry, Program Director Catholic Relief Services**

#### **Overview: The U.S. Church's Commitment to Workers**

##### **Introduction**

The roots of Catholic social teaching on labor in America reaches back to the late 1800s. In 1877 there was a major depression in the U.S. Twenty percent of the population was unemployed and an additional forty percent could find work only six months out of the year. Workers were often subject to severe wage cuts and long hours. People lost their homes to foreclosure. Most U.S. Catholics at that time were immigrants, most were poor or middle-class, and they were laborers.

##### **Organizing Workers**

In 1862, an anti-slavery Republican and Baptist named Uriah Stephens (1821-1882), helped organize textile workers in the Garment Cutters' Association. In 1869, he formed the Noble and holy Order of the Knights of Labor. The Knights were always more than a union; they were a platform for social change. They advocated for fair pay and decent working conditions for skilled and unskilled labor, women and men, and blacks and whites alike.

Their methods, however, were controversial. Stephens, worried about the workers safety, often required high degrees of secrecy. He also required that members participate in Mason-like rituals and he was confrontational, using boycotts and eventually strikes. While many Catholics were drawn to the organizing for change, the Catholic hierarchy was often concerned about this organization.

A Catholic named Terence Powderly came to the forefront of leadership in the Knights in 1879. The tensions between the Knights and the church became significantly higher in 1884 when the Bishop Taschereau of Quebec condemned them due to its secret status. Yet Catholic participation in the Knights continued to grow. By the mid-1880s, the Knights had secured an eight hour workday for groups of workers through the use of boycotts.

## **Cardinal Gibbons**

The climate changed when Cardinal James Gibbons, the Archbishop of Baltimore, championed the rights for workers in 1887 by writing a letter to Pope Leo XIII in defense of the Knights, persuading them not to condemn them. The workers needed the support of the church and the Church did not want to alienate its American Catholic base.

Gibbons' letter encouraged Leo to eventually issue an encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum*, on May 15, 1891, an encyclical that left no doubt where the Catholic Church stood regarding the rights and dignity of workers.

## **Work in CST**

The beginning of modern Church social teaching is generally recognized as having its origins in Leo's encyclical as he sought to deal with the social issues of his day around labor. The roots of the teachings stretch back to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures which affirm the dignity of the person, care for the poor, and the importance of community. What remains distinct about Catholic social teaching, however, is that the Church teaches that its principles are understandable by all persons of goodwill, regardless of their faith orientation. Thus, these teachings provide an articulation of those values that the Church shares with all persons and serves as a basis for our working with others for the common good.

Support for workers has been reaffirmed in U.S. Bishops' statements and in papal encyclicals ever since the 1890s, especially in the encyclicals written by Pius XI, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI.

## **Key Episcopal and Papal Teaching on Labor**

### **1891 Rerum Novarum: The Condition of Labor**

The encyclical enumerated a number of rights: to work, to receive a just wage to support one's family to organize into workers' associations, and to own private property. Pope Leo XIII set forth the role of the Church in speaking out on social matters, educating for justice, and the role of public authority and law in society. He argued that the three key factors underlying economic life in society are workers, productive property, and the state. A key concept is human dignity.

### **1931 Quadragesimo Anno: Reconstruction of the Social Order**

Pope Pius XI continued to advance the church's defense of workers and solidarity with them during the time of the Great Depression and rise of dictatorships in Europe. The encyclical's major areas of concern are the role of the Church in promoting the reconstruction of the social order, responsible ownership, labor and capital, public authority, just social order, and capitalism and socialism. It is here that the term "subsidiarity" is officially articulated. Subsidiarity is an organizing principle in which decisions should be made at the most local level possible. The ability for people and community's to direct their work is one of the ways work becomes meaningful.

### **1961 Mater et Magistra: Christianity and Social Progress**

Pope John XXIII emphasizes the just remuneration for work, but also focuses on economic imbalances and the common good—the public authorities have a responsibility to reduce economic imbalances. Particular attention is given to the need for industrial nations to help poor, non-industrialized countries through aid and assistance.

**1971 Octogesima Adveniens: A Call To Action**

Pope Paul VI calls Christian to respond to the needs of the new poor, particularly those in major cities. The emphasis here is on the role of individuals to respond personally and directly to injustice in its many forms.

**1981 Laborem Exercens: On Human Work**

John XXIII's expresses growing concern over the reduction of the human person to a thing and the way people were treated in economic life. Major areas topics discussed in the encyclical are dignity of work, failures of both socialism and capitalism, conflict between labor and capital, the nature of work and the rights of workers, property, unions, employment, and the spirituality of work. The rights of workers include a wage high enough to support a family, healthcare, leisure time, a pension, accident insurance and other benefits to ensure their future.

**1986 Economic Justice For All**

The U.S. Catholic bishops have constantly supported workers' rights, and their right to be represented by a union, to bargain collectively for economic justice. The pastoral letter puts forth a Christian vision of economic life specifically stating that employment is a right.

**1987 Sollicitudo Rei Socialis: On Social Concern**

While this encyclical is focused on development and east-west relations it particularly names and addresses structures of sin in contemporary society.

**1991 Centesimus Annus: The Hundredth Year**

Dedicated to the one hundredth anniversary of Rerum Novarum, John Paul II notes the benefits of regulated capitalism that serves and protects the human person but decidedly rejects "unbridled" capitalism and warns against the dangers of excessive consumerism to the persons, society and planet.

## **1996 A Catholic Framework for Economic Life**

This short letter by the U.S. bishops lays out ten principles to guide economic life. Three are noted here: 1) 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; 2) All people have a right to life and to secure the basic necessities of life (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, education, healthcare, safe environment, economic security); 3) 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.

## **2009 Caritas in Veritate: In Charity and Truth**

Pope Benedict XVI reaffirms the need for structural change while emphasizing the need for Christians to seek justice in love. Love and justice is more than giving of one's excess but is fundamentally about a relationship with the marginalized. He writes, "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 response to the urgent need for new forms of cooperation at the international level, as well as the local level."

## **Prayer for Labor Day**

**By Jane Deren**

God of Creation, help us to celebrate Labor Day by recalling the Church's teaching on work and workers' rights as well as by praying for all workers and those seeking work.

We celebrate the Church's long history defending workers' rights and the right to unions.

We acknowledge that we are all called to work as co-creators of the Kingdom of God, as Blessed John Paul II has instructed us, and as builders of the common good.

We affirm that work is central to the development of the human person and to enable them to contribute to the common good.

We know that work is first for the good of workers for their own human flourishing and not primarily for profits;

We recognize that all workers have dignity and that all workers must be treated with respect.

We call for a just minimum wage so all families can have decent living conditions.

We support the calls for workers' health and safety in all working environments.

As we reflect on our Church's teachings, we pray for all those currently employed and ask that they enjoy the dignity of work and all the rights workers are entitled to. We especially pray for those who are unemployed and seeking work; may they know the support of our communities and may they be graced by solace and hope so they do not despair.

We pray that our local, state, and Federal government leadership work together to find solutions to that all who seek work may find a decent position in workplaces that uphold the dignity of the worker.

Give us all the gift of good work and the satisfaction of jobs well done.

God of creation, hear our prayer. Amen

## USCCB and Interfaith Worker Justice Collaborating to Minister to the Unemployed

*...unemployment today provokes new forms of economic marginalization, and the current crisis can only make this situation worse. Being out of work or dependent on public or private assistance for a prolonged period undermines the freedom and creativity of the person and his family and social relationships, causing great psychological and spiritual suffering. I would like to remind everyone, especially governments engaged in boosting the world's economic and social assets, that the primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity: "Man is the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life"-*

Caritas in Veritate, Pope Benedict XVI (2009)

### The Economic Pain Continues...

Media reports of the recent decline in the unemployment rate mask the reality faced by millions of Americans and their families:

- In addition to the 13.7 million unemployed workers, 8.3 million are underemployed (involuntarily working part-time) and 2.7 million have given up looking for work. **In sum, 16% of the country is unemployed or underemployed**
- For every **five** unemployed people, there is **one** job opening.
- A disproportionate number of the jobs created have been in low-and middle-wage jobs.
- The average length of unemployment is **nine months**. The longer a person is out of work, the less likely he is to be hired eventually.

Unemployment- and the insecurity that comes with it- has devastating effects on emotional and physical health, marriages, families, and whole communities. The bishops of the United States believe that we have an obligation to minister to the spiritual and social needs of the unemployed, as well as support them in their search for economic security.

## **What We Can Do**

Working in collaboration with Interfaith Worker Justice and other faith-based groups, the Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development is intensifying its efforts to support our unemployed brothers and sisters, and their families.

The Faith Advocates for Jobs Campaign has been launched to:

1. Advocate policies that protect families and ensure access to just and decent jobs with fair wages; and
2. Empower parishes and other faith communities to minister to the spiritual, social, and employment needs of their parishioners.

For more information on the Campaign, to join, and to download the Toolkit, visit:

[www.iwj.org/index.cfm/employment](http://www.iwj.org/index.cfm/employment)

## **Labor in the Pulpit**

Each year, Arise, a partner organization of the Chicago Catholic Campaign for Human Development, co-facilitates a nation-wide effort called "Labor in the Pulpit." On Labor Day weekend, congregations of all faiths across the nation will join to feature sermons or reflections emphasizing the theological connections among faith, work, and justice. Last year, over 116 congregations in Chicago participated. Speakers included pastors, worker center employees, congregational members, and union members.

**We invite your parish to join others in featuring "Labor in the Pulpit" this year!**

**The day will be Sunday, September 4<sup>th</sup>.**

To confirm your participation; to request a speaker for Labor Day weekend, homily ideas, prayers, intentions, or bulletin inserts related to faith and work; and with any questions, please contact Rebecca Stephans at [rebecca@arisechicago.org](mailto:rebecca@arisechicago.org)

## 10 Things Your Parish Can Do to Help Workers

1. Pray for all workers.
2. Encourage your members to advocate for public policies that seek justice for all workers, including fair living wages, safe and healthy workplaces, and health care benefits for all workers.
3. Encourage your members to talk about how they practice their faith on the job. Most workers face challenging ethical questions at work. Structure opportunities for your members to talk about their work lives and find support for ethical dilemmas.
4. See to ensure that all the workers employed by your parish are paid a fair wage and health care benefits.
5. Educate your members about workers' rights. Information is available at We Can Help (<http://www.dol.gov/wecanhelp/>), the National Employment Law Project (<http://www.help.org>), Interfaith Work Justice ([www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)) and other sites
6. Get involved and become a member of a local worker center or with organizations like Interfaith Work Justice ([www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)), Jobs with Justice ([www.jwj.org](http://www.jwj.org)), National Day laborers Organizing Network ([www.ndlon.org](http://www.ndlon.org)), and National Domestic Workers Alliance (<http://www.nationaldomesticworkeralliance.org>).
7. Join or form a local interfaith committee for worker justice.
8. Invite a labor speaker or have one of your leaders speak about worker justice during Labor Day weekend or at an appropriate time.
9. Invite someone from the Department of Labor to speak to workers in your congregation about worker rights that are protected under state and federal laws. Many workers, especially low-wage workers, don't know their rights.
10. Participate in labor Day events sponsored by your local labor community.

## **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), had 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 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’ association 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 works 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)

## Labor Day Litany

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

**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.

**Called to Justice in Everyday Life Workers are called to pursue justice.**

**Excerpt from *Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst Justice*.**

***A Pastoral Reflection on Lay Discipleship for Justice in a New Millennium.***

**United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 1998**

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 vents 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 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 determine whether they care for the "least among us" and are committed to work for 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 responsibilities 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 the individual more effective.

## Selected Biblical Passages on Justice for Workers

Genesis 1:26-28	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 23:14-15	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
1 Corinthians 3:6-9	Each will receive wages according to the labor of each
1 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