Labor in the Pulpits:
Catholic Parish Toolkit
INTRODUCTION

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 the service held around Labor Day weekend.

Interfaith Worker Justice believes that people of faith are an integral part of the effort to guarantee that all workers are treated with dignity and respect. As corporations, unions, worker advocates and workers seek to cooperate and build together, the religious community can urge and help them grow in a moral context.

Since 1996, thousands of congregations have spent Labor Day doing this important work. From San Diego to New York, religious communities focus Labor Day weekend services on the injustices facing low-wage workers and religious community’s efforts to support those workers’ struggles for living wages, family-sustaining benefits, and for dignity and respect on the job. Participating congregations integrate worker justice themes into their services, and many invite a worker from within their congregation, a union member or worker advocate to be a guest on Labor Day weekend.

Through Labor in the Pulpits, congregations have the opportunity to talk about the connections between faith, work, and justice. If you would like more information on how to become a speaker or host a speaker, please e-mail info@iwj.org.
GETTING STARTED

There are many different ways to plan a Labor Day service that lifts up workers within your community and around the country. The suggestions below can help you get started. Many of these can be incorporated into groups and programs that already exist in your congregation.

- **Connect with your local federation of labor or Interfaith Worker Justice affiliate.** Many IWJ affiliates have strong Labor in the Pulpit programs. Reach out to one in your area. A list of affiliates is available at www.iwj.org.

- **Invite a speaker (worker, union leader, worker advocate).** Recruit someone from your community to speak on Labor Day weekend. If no one is available, IWJ and our affiliates can match your congregation with a guest speaker for Labor Day weekend. For more information, e-mail info@iwj.org.

- **Focus on education.** Labor Day weekend offers congregations the opportunity to highlight and lift up issues that impact workers within the community. Immigration reform, minimum wage and wage theft are among the many worker issues that your congregation can focus on. Issue and campaign-specific resources are included in this toolkit. Additional resources are also available at www.iwj.org.

- **Get the word out.** Promote your Labor Day service in your congregation’s bulletin and/or newsletter. IWJ will help promote events registered here: http://bit.ly/2013LaborDayService.

- **Develop a worship planning committee.** A worship committee can explore creative ways to integrate worker justice themes into the service either by using resources included in this toolkit or creating their own.

- **Teach a fair labor study.** Throughout the month of September, have someone (maybe you!) teach a Bible study or lead a prayer group focusing on labor and faith.

- **Honor an outstanding member (or members) congregation.** Lift up the good work of members of your community. Honor a church worker, volunteer or an outstanding member with a gift to IWJ. We will send you certificates to hand out. Honor a worker here: http://bit.ly/LaborDay2013.
PUBLICITY & MEDIA OUTREACH

Labor in the Pulpits provides a great opportunity for labor groups, worker advocates and religious communities to collaborate and make the voices of workers heard. Below are a few tips on engaging the broader community.

• **Register your event with IWJ.** In the weeks leading up to Labor Day weekend, IWJ will actively promote services planned around the country. Include yours in the list: http://bit.ly/2013LaborDayService.

• **Promote your Labor Day service in your congregation’s bulletin and/or newsletter.** Sample language is available below. Visit www.iwj.org to download Labor Day images.

• **Inform local media about the event.** Invite members of the media to your Labor Day event. Highlight issues – minimum wage, wage theft – that are already getting coverage.

• **Select a spokesperson from your congregation.** Have a “point person” for media interviews who might share personal stories about worker justice or reflections about Labor Day.

Sample blurb for congregation newsletter or bulletin:

**CELEBRATE THE SACREDNESS OF WORK**

On ______________, we will join with congregations across the nation in lifting up and honoring the sacred link between work and faith. This is an opportunity to educate ourselves about the issues that impact workers, especially those in low-wage jobs, and reflect on the true meaning of Labor Day.

[Name of speaker] will join us to speak on what it means to be a person of faith and a [worker, worker advocate].

Sample News Advisory

(Print on your letterhead.)

For Immediate Release
<Enter date here>

Contact:
<Name, E-mail, Phone number>

CELEBRATING THE SACRED LINK BETWEEN FAITH, JUSTICE, AND WORK
[Worker/Labor leader/worker rights activist] brings [issue] to the pulpit on Labor Day Weekend

WHAT: [Congregation] will join more than 500 congregations across the country in honoring workers and lifting up worker struggles this Labor Day weekend. The service is part of the annual Labor in the Pulpits/on the Bimah/in the Minbar program hosted by national worker rights organization, Interfaith Worker Justice, and its network of affiliates.

Presentations will celebrate the ever-growing relationship between religion and labor and their efforts to not only uplift the efforts of past labor leaders and workers, but also to educate people about sweatshops within the borders of the U.S., educate workers’ on their rights in the workplace, give life to living wage ordinances throughout the country, highlight anti-wage theft efforts, and a host of other initiatives designed to secure dignity and respect for all of American workers.

WHO: [Speaker] will talk about [issue].

WHEN: [Specific date and time of your service]

WHERE: [Your church’s address]

WHY: [Include additional information regarding particular issues impacting your community and why it is important for people of faith to be involved.]

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For additional information, please e-mail info@iwj.org.
SPEAKER GUIDE

1. Call the pastor/rabbi/imam as soon as you are assigned. Ask him/her:
   - What time does the service start?
   - At what point in the service will I be speaking, and how long a talk is appropriate?
   - How do I get there?
   - Which scripture readings/texts the congregation will use.
   - The justice activities, ministries and relevant history of the congregation.

2. Getting there:
   - Dress appropriately.
   - Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the service begins.
   - Identify yourself to the pastor/rabbi/imam. Thank him/her.
   - Ask where you should sit and where you will be speaking from (some congregations have more than one pulpit).
   - Get a sense of the sound system, acoustics, and lighting.

3. Final reminders for giving your presentation:
   - Speak slowly, loudly and clearly.
   - Be brief.
   - Be well prepared.
   - Be creative.
   - Introduce yourself and clarify your relationship to labor.
   - Keep your presentation within the allotted time frame.
   - Talk about your own experiences. It is far more important to believe what you are saying than to be eloquent.

4. Once you have finished:
   - Take a deep breath and smile!
   - Thank the pastor, rabbi or imam.
   - Greet people after the service. This is a great opportunity to chat informally with interested people.

Sample outline:

1. Introduction and thanks to the congregation
2. Reason for speaking
   - Labor Day is an opportunity for people of faith to recognize God’s commitment to justice.
   - Reminder that Labor Day is a hard-earned holiday coming out of the struggles of working people for the eight-hour day and the right to organize unions.
3. Tie Labor Day to the lectionary, other Biblical readings, or the appropriate faith group statement on the right to organize.
   - Check www.iwj.org for this year’s lectionary.
4. Describe the importance of unions today in light of a current situation.
   - Tell a personal story of how unions have had a positive impact or tell how they can help reverse some of the following problems:
     - Unions are responsible for benefits we often take for granted, such as the eight-hour day, the end of child labor, the public school system and pensions.
5. Emphasize the importance of the religious community and unions working together.
   - Corporations and unions work most effectively when they can cooperate and build together. The religious community can urge them both and help them grow in a moral context.
NEXT STEPS: THINGS YOU CAN DO FOR WORKERS

1) **PRAY** for all workers, especially those in low-wage and unsafe jobs. Pray for victims of wage theft and those struggling to make ends meet with their minimum wage jobs.

2) **EDUCATE** yourself and other members of your community on worker and economic justice issues. Connect with a worker center in your area and visit www.iwj.org for resources on faith and labor.

3) **ORGANIZE** a worker rights training at your parish to learn how Catholic Social Teachings apply to worker rights in your city.

4) **BE AN ETHICAL EMPLOYER.** 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.

6) **ADVOCATE** for public policies that seek justice for all workers, including decent wages and health care benefits for all workers.

7) **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.

8) **SUPPORT ETHICAL BUSINESSES.** Make an impact with your dollars. Find out how your vendors treat their employees and support those with policies that promote fairness, fair wages and respect at the workplace

9) **BECOME A WORKER JUSTICE CONGREGATION.** Support IWJ’s efforts to improve wages and working conditions for workers by joining our congregational membership program. As a member you will also receive discounts to ethical vendors and access to many of IWJ’s education resource materials.

TAKE ACTION ON THE GROUND AND ONLINE. JOIN IWJ’S E-ADVOCACY TEAM. REGISTER AT WWW.IWJ.ORG.
LECTIONARY READINGS AND SUGGESTED BIBLICAL PASSAGES

Sunday, September 1
First Reading
Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29
My child, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts. Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God. What is too sublime you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not. The mind of a sage appreciates proverbs, and an attentive ear is the joy of the wise. Water quenches a flaming fire, and alms atone for sins.

Responsorial Psalm
Psalm 68:4-5, 6-7, 10-11
R. (cf. 11b) God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.
The just rejoice and exult before God; they are glad and rejoice. Sing to God, chant praise to his name; whose name is the LORD.
R. God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.
The father of orphans and the defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling. God gives a home to the forsaken; he leads forth prisoners to prosperity.
R. God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.
A bountiful rain you showered down, O God, upon your inheritance; you restored the land when it languished; your flock settled in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided it for the needy.
R. God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor

Second Reading
Hebrews 12:18-19, 22,24A
Brothers and sisters: You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them. No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.

Gospel
Luke 14:1, 7-14
On a sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully. He told a parable to those who had been invited, noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table. “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor. A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited by him, and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say,
‘Give your place to this man,’ and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place. Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say, ‘My friend, move up to a higher position.’ Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table. For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Then he said to the host who invited him, “When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

**Monday [Labor Day], September 2**

**First Reading**

1 Thessalonian 4:13-18

We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, console one another with these words.

**Responsorial Psalm**

Psalm 96:1, 3-5, 11-12, 13

*R. (13b) The Lord comes to judge the earth.*

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all you lands. Tell his glory among the nations; among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.

**R. The Lord comes to judge the earth.**

For great is the LORD and highly to be praised; awesome is he, beyond all gods. For all the gods of the nations are things of nought, but the LORD made the heavens.

**R. The Lord comes to judge the earth.**

Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea and what fills it resound; let the plains be joyful and all that is in them! Then shall all the trees of the forest exult.

**R. The Lord comes to judge the earth.**

Before the LORD, for he comes; for he comes to rule the earth. He shall rule the world with justice and the peoples with his constancy.

**R. The Lord comes to judge the earth.**

**Gospel**

Luke 14:16-30

Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty
to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, “Is this not the son of Joseph?” He said to them, “Surely you will quote me this proverb, ‘Physician, cure yourself,’ and say, ‘Do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.’” And he said, “Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place.

Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land.

It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But he passed through the midst of them and went away.

Suggested Biblical Passages

**WAGE THEFT**

**Leviticus 19:13** “Do not oppress your neighbor…Do not keep the wages of the worker…”

**Amos 5:11-12,21-24** “I will not look upon your offerings because you have trampled on the poor.”

**Deuteronomy 24: 14-15** “Do not take advantage of workers. Pay them their wages because they are counting on it.”

**Malachi 3:5** “‘I will be quick to testify against those who defraud laborers of their wages…’ says the LORD Almighty.”

**Isaiah 58: 3-7** “To observe religious practice: but oppress your workers is false worship.”

**Matthew 6:24** “You cannot serve God and money.”

**Jeremiah 22:13** “Woe to him who makes neighbors work for nothing and does not give them their wages.”

**II Timothy 2:6** “The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.”
IMMIGRATION REFORM

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 “Pay workers their wages regardless of where they are from.”

Ruth 2:2-23 Boaz cares for Ruth, a widow and a foreigner, going beyond what the law required.

Jeremiah 34:8-14 “Treat the alien well like God treated the Israelites.”

Matthew 25:41-46 The parable of the goats and sheep/Welcome the stranger

I Corinthians 12:12-13 “…we were all baptized into one body.”

MINIMUM WAGE

I Corinthians 12:26 “Suffering of one is suffering of all.”

Proverbs 17:5 “Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished.”

PAID SICK DAYS

Deuteronomy 5:13-15 The Sabbath is for everyone. It is grounded in the memory of hard labor in Egypt and the exodus from Egypt.

James 5:1-6 “Those who become rich by abusing their workers have sinned against God.”

RIGHT TO ORGANIZE

Jeremiah 22:13-16 A legitimate government upholds the rights of the poor and vulnerable.

JUSTICE

Deuteronomy 16:20 “Follow justice and justice alone…”

Jeremiah 21:11-12 “The Lord says to execute justice and aid the oppressed.”

James 2:14-26 “Faith without works is dead.”

Isaiah 1:17 “…learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”

Proverbs 14:21 “Those who despise their neighbors are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor.”

Jeremiah 22:13-17 “…Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well…”

CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

Jeremiah 29:4-7 “Seek the welfare of the city, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

Luke 10:29-37 The Good Samaritan parable teaches us to show mercy to one another.

John 3:16-18 “Love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

I Corinthians 3:6-9 “For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.”

II Timothy 6:18-19 “Rich people are to be generous and ready to share.”
SAMPLE SERMON

Labor Day Reflection: There is more than one Deadly Sin
By: Fr. Sinclair Oubre, J.C.L.
St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church

1. The ancient Catholic moral teachers recognized that there were some actions that were so grave in themselves that they either were the basis for damnation, or were the cause on which other sins were based.
   a. These were called the Seven Deadly Sins, or the Seven Cardinal Sins.
   b. They were wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony.
   c. These sins are also Mortal Sins:
      i. The Catechism: “Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him.”
      ii. Another way of describing mortal sin is that it is such a serious act that it breaks one’s relationship with God.
   d. However, living in our present day,
      i. if one even believes that there may be actions that are so serious that they break one’s relationship with God, and thereby severs one’s connection to the source of salvation,
      ii. then there really only one, and that is lust in all its permutations.

2. However, there are actually seven, and all of them can lead us to do actions that are mortal sins, and can lead to our loss of salvation.

3. On this Labor Day weekend, we can reflect on three of them:
   a. Greed (which is usually listed as the first of the deadly sins)
   b. Sloth
   c. Gluttony

4. Greed: There is a strong temptation here in America to worship at the Altar of Free Enterprise, and fail to recognize that one of the primary principles of the free market is greed.
   a. I still can hear the speech of Michael Douglas in the movie “Wall Street,” when he preached to shareholders that “Greed is good.”
   b. However, greed is the source of much suffering in our economy. Our US bishops have stated in their Labor Day Message:

   “This broken economy also contributes to the danger that workers will be exploited or mistreated in other ways. For example, many employees struggle for just wages, a safe workplace, and a voice in the economy, but they cannot purchase the goods they make, stay in the hotels they clean, or eat the food
they harvest, prepare, or serve. Immigrants and their families are especially
vulnerable, which highlights the urgent need for comprehensive immigration
reform.”

c. When we do not buffer our economy with the Catholic principles of:
   i. Promoting the Common Good
   ii. Solidarity
   iii. An option for the Poor, and iv. Subsidiarity,
d. than the economy will be based on what I can make, and what I can acquire, and
   what is that but “Greed.”

5. Sloth: The sin of the worker
   a. I am just here to get a check b.
   We are called to:
   i. See our jobs as our participation in God’s ongoing creation
   ii. Owe our employer a “full day’s work for a full day’s pay.” If not, then we
      are stealing time as well as treasurer.

6. Gluttony:
   a. This is often understood as overeating
   b. But in the consumer swamped society that we live in, we must ask ourselves: “When
      is enough, enough.”
   c. If we do not set limits on ourselves, then we will always be striving for more, and
      never appreciate the gifts that God gives us.
   d. To not appreciate what God has already given us, is to fail to see God’s grace in our
      lives, and where God’s grace is absence, then there cannot be eternal life.

7. Finally, much is said regularly in the press about unions. Most of this is very negative, and
   often entails calls of curbing unions or disbanding them all together. However, as
   Catholics we must constantly follow not what the world says, but what God reveals
   through his Church. Let me close with this reflection from this year’s Bishops’ Labor Day
   Letter as it relates to labor organizations:

   “Unions and other worker associations have a unique and essential responsibility in
   this needed economic renewal. Our Church has long taught that unions are "an
   indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrialized societies"
   (Laborem Exercens, no. 20) and are examples of the traditional Catholic principles
   of solidarity and subsidiarity in action. At their best, unions demonstrate solidarity by
   bringing workers together to speak and act collectively to protect their rights and
   pursue the common good. Unions are a sign of subsidiarity by forming associations
   of workers to have a voice, articulate their needs, and bargain and negotiate with
   the large economic institutions and structures of government.”
PRAYERS

*Great Thanksgiving suitable for Labor Day weekend*

[Produced by Workers Interfaith Network]

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give God thanks and praise.**

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everything, to give thanks to you,

Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.

You formed us in your image for work and for Sabbath rest.

When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

You delivered us from hard labor in Egypt, and made covenant to be our sovereign God.

You spoke to us through your prophets, who looked for the day when justice shall roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,*

*heaven and earth are full of your glory.* **Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.

Though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor.

He gathered common laborers to be his disciples,

and by Your Spirit he preached good news to the poor,

proclaimed release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind,

set at liberty those who were oppressed,

and announced the year of Jubilee.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, you gave birth to your Church,

delivered us from slavery to sin and death,

and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread,

gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you,

do this in remembrance of me."
When the supper was over he took the cup,
   Gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:
   “Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant,
   poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
   Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
   we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
   as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ’s offering for us,
   as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
   That we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

Renew our communion with your Church throughout the world,
   and strengthen it in every nation and among every people
   to witness faithfully in your name, resisting evil, injustice, and oppression
   in whatever forms they present themselves.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
   one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,
   until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.
Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church,
All honor and glory is yours, Almighty God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

**Prayers of Blessing the Work of Our Hands**

Blessed be the works of your hands,
   O Holy One.
Blessed be these hands that have touched life.
Blessed be these hands that have nurtured creativity.
Blessed be these hands that have held pain.
Blessed be these hands that have embraced with passion.
Blessed be these hands that have tended gardens.
Blessed be these hands that have closed in anger.
Blessed be these hands that have planted new seeds.
Blessed be these hands that have cleaned, washed, mopped, scrubbed.
Blessed be these hands that have become knotty with age.
Blessed be these hands that are wrinkled and scarred from doing justice.
Blessed be these hands that have reached out ad been received.
Blessed be these hands that hold the promise of the future.
Blessed be the works of your hands,
O Holy One.

[Prayer by Diann Neu from Imagining the World: An Arts and Lectionary Resource, Volume 1, 1994]
**Prayers of the People**

**Left:** Show me the suffering of the most miserable; 
So I will know my people’s plight.

**Right:** Free me to pray for others; 
For you are present in everyone.

**Left:** Help me take responsibility for my own life; 
So that I can be free at last.

**Right:** Grant me courage to serve others; 
For in service there is true life.

**All:** Bring forth song and celebration; 
So that the Spirit will be alive among us.
Let the Spirit flourish and grow; 
So that we will never tire of the struggle.
Let us remember those who have died for justice; 
For they have given us life.
Help us love even those who hate us; 
So we can change the world.

**Amen.**

[Prayer of Cesar Chavez, adapted into litany form by April McGlothin-Eller]

**We have been to the Mountaintop: A prayer for workers**

Almighty God, 
We are gathered here today in fellowship and in hope 
As women and men committed to justice and freedom, 
And as people who honor the dignity and rights of all working people. 
We recall today the life and the hope of Martin Luther King, Jr. 
And we remember today his vision of a just society, a beloved community.

We have been to the mountaintop, 
And we have seen the Promised Land

Even as Dr. King courageously stood with sanitation workers in 1968, 
So we stand today with teachers, firefighters, police officers, 
An all workers whose rights are today imperiled across this nation 
We know, God, that your Spirit is among us 
And that Dr. King’s vision abides in our hearts.

We have been to the mountaintop, 
And we have seen the Promised Land

We see in one another and in our working brothers and sisters 
Your divine signature, God, and we lift it up this day. 
We offer this common prayer in one voice to your, 
In one mighty chorus across the nation.

We have been to the mountaintop, 
And we have seen the Promised Land

God of Compassion and Mercy, 
We ask that you remain with us and strengthen us 
As we endeavor to ensure that freedom prevails for working people, 
And that your divine signature is never obscured by injustice.
We have been to the mountaintop,
And we have seen the Promised Land

We ask that you guide us today and in the days to come
That we may all one day arrive in the Promised land
As a beloved community, a great fellowship of men and women
Committed to the dignity and welfare and freedom of all people.

We have been to the mountaintop,
And we have seen the Promised Land

We ask for these things
In the sure knowledge that justice
Will triumph.

Amen.

**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
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 an individual more effective.

Labor Unions and The Church

John Sweeney, President Emeritus, 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 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 (1916-2002) was the nation's most revered labor priest. A strong supporter of IWJ he wrote this piece for Labor Day 1999.

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 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.

For instance, 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 retribution. 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.

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 credible – 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.
EVALUATION

Thank you for participating in Labor in the Pulpits. We’d love to hear about your experience planning your Labor Day service. Please take a few moments to fill out this evaluation. Your comments will help us make improvements for next year.

1 = poor  2 = needs some improvement  3 = average  4 = good  5 = excellent

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Suggestions for improvement:

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What were some of the ways your congregation integrated worker justice into Labor Day service?

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Need more space? E-mail additional information to info@iwj.org.
Mail form to 1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Chicago, IL 60660