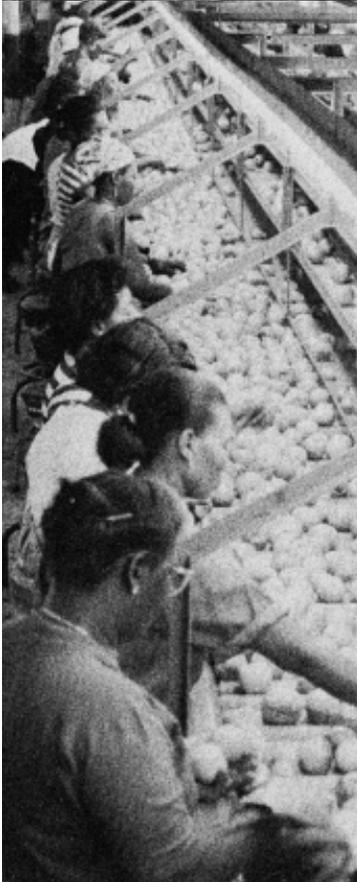




# Presbyterian Resources for Worker Justice



With its history rooted in the Protestant Reformation and the 16th century, the Presbyterian Church holds that God's people are called for service as well as salvation and are called to transform society by seeking justice and living in obedience to God's Word. Through the prism of the Reformed tradition and the writings of John Calvin, Presbyterians also view work as a Godly endeavor. These two values meet in the quest for justice for working people and are well established in the Presbyterian faith tradition. This manual highlights those traditions and includes denominational statements about worker justice, historic and current programs, liturgical resources, suggested actions and perspectives on worker justice and the Presbyterian Church. Our prayer is that these materials serve as a helpful reminder of the Presbyterian commitment to worker justice and inspire continued service in this arena.

Special thanks to Frank Kim, former director of the Orange County Interfaith Committee, Rev. Mark Wendorf of McCormick Theological Seminary, Rev. Dick Poethig, former dean of the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations, and Rev. Noelle Damico, the Presbyterian Church USA National Coordinator for the Taco Bell Boycott.

## Presbyterians and Labor

**J**ohn Calvin changed the world's understanding of labor. Before his day, labor was understood as a necessary evil to provide food, clothing and shelter. But Calvin understood labor as a means to glorify God, a calling from God, by which people could help build a better community free of sin and injustice. Work was a divine activity in Calvin's eyes. Thus, all work should be shrouded in justice, safe working conditions, a living wage, and fair relations between employer and employee. Those who abused, exploited or sought advantage of the other were seen as sinners. The only goal in work was honoring God and improving the community's life.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has a long history of supporting economic

justice. These actions flow directly from the Scriptures and the Confessions. The words of the ancient prophets, the Psalms, and Jesus have been particularly important. "...A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs...makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God."

*Book of Confessions, Confession of 1967, 9.46*

The church has stood in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, called for reform of corporate misdeeds and actions, proposed living wages, supported economic boycotts, demanded safe working conditions, supported fair and equitable policies and practices and ratified the collective bargaining process.

*Social Policy Compilation, Economic Justice, Ch. 7.*

## Work is a Good Thing

*Rev. Mark Wendorf*

**T**oday work is that thing we must do to put food on the table, a roof over our head, and clothes on our body. For most of us it is understood as a necessary evil. Something we have to do, but don't want to do. Something we must do, but when we do it we complain and whine.

Many times there are good reasons for this wailing and moaning. The work is difficult. The pay is low. The work may even be dangerous and bad for our health. The boss is authoritarian and unfair. The work site is dirty and unpleasant. No one listens to our suggestions. The list of rules is long and the breaks are far too short.

The "good life" is seen as wrapped up in leisure time, vacation time, anytime away from work.

### A New Understanding of Work

But work has not always been understood this way. There was a time when all work, every kind of work, was seen as a call from God. Work was a divine activity. Our work represented God. In our work God could be seen and experienced. Thus, good, quality work was important, because who wants to short God?

John Calvin introduced this idea centuries ago. He proclaimed that all people common and elite, had an office, a calling from God. God loves all and calls all; not just the leisurely and the rich.

We are made in God's image. Thus, the labor of our hands, the work of our bodies, the ideas of our minds are also in the image of God. Every person, every person's job, has worth, a calling from God. Every person is connected to God and dignified because he/she is created in God's image. Every person's work, therefore, produces things that are worthy of God. Work is a good thing. Labor is a calling from God.

The work of a housemaid making the beds in the poorest hotel is just as worthy as the highest paid corporate chief. The work of a laborer creating steel is just as worthy as a monk contemplating God's greatness through prayer.

In this understanding of work there are no economic classes. No one is better than another. The evaluation of work is not based on what a person does or how much money that person receives for pay. Instead one is evaluated on how and why the work is done.

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## Why do we work?

One works to improve the community. Life only receives meaning by its service to God – praising God and serving each other. This understanding of work rules out any possibility of severe profits at the expense of others, unjust wages, inhumane and unsafe working conditions, or mistreatment of employees; because such things would not praise God or improve the community.

Work must always be done with God in mind, not for profit or self interest and it must be practiced with Christian principles of mercy and love, justice and righteousness. When these principles are not used, we have sin and when we have sin, economic classes exist, low wages occur, and poor working conditions thrive.

In Calvin's view work is not just a necessity or simply a means for survival. Work has a much higher status. Work is a calling from God where one expresses one's love for God and gives one's self in service in order to create a just and righteous society.

We work to give God praise and build a better community for all where justice and mercy, peace and love reign.

## What about the rich?

Calvin argued it was ok to be rich, if you paid attention to these guidelines:

- Wealth is a gift from God to be shared with others. It is not, as we think today, a result of hard work or good fortune.
- All gifts come to us by God. Thus, they are to be used to glorify God and serve those in need. Wealth is not a sign of favoritism from God. It is a duty and responsibility to be used with God for the improvement of others; not for the accumulation of goods and the increase of your bank account.
- Any oppression, speculation, harmful activity that increases one's wealth is a sin before God. The purpose of work is not to gain profit at any cost. The purpose is to honor God and help others. Thus, exploitation of any kind was forbidden as a sin. It is never right to keep others poor and exploited so you can be rich.

*Rev. Mark W. Wendorf is the Edward F. and Phyllis K. Campbell Assistant Professor of Urban Ministry at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Ill.*

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*Work is a calling from God where one expresses one's love for God and gives one's self in service in order to create a just and righteous society.*

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## Labor Statements Presbyterian Church (USA)

*Employment, unemployment, working conditions and labor relations are all subjects that have merited the attention of a variety of Presbyterian General Assemblies. Here are a few of the outstanding examples:*

...the church must seek to open the lines of communication for Christian action in the areas of tension between labor and management.... Management, as a governing force, should be called upon to manage fairly for all concerned...and not to be a force only for the few. **1959**

The General Assembly expresses its confidence in collective bargaining as the most responsible and democratic way of resolving issues in labor-management relations...calls upon individual Presbyterian union members to take a responsible part in the activities of their unions. **1959**

Since God has created life and material resources to sustain life, (humanity) does not have the right to deny life by withholding the means of existence to some...justice demands that everyone have the material conditions necessary for their physical and social existence...a guarantee to every American for an income...large enough to provide for basic needs and to sustain every person's participation, with dignity, in society.... **1971**

...we affirm that the Church should espouse for all persons the opportunity and responsibility for productive work ...we affirm for all persons the right to be paid adequately and treated with fairness and dignity...we affirm the right of all workers...to join labor organizations and participate in collective bargaining...we affirm the necessi-



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*I believe that on our best days labor unions and faith communities share some very important values. ...So few secular institutions and organizations share our faith values that when we find one that does...we should join them as allies every chance we get.*


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ty of the church to view economic issues from the side of the lowly and oppressed and for Christians active in our economic system to be concerned for serving the needs of the world.... The Presbyterian Church ...will need to engage in a conscious effort to view labor management issues from the perspective of the unskilled, uneducated and underpaid.... The point of the Parable of the Laborers and the Vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16) is that all workers receive a just wage.... The Church affirms the rights of labor organization and collective bargaining as minimum demands of justice...and arrangements which offer opportunities for workers...to share greater economic rewards. **1980**

...employment training (should) be for jobs that will pay a living wage...the focus (should) be on job creation where jobs at a living wage do not exist...continued health benefits for parents and children be made available.... **1987**

Justice demands that social institutions guarantee all persons the opportunity

## Shared Values Demand Faith Community, Labor Work Together

Rev. Mark W. Wendorf

I am often asked why I have any interest in justice for low wage workers. In response I often paraphrase the words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., found in his Letter from Birmingham Jail: Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

Called to a justice ministry, I must fight injustice wherever I find it.

Besides, in my heart and spirit, I believe that on our best days labor unions and faith communities share some very important values. We believe in similar things and work for comparable ends. So few secular institutions and organizations share our faith values

to participate actively in economic decision-making that affects them. All workers – including undocumented, migrant, and farm workers – have the right to choose to organize for the purposes of collective bargaining. **1995**

In **1997**, the 209th General Assembly of the PCUSA resolved to:

- Endorse the Day of Conscience and Holiday Season of Conscience as a public witness to the need to eliminate sweat shops and urge members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to support and participate in the events.
- Call for the Workplace Code of Conduct and Principles of Monitoring to include provisions that assure wages above subsistence levels and guarantee independent monitoring of compliance.
- Urge the Presbyterian Hunger Program and the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) in collaboration with other offices and networks to give leadership to the education and mobilization effort.

that when we find one that does agree with us, we should join them as allies every chance we get.

Labor unions, like faith communities, are interested in justice. They, like us, want people to be treated fairly and equally with no partiality shown for race, gender, creed, or belief. They, like the laborers in the vineyard, want a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. They, like the church, show favoritism for the poor and oppressed, working diligently to improve their conditions.

Labor unions, like faith communities, believe in the dignity of people. Faith communities believe in this dignity because we believe that all of us are created in the image of God. Labor unions believe it is the right thing to do. No one should be belittled,

harassed, abused, used at work. Each human being should have the right to say what he/she thinks and the ability and power to help make decisions that affect his/her livelihood. That is the essence of the collective bargaining system.

Labor unions, like faith communities, believe in creating a good and decent community for all people – church folk might call it the Kingdom of God or the Beloved Community. Labor folks know that a community based on justice and mercy, healthy and safe living conditions, and the chance to pursue liberty and happiness not only makes for a better life, but also creates a better human being.

## Religion & Labor Timeline Presbyterian Church USA

**1880s** Many urban congregations founded and supported neighborhood houses to minister to the needs of rural and immigrant people moving to industrial urban centers for employment.

**1903** The Rev. Charles Stelzle is appointed the director of the Presbyterian Church's Workingman's Department, a ministry of the Board of Home Missions. The Department's task was to minister to the working people who were part of that era's industrial change. Years later this Department became the Department of Church and Labor.

**1910** Stelzle, as part of the work of the Workingman's Department, founded the Labor Temple, in New York City. He took a dying Presbyterian congregation and focused its attention on the needs and wishes of working class people. It became a large congregation with a wide variety of programs. It became the model for social service congregations open seven days a week instead of just Sunday morning.

**1945** Growing out of the work of the Labor Temple it was clear that a training center was needed to educate pastors on the culture of industrial society and how to minister to working class people. This clarity created the

Labor unions, and faith communities, believe in favoring the poor and oppressed. People of faith are called to this ministry because of the example set by Jesus. Labor union folk know that justice demands that the poor be raised up and the oppressed set free. That is why they argue so vividly for fair wages, safe working conditions, a living wage, and a voice in the workplace.

We, the faith community, share many ideals, goals and values in common. That is why I am dedicated to working with unions on matters of economic justice.

*Rev. Mark W. Wendorf is the Edward F. and Phyllis K. Campbell Assistant Professor of Urban Ministry at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Ill.*

Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR). PIIR became an integral part of the ministry of McCormick Theological Seminary and was directed by the Rev. Marshal Scott.

**1950s** The 1950s saw a growing interest in international mission work by the Presbyterian Church which coincided with a burst of industrial economies in Asia. Thus, a number of missionaries were sent to Asia to assist our sister churches in ministering to workers in urban industrial settings. Thus was born the urban industrial mission model.

**1966** The urban industrial mission model, pioneered by Presbyterian missionaries, was institutionalized by the World Council of Churches with the establishment of their Urban Industrial Mission Office, staffed by the Rev. George Todd, a Presbyterian pastor.

**1968** The Institute of the Church on an Urban Industrial Society (ICUIS), as part of the World Council of Churches' urban industrial ministry, was formed at McCormick Theological Seminary to provide resources and training for pastors interested in urban industrial ministry anywhere around the world. The Rev. Richard Poethig, a former urban industrial missionary in the Philippines,

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was its director. In 1970, after 25 years of tremendous ministry, PIIR was merged into ICUIS. ICUIS' ministry lasted for about 20 years.

**2000** McCormick Theological Seminary, the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and the AFL-CIO, build-

ing on the vision and foundations of PIIR and ICUIS, founded Seminary Summer. This ten week summer internship provides opportunities for ministry students to work alongside labor unions and low wage workers on matters of economic justice.

## Presbyterians Face Industrial Change In the Twentieth Century

Rev. Richard Poethig

*Congregations centered in serving a largely homogenous ethnic population were suddenly confronted with increasing numbers of new immigrants.*

The twentieth century challenged the social policy of the Presbyterian Church as it faced massive industrial change in the United States. A socially conservative denomination in the nineteenth century, the Presbyterian Church moved into the social gospel movement in a dramatic way in the first decade of the new century. What brought about this change? First, the dual social forces of massive immigration and rapid industrialization hastened the processes through which the church reviewed its mission as a twentieth century denomination. Second, new leadership arose which responded to these social changes in innovative ways.

Immigration into Northeastern and Midwestern cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a direct impact upon local urban congregations. Congregations centered on serving a largely homogenous ethnic population were suddenly confronted with increasing numbers of new immigrants. Charles Thompson, appointed to head the Board of Home Missions in 1898, represented the new thinking of the church. A successful pastor, who had served urban churches in Cincinnati, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Kansas City, Thompson was called to Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York at a time of crisis. When Thompson arrived in New York, the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church was in the throes of a decision to leave its present site and move north, away from the incoming immigrants. Thompson convinced the congregation to stay and create a social program

meant to meet the needs of newcomers. Thompson recognized that institutional change could not be achieved alone. Other congregations in the city were facing similar situations and Thompson saw that there needed to be a way of sharing experience and supporting one another in a common cause within the city. Thus it was that he became a leader in "the Open and Institutional Church" movement which ultimately laid the foundation for creation of the Federal Council of Churches in 1908.

Upon his call to head the Board of Home Missions in 1898, Thompson began a search for leadership to relate to the growing working class in U.S. cities. He found that leadership in the person of Charles Stelze, whom he appointed to head the newly created Workingman's Department in 1903. It was the first such program among national church bodies, and through Stelze's experience and energies, the ground was prepared for Presbyterian church involvement in the industrial changes of the early twentieth century. Stelze was cut out for the job. Among the social gospellers of the early twentieth century, Stelze came out of a working class background. He was raised in the tenements of the lower East Side of New York and carried a union card as a member of the International Association of Machinists (IAM). He was proud to say that the only diploma he had was his certificate of his apprenticeship as a machinist. He had little formal education, but through help from a mixed array of people, he learned basic mathematics, Greek and Hebrew, and the Scriptures. When he



was called from the Markham Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, he had established a Sunday School of four thousand working people, the largest Sunday School west of the Mississippi.

Among the many social ministries Stelze created, the one he felt best represented his approach to the immigrant working people filling city neighborhoods was the founding of the Labor Temple in 1910 at the vacated site of the Presbyterian Church at 14th St. and Second Avenue. Labor Temple with its multiple programs, especially its public forums, served the multi-ethnic peoples in Stelze's former East Side neighborhood. The Labor Temple, whose history lasted into the 1950s, gained a worldwide reputation for its ability to reach immigrant working people.

Stelze served the Presbyterian Church for 10 years before conservatives in the denomination forced his resignation. But the die was cast – Stelze's efforts lasted beyond his 1913 resignation from national church leadership as others, influenced by his work, continued his ministries in the next decades. The stream of industrial ministries gathered force in the post-World War II period when Jacob "Jake" Long, head of the Unit of City and Industrial Work (the 1940s inheritor of Stelze's Department of Church and Labor) saw the need for a program to train pastors and church workers to face the latent labor-management conflicts which would come in the post war period. Out of his efforts the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR) was created and Long had the new program housed at the Labor Temple.

The PIIR, established in January 1945 under the deanship of Marshal L. Scott, set in motion a program which was to shape the urban-industrial mission movement for the next generation. Scott, who had been a pastor in Columbus, Ohio, had minimum training in urban-industrial mission. He had, however, done a major paper on the Protestant churches and industrial change under Rhea Dulle at Ohio State

University. Scott brought to the PIIR program an appreciation for the technological change taking place in the U.S. and an understanding of the processes needed for preparing pastors for these changes. Scott began with a two week seminar program at Labor Temple for pastors and seminarians on the issues of urban and industrial change. He used New York City as his laboratory. He soon moved to a full time summer program for seminarians that involved them as on-the-line workers. The first program held in Pittsburgh in 1950 had eighteen seminarians working "incognito" as workers in various steel plants. The program was moved to Chicago in 1952 where it became based at McCormick Seminary.

The "Ministers-in-Industry" summer project had a direct impact upon the decisions of seminarians as they chose their calling after seminary. This was a time of upheaval in the center city across the U.S. as white flight left down town churches in disarray. The PIIR experience helped create a new generation of pastors who chose to minister to these inner-city congregations. Other PIIR alumni chose to develop industrial mission programs with direct engagement in industrial and corporate structures. Others chose an even more direct route by following in the tradition of the "worker priests." No matter what route they took, the 3,000 participants in the PIIR program in its thirty year history saw the mission and the work of the church in a growing technological economy with new eyes.

Those who remain engaged and those newly called to the struggles of worker justice are building upon the foundations of those who preceded them in this past century. We take courage from their dedication and pray for God's empowerment in the action still ahead.

*Rev. Richard Poethig, a retired Presbyterian minister, is a former dean of the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations and former director of the Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society. Poethig also participated in the first PIIR summer Ministers-In-Industry Program.*



## Presbyterian Social Witness and the Taco Bell Boycott

Rev. Noelle Damico

*“All workers – including undocumented, migrant, and farm workers – have the right to choose to organize for the purposes of collective bargaining.”*

In June 2002, the 214th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA endorsed a consumer boycott of Taco Bell restaurants and products started by the Immokalee, Fla.-based Coalition of Immokalee Workers. The community group sought better wages and working conditions for Florida farm workers who pick tomatoes that go into Taco Bell products.

The ongoing Taco Bell action is the first consumer boycott endorsed by the General Assembly in more than 20 years. The church does not undertake such actions lightly, but an overture from the Presbytery of Tampa Bay and the testimony of a farm worker made the case: The circumstances of the farm workers were urgent; the objective was winnable; and the method was consistent with Presbyterian social witness.

Farm workers who pick tomatoes in Florida earn between 40 and 45 cents for every 32-pound bucket they pick and haul. At 40 cents, a worker must pick two tons of tomatoes to earn \$50. According to the Department of Labor, these workers are earning the same average wage they earned in 1978, over 20 years ago. Workers laboring in these sweatshop-like conditions earn, on average, \$7,500 annually.

Slavery, the most extreme form of labor exploitation, was also found in the fields of Florida. The CIW has worked with the Justice Department and the FBI to prosecute five cases of slavery in the past five years. In the most recent case in 2002, three employers who employed over 700 workers were sentenced to 12, 12, and 10 years in federal prison on charges of holding workers in debt-bondage, extortion, and use of firearms during a violent crime. We believe these cases, involving more than one thousand enslaved migrants, are merely the tip of the iceberg.

For over fifty years, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has adopted a significant

social witness policy calling for agricultural workers to have the right to organize and bargain collectively:

- In 1948 the PCUSA Assembly opposed the removal of federal laws protecting migrant workers and urged congregations to make migrant camps an object of Christian concern. They reiterated the spirit of this in 1954 and 1956.
- In 1969 the UPCUSA General Assembly urged the church to support “...the demands of farm workers for bargaining rights and legislative protection....” Further, the UPCUSA supported the successful 1970s struggle of the United Farm Workers, which included the right to bargain collectively with their employers.
- In a 1995 statement, Principles of Vocation and Work, the General Assembly declared: “Justice demands that social institutions guarantee all persons the opportunity to participate actively in economic decision making that affects them. All workers – including undocumented, migrant, and farm workers – have the right to choose to organize for the purposes of collective bargaining.”

Boycott supporters want Taco Bell (1) to participate in three-way talks between the company, tomato suppliers, and representatives of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (2) to contribute to an immediate increase in farm worker wages through an increase in the per pound rate Taco Bell pays for its tomatoes, and (3) to work with Taco Bell’s tomato suppliers and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) to establish a code of conduct that would ensure workers’ fundamental rights.

The church has also worked with generations of legal advocates in hopes of including agricultural workers in the National Labor Relations Act. Under the act, workers have the right to organize and to meet with employers about their



concerns. Agricultural laborers are explicitly excluded from the law and the growers who employ them feel no obligation to dialogue with worker representatives. Workers cannot turn to the National Labor Relations Board if they are fired or discriminated against for raising issues with their employers.

By endorsing the Taco Bell boycott, the General Assembly underscored the systemic nature of labor abuse within the agricultural industry and the belief that it could best be addressed if all who benefit from worker exploitation make a commitment to end it together. The boycott also invites Presbyterians to use their influence as consumers to address the imbalance of power between workers and those who profit from their labor, by pressuring all parties to negotiate.

## McCormick Theological Seminary: Training Pastors to Minister to Workers

**M**cCormick Theological Seminary has pioneered the training of pastors for ministry with working class people. It started with the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR), 1945-1970, kept going with the Institute on the Church in Urban Industrial Society (ICUIS), 1968 – 1988, and is now continuing with Seminary Summer, a ten week summer internship that places ministry students in ministry sites with labor unions and low wage workers working on matters of economic justice. Seminary Summer is done in cooperation with the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and the AFL-CIO.

McCormick also offers courses that may assist students in ministry with low wage workers and working class people; courses that help students

Promoting social righteousness is one of the Great Ends of the Church. One way to do this is to use consumer power to express disapproval and seek change. Prior boycotts have saved lives, empowered people, and challenged social and economic barriers in the name of the gospel. The Taco Bell boycott stands in continuity with the church's history and witness. Please visit [www.pcusa.org/boycott](http://www.pcusa.org/boycott) to learn how you can help stop slavery and exploitation in the fields.

*Rev. Noelle Damico is the Presbyterian Church USA National Coordinator for the Taco Bell Boycott. She holds a Masters of Divinity degree and a Masters of Theology degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. She is also a minister in the United Church of Christ. For more information about the Taco Bell boycott, visit [www.pcusa.org/boycott](http://www.pcusa.org/boycott).*

understand immigration, immigrants and their struggles and joys; courses on the variety of organizing philosophies and techniques, economic and economic ethics courses, courses on globalization, urban culture and ministries; as well as ministry centers that focus particularly on the experiences of Hispanic and African American peoples – often the communities that bear the brunt of low wage work.

In cooperation with many Chicago area organizations McCormick also co-sponsors the annual Addie Wyatt Religion and Labor Lecture Series. The Rev. Addie Wyatt, former McCormick Board of Trustee member, was a pioneer in Chicago labor organizing becoming the first African American woman to be president of a local labor union, vice president of a national labor union and vice president of the AFL-CIO.

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*“None of us works independently.... Our partners in work, even when we cannot see them or know them personally, deserve our respect and our attention to their needs.”*

*From the PCUSA 1995 statement, “God’s Work in Our Hands.”*

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## Labor Litany

One: God of all things, we thank you for work.

*Many: For in our work you call us to give you honor, serve others and create a loving community.*

One: God of grace and hospitality, we thank you for the many immigrants who come to work in our land.

*Many: May we serve them as they serve us. May we welcome them, for the Word tells us that as we entertain strangers we entertain God.*

One: When we give drink to the thirsty or feed the hungry,

*Many: We serve Jesus our Savior.*

One: God of justice, you call us to treat the laborers in the vineyard fairly. Your prophets decry the oppression of the workers. Your people traveled forty years to escape the oppressive work of the Egyptians.

*Many: Merciful and forgiving God, When we establish just and living wages, When we create safe and healthy working conditions, When we provide harassment-free working places,*

One: We are setting free the oppressed.  
We are creating justice.  
We are doing God's work.

*Many: Thanks be to God that in our work we can be faithful and that working with others makes us faithful to our God and Savior. Amen.*



*God of justice,  
you call us to  
treat the laborers  
in the vineyard  
fairly. Your  
prophets decry  
the oppression of  
the workers.*

## Labor Prayer

*Wonderful God*  
**MIGHTIEST WORKER**  
PARENT OF THE  
*CARPENTER JESUS,*

*we offer prayers for our  
brothers and sisters in labor.*

As our labor serves others by providing services, goods and profits may it also serve you in its diligence, dignity and justice. May our employees and employers be guided by the common good and not selfish interest.

May justice rule over profit.

May safety reign over risk.

May love overwhelm harsh rules.

Bless us all, living God, and raise up workers clear of mind, glad to labor in your name and striving together to build your Beloved Community.

Amen.

*Amen*

*adapted from a Labor Day prayer, the Presbyterian Church  
(USA), Book of Common Worship, 1946*

## What You Can Do To Help Workers

1. Pray for low-wage workers, unemployed workers and their families. Pray for employers and elected leaders who set policies and make decisions that affect low-wage workers.
2. Write your Congressional Representative and Senators urging them to support an increase in the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.65 per hour. Write to your Representative (U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515) supporting bill HR-964, and your Senator at U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510 supporting bill S-224. You can also send a letter from [www.nicwj.org](http://www.nicwj.org).
3. Advocate for immigrants by supporting the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride as it travels through 80 cities in the U.S. and by joining the Washington, DC event on Oct. 2 and the New York City rally on Oct. 4. For more information, visit [www.iwfr.org](http://www.iwfr.org).
4. Check to see if your congregation, health care facility, business, or organization uses Cintas for its mats, uniforms, or first aid kits. Cintas is a large industrial laundry that should help raise the standards for workers. In many communities, Cintas workers are organizing to improve conditions. You can encourage Cintas consumers to urge Cintas to become a model employer.
5. Boycott Taco Bell restaurants and products and call, write, or fax company officials asking that they meet with representatives of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to discuss how Taco Bell can help achieve justice for Florida farmworkers. You can write to Mr. Emil J. Brolick, President and Chief Concept Officer, Taco Bell Corp., 17901 Von Karman, Irvine, California 92 614. The telephone number is (949) 863-4500 and fax (949) 863-4537. Please visit [www.pcusa.org/boycott](http://www.pcusa.org/boycott) to learn more about the boycott.
6. Sign-up for Worker Justice updates via the National Interfaith Committee Newsletter and E-mail Bulletin. Mail, Fax or E-mail your addresses:

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization/Congregational Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail:**  
NICWJ  
1020 West Bryn Mawr  
Chicago, IL 60660

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(773) 728-8409

**E-mail:**  
[bridget@nicwj.org](mailto:bridget@nicwj.org)



## Who We Are...

The National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice (NICWJ) calls upon our religious values in order to educate, organize, and mobilize the religious community in the U.S. on issues and campaigns that will improve wages, benefits, and working conditions for workers, especially low-wage workers. The National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice:

- **Protects Worker Rights**

NICWJ believes workers should have the right to organize and to engage in collective bargaining. Because many U.S. workers are being denied these rights, NICWJ has a joint partnership with the Department of Labor to help guarantee and enforce these basic rights.

- **Builds Relationships**

Too often the religious community and the labor communities have worked in isolation from one another. NICWJ promotes opportunities for labor leaders and people of faith to work together, including workshops and field placements for seminarians, novices, and rabbinical students. For more information, contact [regina@nicwj.org](mailto:regina@nicwj.org).

- **Develops Resources**

NICWJ develops resources on worker justice issues for congregations. Materials such as

*Faith Works, Why Unions Matter, Living Wage resources, What Faith Groups Say About the Right to Organize* and more can be downloaded from [www.nicwj.org](http://www.nicwj.org). To order quantities of materials, contact [bridget@nicwj.org](mailto:bridget@nicwj.org).

- **Engages Religious Employers**

Religiously-affiliated non-profit institutions, such as hospitals and nursing homes, should model the highest standard of employer-employee relations. Unfortunately some religious institutions hire union-busting “consultants” and engage in unethical, and sometimes illegal behavior toward workers when they attempt to form a union. NICWJ has developed resources to educate people of faith about this issue.

- **Organizes Local Interfaith Committees**

Most low-wage worker concerns require local religious involvement and assistance. NICWJ works with interested religious leaders to form ongoing local organizations to help educate and involve the religious community on worker justice issues, and to support the work of the network of local committees and Religion-Labor groups. For more information, contact [kristi@nicwj.org](mailto:kristi@nicwj.org).

For more information about the struggle for worker justice, visit [www.nicwj.org](http://www.nicwj.org).



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