

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.

# Putting **LABOR** into **LABOR** **DAY** *Services*

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.

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. Additional copies of this resource guide are available by calling the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice at (773) 728-8400. Special thanks to The ACTA Foundation and the Joseph P. Sullivan & Jeanne M. Sullivan Foundation for the development, printing, and distribution of this resource.

As the Roman Catholic Board members of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, we hope this resource is helpful to you. Please use the return envelope to become a member of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and receive our regular publication, *Faith Works*. We would love to hear from you about how we can further strengthen your ministry with low-wage workers. May God bless you in your ministry.

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- Mr. Tom Chabolla, Office of Justice and Peace, Archdiocese of Los Angeles
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# Statements on Labor and the Right to Collective Bargaining

by His Eminence John Cardinal O'Connor

"I see death on our city streets in the form of depersonalization of human beings. This is one of the reasons why, in my own city of New York, I have been constantly fighting for the rights of unionism, well aware of the mistakes and even the corruption of individual unions. I shudder to see what the law of the land can do to undermine the right to collective bargaining so that human persons can no longer come together with human persons to negotiate terms which will ensure justice for all. I see the law used to justify permanent replacements for striking workers... This is the kind of thing that leads everyday to alienating the individual from society, to depersonalization, to a sense of worthlessness that leads to self contempt for life itself..." **Remarks of John Cardinal O'Connor: "A Common Heritage, a Continuing Challenge", Church Magazine, Summer 1991.**

"The common enemy of both employers and employees is injustice. If we are going to overcome injustice, more is required than a unity and trust between and among union members. It goes far beyond this. To overcome injustice, there must be a unity and trust among and between employers and employees as well, and this means good will. This means that we cannot start in divisiveness...In all collective bargaining, we who call ourselves followers of Christ must avoid any perception that we are entering into negotiations with ill will, with distrust, with refusal to believe...There can be no peace with justice unless there is trust, human respect and the giving up of individual pride on the part of both employer and employee...Only then can unity be restored, when pride is driven out. The Church in New York will never abandon labor." **Labor Day Mass, St. Patrick's Cathedral - September 10, 1995.**

"In my judgment, those who, deep within their beings, would like to see unionism disappear off the face of the earth have underestimated the power of Original Sin or whatever else one may want to call the debilitating force in human nature. Given the human condition, we need "rules of engagement" in all life—no agreed upon colors of traffic lights, no traffic lights at all, and property is wantonly destroyed, people are wantonly killed. . . What does collective bargaining mean, but that a group of individuals can voluntarily band together to negotiate with an employer. . .The ideal collective bargaining process respects the rights and the needs of all parties: employees, employers, consumers, the entire community. It's a process between and among rational human beings all made in the Image and Likeness of the same God. Ideally the process attempts to achieve the best interest of all society. . . The

collective bargaining process has been misused. . .Such is never the ultimate interest of society. But every political system has been corrupted, as well. . .it's the human condition. We have a grave and continuing obligation to correct abuses. . .but to reform is not to destroy, and the need for reformation must never be subverted by the desire for destruction. . .I see us at another crossroad. Organized labor has recently made some gains. . .Yet one hears the question asked with increasing frequency "Do we still need labor unions?". . .In my judgement, as long as the human condition remains what it is, the right to collective bargaining is critical. Call an organization w h i c h exercises that right on the part of its members a "union," or anything else. Its right to exist is vital to justice in our society. . .I believe firmly that, in the final analysis, the free exercise of the right to collective bargaining is indispensable to a free society. . ." **John Cardinal O'Connor's Column: From My Viewpoint: The Right to Collective Bargaining is Critical, Catholic New York, September 4, 1997.**

There must be justice but it must be justice for all. This is the mandate of organized labor— to help achieve justice for all. . .

"(This)...must be the hallmark of organized labor in our country. We must do everything well. We must do everything as we are required to do to the very best of our ability. We must treat people as made in the Image and Likeness of God, everyone without exception: employer, employee, rich, poor, whatever color, whatever ethnic background, men and women. . .That is the beginning of true collective bargaining in justice. . .This is ultimately what unionism and collective bargaining is about—to try to bring justice, but justice to all, not just either to the "haves" or to the "have nots," justice to everybody. . .I recognize the pragmatic nature of collective bargaining. I recognize what a struggle it has been for working people. . .There have been tremendous improvements in our society, but these did not happen by chance. These happened through enormous sacrifice of working people trying to improve their lives. Some have made mistakes. . .but that has not been a great majority of men and women simply trying to breathe free, trying to achieve what the Declaration of Independence tells us we are entitled to as a human right: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But we cannot achieve this, those of you wedded to the right of collective bargaining as I am, without a sense of the sacredness of every human person whether they disagree with us or agree with us. . . Mother Teresa (was a person who) believed in justice for every human person. She believed, as I believe, that there can be no love without justice; otherwise it is just talk. It is sentiment. It is nonsense. There must be justice but it must be justice for all. This is the mandate of organized labor— to help achieve justice for all. . .That is the noble role given to labor. . .I plead with you. . .who are trying to achieve the fulfillment of what is the right to collective bargaining for all, I plead with all of you. . .to use as your example. . .a woman who never wrote a contract. . .but who did so very, very much for the rich and the poor throughout the world. . .As there can be no love without justice, justice in the long run can be pretty empty, pretty sterile without love. . ." **Labor Day Mass, St. Patrick's Cathedral, September 7, 1997.**



# Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions

## Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops

The following are short excerpts describing three important themes in Catholic social teaching. To understand the full dimensions of Catholic social teaching, be sure to read the complete document. There are seven themes highlighted as key for Catholic social tradition: life and dignity of the human person; call to family; community and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable; the dignity of work and the rights of workers; solidarity; and care for God's creation. Three of these themes seem most appropriate for reflection over Labor Day weekend. The Bishops say, "Catholic social teaching is a central and essential element of our faith. Its roots are in Hebrew prophets who announced God's special love for the poor and called God's people to a covenant of love and justice. It is a teaching founded on the life and words of Jesus Christ, who came 'to bring glad tidings to the poor. . . liberty to captives. . . recovery of sight to the blind' (Lk 4:18-19), and who identified himself with 'the least of these,' the hungry and the stranger (cf. Mt 25:45). Catholic social teaching is built on a commitment to the poor. This commitment arises from our experiences of Christ in the Eucharist. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, 'To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren (No. 1397).'" Below are the statements describing the three themes.

### Call to Family, Community, and Participation

In a global culture driven by excessive individualism, our tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society in economics and politics, in law and policy directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The family is the central social institution that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. While our society often exalts individualism, the Catholic tradition teaches that human beings grow and achieve fulfillment in community. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. Our Church teaches that the role of government and other institutions is to protect human life and human dignity and promote the common good.

### Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

In a world characterized by growing prosperity for some and pervasive poverty for others, Catholic teaching proclaims that a basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgement (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

### The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

In a marketplace where too often the quarterly bottom line takes precedence over the rights of workers, we believe that the economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation.

## Bulletin Inserts

The Labor Day Litany (right) is intended to be cut out and copied. "The Achilles Heal of the Economy" and "Called to Justice in Everyday Life" on subsequent pages are intended as double-sided bulletin inserts. Please cut out and reproduce for worship services. All materials in this booklet may be reproduced without permission.

## 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

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# Labor Unions and The Church

John Sweeney, President, AFL-CIO

My 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.

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 scrap-heap 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



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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*



***It's time unions and the Church stopped trying to go it alone.***

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

Rev. Msgr. George G. Higgins, Department of Theology, The Catholic University of America

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.

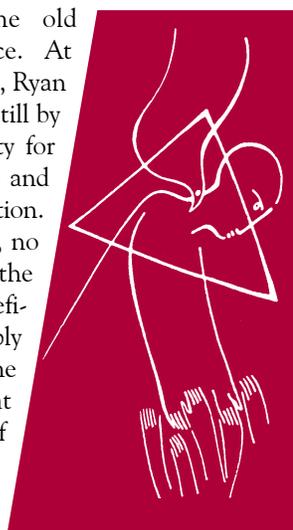
**[It’s a] mistaken notion that the labor problem is a dead issue and that workers’ basic rights are no longer in dispute. Such is not the case.**

The 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 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.

## The Achilles' Heel of the Economy



Dr. Ray Marshall, former secretary of labor, refers to the increasing disparity in wages as the Achilles' heel of the economy. In an overall rosy economy, many workers are struggling to make ends meet.

Catholic Social Teaching states that the economy must serve people and not the other way around. Work and wages should support families. Families should not be undermined by the structure of the economy. Unfortunately, even though the economy is considered strong, the benefits are not being distributed fairly. Some workers are earning astronomical salaries, with Cadillac benefits and stock options. Many other workers and their families are not making ends meet. If the economy is to serve the person, it must serve all persons, not just the wealthy.

Test your knowledge of the Achilles' heel of the economy.

- 1) In the economy at large, what has been the most important factor in maintaining or increasing family income?
  - a. Higher wages.
  - b. Good stock returns.
  - c. Two adults working.
- 2) What is the fastest category of jobs in the U.S.?
  - a. Computer technology
  - b. Nursing home aides
  - c. Cashiers
- 3) Who is the largest employer in the U.S.?
  - a. General Motors
  - b. McDonalds
  - c. Manpower, Inc.
- 4) What percentage of new jobs pay wages below a livable wage?  
34 %    54 %    74 %
- 5) What percentage of children live in poverty?  
16 %    21 %    26 %
- 6) How many Americans are without health insurance coverage?  
32 million    42 million    52 million
- 7) What percent of stock, mutual funds, and pension funds does the bottom 80 percent of American families own?  
3 percent    10 percent    More than 20 percent
- 8) Between 1980 and 1997, after adjusting for inflation, the minimum wage fell 15 percent, the average hourly wage declined by 3 percent, and corporate profits rose by 118 percent. How much did CEO pay increase?  
336%    436%    536%
- 9) How much higher are union wages than non-union wages?  
22%    34%    42 %

## Answers to The Achilles' Heel



- 1) The most significant factor over the last twenty years in maintaining and increasing family income has been putting two adults into the workforce. Without increasing the number of workers, family incomes would have fallen dramatically. This is clearly a factor in parents spending 40 percent less time with their children.
- 2) Cashiers is the occupation category that will add the most jobs in the coming years. These jobs pay significantly below a living wage. National Priorities Project, *Working Hard, Earning Less: The Story of Job Growth in America*, December, 1998.
- 3) Manpower, Inc. is the largest U.S. employer, with more than half a million workers. Manpower, Inc. is a temporary agency, reflecting the switch from full-time jobs to part-time and temporary jobs. Currently, 27 percent of workers are nonstandard. AFL-CIO. *America @ Work*, January, 1999.
- 4) This figure depends on what one defines as a living wage. In a recent study by the National Priorities Project, 74 percent of all new jobs were found to pay below a livable wage, if one looked at the actual costs for a family of four to meet their basic needs of food, housing, transportation, clothing, and to pay federal and state taxes. A livable wage for a family of four, as defined by this research, was around \$32,000, although it varied some by state. *Working Hard, Earning Less: The Story of Job Growth in America*
- 5) 21 percent of all children live in poverty, but 46 percent of African American children and 40 percent of Latino children live in poverty. Center for the Future of Children, *The Future of Children*. Vol. 7, No 2, 1997.
- 6) Over 42 million Americans are without health insurance coverage. Most of those without health insurance are low-wage workers and their families.
- 7) The bottom 80 percent of American families only own 3 percent of stock, mutual funds, and pension funds. *UFCW Action*, July-August, 1998.
- 8) CEO pay increased by 536 percent during this period. AFL-CIO.
- 9) On average, union wages are 34 percent higher than non-union wages, but the difference is even greater for African American and Latino workers. African American union workers earn 44 percent more than their non-union counterparts, and Latino workers earn 51 percent more than non-union Latinos. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*. January, 1998.

## 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 the 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.



## Additional Resources

*Catholic Teachings on the Rights of Workers*, available from the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. First copy \$1, additional copies 25 cents each. Brochure includes the Catholic Framework for Economic Life, developed by the U.S. Bishops in 1996. Order from NICWJ, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Chicago, IL 60660. Phone: (773) 728-8400. E-mail: nicwj@igc.org. Web: www.igc.org/nicwj.

*Economic Justice for All: A Catholic Framework for Economic Life*, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1996. Call (800) 235-8722 to order related resources or a free catalog, or visit [www.uscc.org](http://www.uscc.org).

*Our Best Kept Secret: The Rich Heritage of Catholic Social Teaching*, developed by and available for \$4.50 from the Center of Concern. The 75-page book includes history, notes on documents, and a study guide. Order from the Center of Concern, 3700 13th Street, NE, Washington, DC 20017. Phone: (202) 635-2757.

*Catholic Social Teaching and Movements*, Marvin L. Krier Mich. "This book is a goldmine of information for anyone who is interested in how the teaching of Jesus Christ should affect our lives and our work"—Most Rev. Rembert G. Weakland, OSB. Available for \$29.95 at book stores or from Twenty-third Publications, P.O. Box 180, Mystic, CT 06355. Phone (800) 321-0411.

*Poverty Amid Plenty: The Unfinished Business of Welfare Reform*, developed by NETWORK, a national Catholic social justice lobby. This is the 1999 report of NETWORK's National Welfare Reform Watch Project. 801 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, Suite 460 Washington, DC 20003. Phone: (202) 547-5556. E-mail: [network@networklobby.org](mailto:network@networklobby.org). Web: [www.networklobby.org](http://www.networklobby.org).

*Working Hard, Earning Less: The Story of Job Growth in America*. A publication of the National Priorities Project, in collaboration with Jobs with Justice, December, 1998. Order from 17 New South Street, Suite 301, Northampton, MA 01060. Phone: (413) 584-9556. E-mail: [info@natprior.org](mailto:info@natprior.org). Web: [www.natprior.org](http://www.natprior.org).

*Shifting Fortunes: The Perils of the Growing American Wealth Gap*, developed by and available for \$6.95 from United for a Fair Economy. Includes recommendations, tables, graphs, real-world stories and up-to-date information on the growing concentration of wealth. Order from United for a Fair Economy, 37 Temple Place 2nd floor, Boston, MA 02111. Phone: (617) 423-2148. E-mail: [stw@stw.org](mailto:stw@stw.org). Web: [www.stw.org](http://www.stw.org).

*Why Unions Matter* developed by and available for \$1 from the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. Additional copies 25 cents each. Order from NICWJ, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Chicago, IL 60660. Phone: (773) 728-8400. E-mail: [nicwj@igc.org](mailto:nicwj@igc.org). Download a free copy from [www.igc.org/nicwj](http://www.igc.org/nicwj).

*The Activist Cookbook: Creative Actions for a Fair Economy*, developed by and available for \$15 from United for a Fair Economy. A 100 page hands-on manual for activists and artists, with examples and ideas of creative actions to liven up meetings, conferences, campaigns, and media events. Order from United for a Fair Economy, 37 Temple Place 2nd floor, Boston, MA 02111. Phone: (617) 423-2148. E-mail: [stw@stw.org](mailto:stw@stw.org). Web: [www.stw.org](http://www.stw.org).

*A Very Popular Economic Education Sampler*, developed by and available for \$25 by the Highlander Research and Education Center. The 380-page sampler contains dozens of popular education exercises and materials to help groups learn more about the economy. Order from Highlander Center, 1959 Highlander Way, New Market, TN 37820. Phone: (423) 933-3424.

## The National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice

### Who we are

This Labor Day resource booklet was produced by the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. Formed in 1996, the National Interfaith Committee for 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 44 local worker justice groups affiliated with the National Interfaith Committee for 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:** The National Interfaith Committee for 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.

**Challenging Low-Wage Industries to Treat Workers More Justly.** The organization has developed a special initiative with poultry workers. One initial campaign persuaded the Department of Labor to conduct an investigation of the industry, which found that 60 percent of poultry plants were violating wage and hour laws. A new initiative is underway to support nursing home workers' initiatives to improve wages, benefits and working conditions.

**Acquainting Future Religious Leaders with Worker Justice Issues.** The National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice works with key religiously affiliated youth training programs, such as the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, and offers internship opportunities for seminary students. October 7-11, 1999, Forging Partnerships: A National Religion-Labor conference will be held in Los Angeles. Students will dialogue with key religious and labor leaders from across the nation and serve as observers at the AFL-CIO convention.

To become a member or to get more information, use the enclosed envelope, or call (773) 728-8400.

# 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) Arrange for a Labor Day message at your parish. Enclosed are some comments that John Cardinal O'Connor has made in past years on Labor Day that might be helpful in preparing a homily with a Labor Day emphasis.
- 3) Invite a union leader to speak to the congregation at an appropriate time. Hundreds of congregations have participated in "Labor in the Pulpit" 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.
- 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. (Order a copy of Building Projects and Religious Values from the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice.)
- 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 parishoners 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.



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