

Labor Day 2010

WHAT THE CHURCH HAS SAID ABOUT WORK AND UNIONS

What is meant by the word "decent" in regard to work? It means work that expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman in the context of their particular society: work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both men and women, with the development of their community; work that enables the worker to be respected and free from any form of discrimination; work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children, without the children themselves being forced into labor; work that permits the workers to organize themselves freely, and to make their voices heard; work that leaves enough room for rediscovering one's roots at a personal, familial, and spiritual level; work that guarantees those who have retired a decent standard of living. ~ Pope Benedict XVI *Caritas in Veritate* (2009)

The purpose of unions is not simply to defend the existing wages and prerogatives of the fraction of workers who belong to them, but also to enable workers to make positive and creative contributions to the firm, the community and the larger society in an organized and

cooperative way. In a footnote: Even if most injustice and exploitation were removed unions would still have a legitimate place. They are the normal voice of labor, necessary to organize social life for the common good. ~ U.S. Bishops *Economic Justice for All* (1986)

Among the basic rights of the human person must be counted the right of freely founding labor unions. These unions should be truly able to represent the workers and to contribute to the proper arrangement of economic life. Another such right is that of taking part freely in the activity of these unions without fear or reprisal. ~ Vatican II *The Church in the Modern World* (1965)

WHAT TO DO

1. Educate yourself on the social teachings of our church. ■ Read the USCCB Pastoral Reflection issued for this Labor Day, "A New "Social Contract" for Today's "New Things." See www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/labor_day_2010.pdf ■ Pick up a copy of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Available at Amazon.com!

2. Educate yourself on the concerns of workers and the efforts of unions locally as well as abroad. ■ Read two classics: Studs Terkel's book *Working*, New Press, 1972 or *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* by Barbara Ehrenreich, Holt, 2001 ■ Keep up with U.S. labor news by reading Labor Notes... labornotes.org/magazine ■ Stay aware of

international labor news with Labour Start: www.labourstart.org

3. Organize a union among your co-workers, in your own workplace. ■ Call the Chicago Federation of Labor for advice (312) 222-1000 ■ Go to the AFL-CIO website for more info: www.aflcio.org

4. Make a charitable donation to those workers who face the greatest hardship in organizing. ■ Fight human trafficking of farm workers with the *Coalition of Immokalee Workers*: www.ciw-online.org/

5. Get involved in faith, student, or community-based organizations that support labor rights, both locally and internationally. ■ *Interfaith Worker Justice* located in Uptown strengthens the involvement of the religious community in workplace justice. Make a donation to honor and thank a special worker in your life at www.iwj.org or (773) 728-8400 ■ *United Students Against Sweatshops* fights them overseas and at home: usas.org ■ Join the campaign to support campus food service workers: www.stirupcampaign.org

6. Respect picket lines and boycotts enacted by working people acting to defend their rights and the common good. ■ Know what hotels are being boycotted around the country and why, including right here in Chicago! See www.hotelworkersrising.org/HotelGuide or (312) 663-4373.

7. Buy "union made" and "fair trade" products whenever available. ■ Patronize *Ten Thousand Villages*, 719 Main St., Evanston. (847)733-8258.