

Workers' Rights are Human Rights

"No one may deny the right to organize without attacking human dignity itself. Therefore, we firmly oppose organized efforts, such as those regrettably now seen in this country, to break existing unions and prevent workers from organizing." -U.S. Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*

Imagine 12-hour work days, 7-day work weeks, no provisions for workplace safety, starvation wages. These nightmarish working conditions were the reality of factory and mine workers in the United States a century ago, and remain realities for millions of workers around the world.

The struggle for the 8-hour workday, overtime pay, sick leave and other worker benefits came at a high price; men, women and children were beaten and even killed to secure better working conditions and the right to organize themselves into labor unions and to bargain collectively. Labor Day has become a holiday for barbecues and back to school sales; it should mean more to us, especially as Catholics, as we recall the Church's teaching on the dignity of human work. With St. Joseph the Worker as our patron, we see human labor as a way to participate in God's creation, a way to use the talents God has given us to enhance the Common Good. Whether we are harvesting crops, teaching children, tending the sick, driving a bus, creating art or waiting tables in a restaurant, we are serving one another. The conditions of that sacred work should enhance, not destroy, our inherent human dignity.



Child labor in the 21st century

For over a century, the Church has declared again and again in papal encyclicals and bishops' pastoral letters that workers have the right to organize into labor unions in order to protect workers' dignity by advocating for living wages and safe workplaces. Learn more at <http://usccb.org/upload/Primer-labor-Catholic-social-teaching.pdf> Remember: How you spend your money is a moral choice. If you want to protect human dignity, buy union-made and Fair Trade items produced under decent working conditions, not in sweatshops.



Pope Francis on Labor:

"Unfortunately, especially when there is a crisis and the need is pressing, inhumane work increases, slave-labor, work without the proper security or respect for creation, or without respect for rest, celebrations and the family, and work on Sundays when it isn't necessary."

*"I think of the difficulties which, in various countries, today afflict the world of work and business; I think of how many, and not just young people, are unemployed, many times due to a purely economic conception of society, **which seeks selfish profit, beyond the parameters of social justice.**"*

*"Where there is no work there is no dignity! ... [lack of work] is the result of a global decision, of an economic system which leads to this tragedy; **an economic system centered on an idol called "money".***

Intercessory Prayers for Labor Day from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Ask your pastor if these prayers could be included in the Prayers of the Faithful at Masses over Labor Day Weekend.

<http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/labor-employment/upload/labor-day-statement-supplemental-aid-2014.pdf>

We pray for renewal of spirit for the men, women and children who must work in jobs that ignore the dignity of their personhood. **We pray to the Lord.**

We pray for the men and women who are not able to find jobs. We pray for their continued perseverance and determination as they continue to seek ways in which to participate in God's creation and work. **We pray to the Lord.**

We pray for the men and women who own companies, who lead companies and who make decisions regarding safe work conditions and adequate wages. We pray that these leaders will act in the best interests of their laborers. **We pray to the Lord.**

We pray for union leaders, national and local, who are responsible for speaking for workers. May they be guided by the grace and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to be servant leaders. **We pray to the Lord.**

We pray for men, women and children who suffer from our lack of solidarity in their daily struggle to survive. May we be aware of our responsibility to be in relationship with our brothers and sisters in the world. **We pray to the Lord.**

We pray that as we are reminded that it is right and just to receive a fair wage for work, we may strive to promote dignity and respect for all in the workplace. **We pray to the Lord.**

We pray for those who have lost their lives while working, that they might be welcomed into the heavenly kingdom; and for their families, that they might be comforted and find security. **We pray to the Lord.**

Support Workers *and* the Environment: GREEN JOBS

Our Diocesan Public Policy Committee continues to raise awareness of global warming and is asking parishioners to make the connection between this issue and our Catholic faith. One way to reduce your family's contribution to climate change is to get a free energy audit of your home, and then to follow up on the results in order to reduce your energy use. The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) provides subsidies and low interest financing for efficient water heaters, furnaces, insulation and appliances. By doing these renovations you can: **1)** save money; **2)** better protect the planet, and the poor and vulnerable people who suffer the most from climate change; and **3)** support good paying green jobs and help grow this sector of the economy for the benefit of workers. See NYSEDA's web site for details:

<http://www.nyserda.ny.gov/Energy-Efficiency-and-Renewable-Programs/Residential/Energy-Efficiency-Programs/Home-Energy-Efficiency-Upgrades.aspx>

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