Labor in the Pulpits:
A Toolkit for
Protestant Congregations
INTRODUCTION

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. This toolkit offers some introductory resources to help celebrate Labor Day in your community. If your worship service or congregation’s tradition does not accommodate outside speakers, you could have someone speak before or after the service, or at adult or teen education classes. 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:**

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**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].

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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.]

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.

8) **BOYCOTT** products produced by companies where workers are organizing to improve conditions and where boycotts are viewed as an effective means for encouraging a just resolution to the workers' problems. For a list of boycotted products, visit www.unionlabel.org.

9) **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.

10) **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 & Psalm
Jeremiah 2:4-13

1Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. 2Thus says the LORD: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves? 3They did not say, "Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?" 4I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination. 5The priests did not say, "Where is the LORD?" Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit. 6Therefore once more I accuse you, says the LORD, and I accuse your children's children. 7Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has ever been such a thing. 8Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit. 9Therefore once more I accuse you, says the LORD, and I accuse your children's children. 10I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. 11"But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. 12So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels. 13O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! 14Then I would quickly subdue their enemies, and turn my hand against their foes. 15Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him, and their doom would last forever. 16I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

Alternate First Reading and Psalm
Sirach 10:12-18

12The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord; the heart has withdrawn from its Maker. 13For the beginning of pride is sin, and the one who clings to it pours out abominations. Therefore the Lord brings upon them unheard-of calamities, and destroys them completely. 14The Lord overthrows the thrones of rulers, and enthrones the lowly in their place. 15The Lord plucks up the roots of the nations, and plants the humble in their place. 16The Lord lays waste the lands of the nations, and destroys them to the foundations of the earth. 17He removes some of them and destroys them, and erases the memory of them from the earth. 18Pride was not created for human beings, or violent anger for those born of women.

Psalm 81:1, 10-16

1Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob. 10I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. 11"But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. 12So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels. 13O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! 14Then I would quickly subdue their enemies, and turn my hand against their foes. 15Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him, and their doom would last forever. 16I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."
Proverbs 25:6-7
6 Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great; 7 for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.

Psalm 112
1 Praise the LORD! Happy are those who fear the LORD, who greatly delight in his commandments. 2 Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. 3 Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever. 4 They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous. 5 It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice. 6 For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered forever. 7 They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD. 8 Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes. 9 They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures forever; their horn is exalted in honor. 10 The wicked see it and are angry; they gnash their teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.

Second Reading
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16
1 Let mutual love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. 4 Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.

5 Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." 6 So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" 7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 15 Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Gospel
Luke 14:1, 7-14
1 On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. 7 When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. 8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; 9 and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. 10 But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. 11 For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." 12 He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or
your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Suggested Biblical Passages

WAGE THEFT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Just Treatment of Workers
By: The Rev. Roger Ray
Community Christian Church

Isaiah 65:17-25
[View sermon here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXlP2n2NhFk&feature=player_embedded]

I was pretty sure that it was a waste of time but as a member of my team, we all took an evening off from our work among the poor in rural Nicaragua to attend a Rotary Club dinner in Managua. My friend loved his own Rotary Club members in Springfield so much that he was just certain that if this Nicaraguan club only knew what we were doing in the impoverished villages in the jungle that they would want to help.

I watched as he desperately spoke to an indifferent gathering of Nicaraguan first families about how his club in America wanted to work with their club in Managua to raise aid for the poor of their country. You couldn't have cut through their indifference with a chainsaw.....though the thought of trying did occur to me.

The businesswomen and men of Managua do not want to think of their country as being poor. Many of them have never strayed into the countryside of their own nation. The coffee they drink in the morning, the fruit and vegetables on their dinner table is being produced in virtual slave conditions not more than a two hour drive up the Pan American highway from Managua but they will never see it and they don't want to hear about it. They do most of their shopping in Miami, they live in gated communities and the army keeps the Sandinista peasants from ever protesting in the city streets of Managua.

I have seen, on several trips, huge encampments of poor Sandinistas just thirty or forty miles north of Managua. They leave the mountains of Matagalpa and form encampments and every few days they walk a few miles closer to the capital city, threatening invasion. This political posturing happens in other areas as well.

I was reminded of these threatening encampments last fall when the Occupy Movement was gaining attention. CNN's beautiful business correspondent, Erin Burnett, launched her new show during a time when she had to walk past the protestors on her way to the studio and she express sincere confusion about the whole thing, saying, "What do these people want?"

And even when the issues of income disparity and the use of public money to repay the virtual gambling debts of Wall Street bankers were explained to her, she looked right into the camera and incredulously said that the whole problem is that the protesters don't understand how the economy works.
Of course, Burnett grew up in an affluent family and was engaged to a leading executive at Citigroup. — a recipient of huge bonuses which, I'm sure they believe that they have earned. When the classes grow so far apart that one cannot even see the other one anymore then the low wages and low standard of living of the poor actually makes sense to the rich.

Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski sat on the set of their popular morning news show talking both about Mika's publication of an entire book about her salary negotiations while sympathizing with Wisconsin governor, Scott Walker's complaints about teacher salaries. Scarborough and Brzezinski have kept their actual salaries largely secret but we know that the hosts of less popular shows make more than ten million dollars a year, including Matt Lauer, Katie Couric, Brian Williams, Diane Sawyer, Meredith Vieira and even Bill O'Reilly.

Brzezinski speaks boldly about the gender gap that separated her salary from the men at the table on Morning Joe but she was still willing to believe that police, firemen and schoolteachers were just going to have to be more realistic about their salary expectations. It is painful to me that so many people are willing to blame middle class laborers for the world's economic challenges while still literally feeling sorry for themselves in the midst of obscene wealth.

Mika Brzezinski threatened to quit because the cost of child care, make-up and wardrobe left her with too little of what must have been more than a million dollars a year of salary.

Bill O'Reilly threatened to just retire if Obama allows the tax cut on the super wealthy to sunset because if he has to pay any more in taxes, the more than $8 million dollars a year that he keeps after taxes just wouldn't make it worth it to keep working. And the fact that Bill O'Reilly might actually shut up if his taxes go up is one of the single best arguments for a tax increase I have ever heard.

The premise underlying Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" is that all that had to happen for Scrooge to change his cold heart was to actually see the lives of the poor, the sick, the homeless and hungry. And I want to believe that most people, if they will leave the Rotary Dinner, push back from the make-up counter and actually go and see how a school teacher has to spend their own meager salary to buy supplies for their classroom and to realize that the person who runs into a burning building when everyone else is running out is not either lazy or greedy but is willing to risk their life, spend half a week isolated away from their family for years and years but that they expect to retire with some dignity and have medical care in compensation for their sacrifice.

It doesn't work for everyone. There are people who just have a cold hard place where their heart is supposed to be but I think most people want to be decent folks. But there is a separation between the rich and the poor in our culture. Old neighborhoods had big houses and small houses but, since the automobile has become ubiquitous, we build houses together within a certain price range. Air conditioning has taken away front porches and cable TV pushes everyone back to the back of the house into a family room.
Many neighborhoods don't even have sidewalks. We don't see one another, we don't interact and so is it any wonder that we don't understand, don't sympathize, and don't care? The people who actually own most businesses live nowhere near them or they don't know they own it. I have no idea what my pension funds are invested in and in most offices, virtually anonymous ownership means that owners never have to know that some of their employees are lined up at Crosslines for an extra bag of groceries to get them through the month.

They don't know which employee comes to work, ignoring the chest pains because they can't afford to see a doctor or miss work even if they need life saving treatment.

In our very familiar scripture lesson today, the prophet is speaking to a people who are leaving slavery behind to go and build a new nation and he says: 21 They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 22 They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat.

The media derision of the Occupy Wall Street movement was that it was lazy bums who wanted a handout. They failed to recognize that what they were asking for was an opportunity to work for a living wage.

The American dream was articulated in a Revolutionary War era saying attributed variously to Washington, Jefferson and Adams that said, "I am a soldier so that my son can be a farmer, so that his son can be a merchant, so that his son can be a poet." There was, among us, a dream that if you worked hard and tried, that we could change our station in life and that our children could have a better life. But if people who are bankers who move money around from instrument to instrument without ever actually producing anything, and people who are talking heads on TV can make millions of dollars while we insist that the people who pave our roads, grow our food, deliver our mail and teach our children cannot retire, or have access to housing, medical care or education for their children then the American dream is a farce.

How can the richest country in the world even consider creating an economy in which people can work full time and not have a place to live, food, medical care, transportation and a hope of retirement? How could we even be callous enough to discuss it? Especially in a country that is full of churches.

No one should be ashamed to ask for a living wage in exchange for their lifetime of service and our nation should be ashamed that they have to ask. I have no problem with people being economically successful but their success cannot mean that the children of public servants can't go to a state university so that the children of the rich can go to exclusive private colleges. I think people who are clever and talented, inventive and frugal, deserve a bigger piece of the pie but they don't get the whole pie.

And the church that thinks that the "good news" is that the poor get some pie in the sky when they die need to dust off their Bibles are realize that the good news to the poor means that they not only build houses for the rich to live in, they get to build a house and live in it themselves. They don't just move from one migrant vineyard after another so that the wealthy
can have wine on their tables but they get to share in the wine and the roses.

If we have to keep a third of this nation in poverty so that the 1% can live in a way where they never have to see the poor then capitalism and democracy have failed the moral smell test.

Most of the world's great religions began with a leader who became radicalized by the suffering of the poor. Buddha, Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed were all advocates for the poor and each as seen the reform movements they started become the state religion and then the means of the government keeping the poor in submission and in poverty.

None of the world's great religions were royal religions. They were movements for justice for the poor and that, I insist, is what they should be again.

Several years ago, Barbara Ehrenreich accepted the journalistic challenge of going around the country taking various entry level jobs and trying to survive on the salary. Her book, "Nickle and Dimed" should be a must read for every pastor and church goer in our nation.

While working as a cook in a retirement home in Maine, Ehrenreich has a Saturday evening off and decides to go to a revival being held near her one room apartment. Her observations of the poor who attend such services were prophetic.

She writes, "The preaching goes on, interrupted with dutiful "amens." It would be nice if someone would read this sad-eyed crowd the Sermon on the Mount, accompanied by a rousing commentary on income inequality and the need for a hike in the minimum wage. But Jesus makes his appearance here only as a corpse; the living man, the wine-guzzling vagrant and precocious socialist, is never once mentioned, nor anything he ever had to say. Christ crucified rules, and it may be that the true business of modern Christianity is to crucify him again and again to that he can never get a word out of his mouth. I get up to leave, timing my exit for when the preacher's metronomic head movements have him looking the other way, and walk out to search for my car, half expecting to find Jesus out there in the dark, gagged and tethered to a tent pole."

Men and women, I say that it is time to stop crucifying Jesus. It is time to cut him loose from the tent pole. It is time for us to turn the good news for the poor loose in our nation and to stand with laborers and public servants, cooks and janitors, the people wipe the chins and the butts of our nursing home patients, the people wipe the noses of our children and spend long hours with them every day. It is time for us to bring the good news of a living wage to the check out clerk at Walmart and the Taxi driver at the airport.

Do not dream of justice in the next world if you do not have the courage to demand it in this world. There is not enough of heaven to make up for treating the poor to a serving of hell on earth. We must not be silent. We must not stand idly by.
Labor Day Sermon  
By: The Rev. Tim Yeager  
St. James Cathedral, Chicago  

Proper 18C – Full Text  
[Video: http://saintandrewschicago.org/St.html]

Jeremiah 18:1-11

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: “Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. Then the word of the LORD came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were traveling with Jesus; and he turned and said to them, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

On behalf of myself, and the more than 4,000 union members of United Auto Workers Local 2320, whom it is my privilege to represent, I thank you for the privilege of speaking to you today. Our members work primarily in the federally-funded legal services programs for the poor, but also in human services agencies, such as Hull House, Heartland Alliance, and Illinois Action for Children. I especially thank Dean Rogers, and my friend the Rev. Jackie Lynn, for their invitation.

Among my duties as a union officer is the teaching of classes on labor history and collective bargaining. I often ask our members when they think the earliest example of union organizing and collective bargaining was. They are usually surprised when I hold up a copy of the Bible and tell them it is a labor history and organizing manual!

In today’s Old Testament reading from Jeremiah Chapter 18, God compares himself to a potter, and he compares Israel to the clay that he fashioned in his hands.

And in the selection from Luke’s gospel, Jesus advises those who want to become disciples that they must prepare for discipleship with the same diligence and foresight as a carpenter or construction worker who was undertaking to build a tower.

These are both metaphors of labor which teach us about the nature of God, and what the Kingdom of God is like.

The Bible is filled with references to labor, and today’s scripture readings are no exception, but they are by no means the earliest. Let’s go to the very beginning…

Genesis 1:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth…
This is the first sentence of our Bible. Who is doing the work here? Does God farm out the creation to a non-union subcontractor? It is God himself who fashions the earth, who divides the land and the water, who plants the fields, who creates the various species, and who forms human beings from dust, giving them life with his own breath. This labor requires six days. And then something astonishing happens:

... on the seventh day He rested from all the work that he had done.

What kind of a God is this? Why does the Supreme Being, the Creator of the Universe, rest? Because he is tired. The God of the Abrahamic tradition, the God worshipped and glorified by more than 3.6 billion Jews, Christians and Muslims, is a Worker God. That is how He is introduced to us at the very beginning. And this has significance for every other book in the Bible. From this narrative of creation, of God working, and then needing to rest, springs the whole concept of social and economic justice that runs throughout the Bible.

Let us consider the second book of the Bible, Exodus. It is here that we find the story of the liberation of the Hebrew people from their bondage in Egypt.

Well, who are these Hebrews, and what were they doing in Egypt in the first place? They are immigrant workers, who left their homeland because of drought and economic hardship, and they crossed the frontier into Egypt to find work and support their families. And we know what they did. In order to survive, they sell themselves into slavery, and they are engaged primarily in farm work and construction work. At first they were welcomed. But as they increase in population, an anti-immigrant sentiment begins to grow among the Egyptians.

So the government takes steps to keep them under control, and to discourage the increase in their population. The Egyptians still wanted their labor, of course. But they feared their growing numbers. Now, stop me if any of this sounds familiar...

In Exodus Chapter 1 we read what the government did:

Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens; and they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Ra'am'ses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they made the people of Israel serve with rigor, and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor. (Exodus 1: 11-14)

Reading further, we learn that God hears their cries, and takes action to end their oppression. He seeks out a leader to negotiate with the government in an attempt to win their freedom. That leader is Moses. This is what God says to him:

I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings ...So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

Well, who is Moses? Moses is a Hebrew himself, who was raised in the household of Pharaoh's daughter as an adopted son. When he grew up, he held a position of privilege. But he also has a keen sense of justice. When he comes upon a foreman beating a Hebrew construction worker, Moses defends the worker, and actually ends up killing the foreman. So he is forced to
flee Egypt. When God recruits him, Moses is living a comfortable life in Midian. He has married a priest’s daughter, and is living a comfortable life as a sheep farmer. And he is not keen about having a change of career.

But God knows that in Moses He has found someone with a keen sense of justice, someone who is willing to take action on behalf of the workers. He overcomes each of Moses’ objections. He appoints Moses’ brother Aaron to become part of the team, and most significantly, God tells Moses not to worry, because it will be the Lord God Himself who will be speaking through Moses. God will be present and will give Moses the words to say.

So, in essence, what we have here is history’s first union bargaining committee, and it is created by the Lord God himself. And then he sends them off to present his first bargaining demand to Pharaoh. Do you remember what the first demand was? Look at Chapter 5:

Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us; let us go, we pray, a three days’ journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God…"

They are demanding a a three-day weekend. Folks, this is the first Labor Day weekend. I am not making this up!

Well how does Pharaoh respond? Well let’s say that he was not a sympathetic employer, and he didn’t favor the idea of his slaves having the audacity to bargain with him. So he orders Moses and Aaron to leave, and then he takes one more step:

The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as heretofore; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the number of bricks which they made heretofore you shall lay upon them, you shall by no means lessen it; for they are idle; therefore they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ Let heavier work be laid upon the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.” (Exodus 5: 1-9)

So at this point in the scriptures, we find the first union bargaining team being organized, the first bargaining session, the demand for the first Labor Day weekend, and now, history’s first example of anti-union retaliation. Pharaoh makes a unilateral change in the construction worker’s job description. He increases their duties, with no increase in pay, by the way, insists on maintaining the same production quotas, and explicitly orders it with the intent of discouraging further union activity. It is designed to scare the workers into submission, and to split the membership (i.e. the Hebrew workers) from the leadership of Moses and Aaron.

But God counsels perseverance. The negotiations continue. Moses and Aaron return time and again to Pharaoh with their demands. The struggle escalates. The Nile turns to blood. There is a plague of frogs. There was a plague of gnat. All the employer’s cattle are killed. There is hail and lightning. There is a plague of locusts. Finally, God strikes dead the first born son of every Egyptian family.

Ultimately, Moses leads the Hebrew workers out on strike. They walk off their jobs, and
completely leave the employer’s premises. And when Pharaoh sends his troops after them to bring them back, the Lord our God is not idly standing by. He wipes out the Egyptian army to the last man.

The significant thing about this story is this: God is not neutral in this struggle. In fact God is the instigator of the whole thing. It is God himself who organizes and leads the first recorded labor struggle in history.

This is the defining moment of the Hebrew God. Jahweh is the God of slaves, of working people. Jahweh is the God of justice, of liberation. This is also the defining moment of the Hebrew people. They are commanded to remember that they were slaves in Egypt, and that God led them out of bondage. The God they worship is a God of Justice, not in some other world, but in this world, and concretely in terms of social and economic justice.

This is the taproot out of which grows the entire Judeo-Christian tradition, and the Islamic tradition as well.

Having been liberated, the former slaves go on to create a new society, and they develop legislation to govern themselves. The first 10 laws were written by the finger of God Himself, and among those laws ordained by God, was this Commandment: “Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto Jehovah thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work.” (Exodus 20: 9-10) The Worker God who labored six days, and then took a day off, declared the same benefit for His people. Other legislation dealt with the timely payment of wages, dealing justly in trade, social security for widows and orphans, forgiveness of debts, release from debtor’s prison and slavery, and the restoration of family lands lost during economic hard times. This body of legislation, found primarily in Leviticus and Deuteronomy is known as “the acceptable year of the Lord”… the Jubilee.

Down through the centuries the Hebrew prophets held up the vision of a truly just society ordained by God. At the heart of this society was the principle that the workers should enjoy the fruits of their own labors, that the wealth they created would be theirs to enjoy and not be expropriated from them by others. In the 65th chapter of Isaiah we read:

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain…

And what about the New Testament? Who is Jesus? When the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, God came to us as a worker, not as a rich man, a ruler, or even a clergyman. The Incarnate God was a carpenter. He grew up in working class household. He recruits other workers to become part of his entourage. His brother James, would have also followed in his father’s trade, and would have been a carpenter. We know that there were at least seven fishermen, at least one low-level civil servant, and according to some accounts, even a reformed prostitute. But no kings, no princes, officials of any consequence. This is a working class movement.
Jesus’ ministry is built upon the foundation of the radical Hebrew prophetic tradition. In the first public pronouncement of his ministry, He enters his hometown synagogue and reads from the Book of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4: 18-19):

He then closes the scroll and announces that this prophecy is being fulfilled in their hearing. The message is clear. Jesus declares his mission to be the establishment of social and economic justice in the land, and not at some abstract time in the future, but now. Clearly a message that will bring Him into conflict with the powers-that-be.

Consider the parables of Jesus. Like the passage from Luke’s gospel we heard today, the parables of Jesus often use the imagery of work, which would be understood by workers, and perhaps not so well understood by the authorities. And understanding is often expressed as being able to hear the Word of God. As he speaks in parables, He often says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (e.g., Matthew 13: 9, et al.)

Many of his parables have construction images (“Build your house on a rock, not on sand”), or agricultural labor (“The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few”). Many describe the Kingdom of God as a place where economic and social justice are realized. Consider, for example, the parable of the day laborers: Matthew 20: 1-16.

1: “For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

2: After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

3: And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place;

4: and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went.

5: Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.

6: And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’

7: They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’

8: And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’

9: And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.

A denarius was a day’s wage. It was the ancient equivalent of the “living wage.” It was what was necessary for the sustaining of working class life. In this parable, Jesus saying, in essence, that in the Kingdom of God, each person will receive what they need, and will be called to give what they can. You might even say “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.” We have heard that before, haven’t we, in a later century, from the pen of another radical Hebrew prophet? I would submit to you that even the philosophy of Karl Marx, with its vision of a more equitable society, grows out of the Judeo-Christian tradition.
The point I wish to make is this: There is a profound unity between what Moses called “The Promised Land”, what Jesus called the “Kingdom of God”, and what the labor movement calls the “hopes and dreams of working people”.

The greatest American prophet of the 20th century, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., understood this unity very well. What many people do not realize is that while Dr. King was certainly a religious and civil rights leader, he was also a labor leader. He described the labor movement as the “first and best anti-poverty movement.” When you see photos of the March on Washington, in the very front row of the march you will see Dr. King, and right next to him is Walter Reuther, the President of the United Auto Workers union -- my union. The UAW worked with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to organize that historic march, along with A. Philip Randolph.

And let us not forget that the reason Dr. King was in Memphis in April of 1968 was to lead a march in support of striking sanitation workers. They were members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Dr. King literally gave his life for the labor movement.

As Christians, we ought to understand this unity better than anyone else. And we ought to be in solidarity with workers who are struggling for a better way of life for themselves and their families.

If you need any further proof, consider who Jesus is. Our Lord Jesus Christ has a worker’s sunburned face. He has a worker’s calloused hands. And He suffered a worker’s death. In an act of supreme irony, when the Romans put Jesus to death, they used the tools of His own trade. They executed the Carpenter of Nazareth by nailing Him to a cross of wood.

Can we not then see the face of Christ in every worker?
Economic justice was not one of Martin Luther’s primary passions, nor has the Lutheran church been consistently at the forefront of the fight for economic justice. However, the core beliefs of Lutheran theology clearly support the struggle for fair wages and benefits in the workplace. At the core of Lutheran theology is the call to faith in a God whose love is unimaginably great, broad, deep and full. God’s love embraces all aspects of our physical and emotional lives. God intends that we have “everything required to satisfy our bodily needs, such as food and clothing, house and home, fields and flocks, money and property.” Martin Luther saw the process of obtaining what we need, our labor, as a holy act when performed in faith and gratitude; “picking up a piece of straw” could be equal in God’s eyes to formal prayer and study (Treatise on Good Works).

While Luther emphasized the internal stance of the individual and the individual’s existential relationship with God as primary concerns, he unquestionably expected faith in God’s grace to result in righteous action. In his small and large catechisms, he painted a passionate picture of the kinds of behavior that would arise from faith— including the arena of labor relations. Luther’s exegesis of the seventh commandment (Thou shalt not steal) includes the following passage:

“For to steal is nothing else than to get possession of another’s property wrongfully, which briefly comprehends all kinds of advantage in all sorts of trade to the disadvantage of our neighbor. To steal is to signify not only to empty our neighbor’s coffer and pockets, but to be grasping in the market … wherever there is trading or taking and giving of money for merchandise or labor. Therefore they are also called swivel-chair robbers, land- and highway-robbers, not pick-locks and sneak-thieves who snatch away the ready cash, but who sit on the chair [at home] and are styled great noblemen, and honorable, pious citizens, and yet rob and steal under a good pretext. No more shall all the rest prosper who change the open free market into a carrion-pit of extortion and a den of robbery, where the poor are daily overcharged, new burdens and high prices are imposed, and every one uses the market according to his caprice, and is even defiant and brags as though it were his fair privilege and right to sell his goods for as high a price as he please, and no one had a right to say a word against it.”

Luther clearly sees from the perspective of an independent producer, a small businessman, whose experience of being robbed by the powerful is primarily connected to price gouging. However, the heart of his
accusations would apply equally to the modern multinational corporations that seek profit at the expense of people not primarily by raising prices but rather by lowering wages. The core violation of “using the market according to his caprice as though it were his fair privilege and right” is as characteristic of WalMart as it was of the noblemen of Luther’s time. Luther also believed that it was clearly the job of political decision-makers to protect the rights of their constituency. His doctrine of “two kingdoms” recognized that even human beings who have faith do not always live in accordance with their faith and that most people do not automatically treat one another with the love and respect called for by the Gospel. We all live in two worlds, the emerging world in which the law is written on the heart and people treat each other well out of love, and the old order in which it is necessary to intentionally ensure respect for human rights through civil authority. As Luther continues in the commentary on the seventh commandment:

“... to check such open wantonness there is need of the princes and government, who themselves would have eyes and the courage to establish and maintain correct order in all manner of trade and commerce, lest the poor be burdened and oppressed nor they themselves be loaded with other men’s sins.”

While Luther could not have envisioned a world in which every citizen had the right and duty to participate actively in political decision-making, we can see that in a modern democracy, we all have power and authority in the political realm and we all need the “eyes and the courage to establish and maintain” correct order in the economic sphere. When we campaign for living wage legislation or conditions on Big Box development, we seek to ensure an economic order that does not allow the poor to be burdened and oppressed. Unions are another modern structure through which workers can exercise legitimate power and authority in the public sphere to ensure protection of their rights. These modern structures and the responsibilities that accompany them are recognized in a Resolution of the ELCA Church-wide Assembly in 1991 that reads, “The ELCA commits itself to advocacy with corporations, businesses, congregations, and church-related institutions to protect the rights of workers, support the collective bargaining process and protect the right to strike.” However, while Luther would have supported those with legitimate authority acting in the public realm to protect workers’ rights, he would have seen clergy as having a different role. Luther saw the work of clergy as belonging to the second realm, the kingdom of God. The heart of that work, for Luther, was proclamation – the speaking of the truth that transforms. When religious leaders in interfaith worker justice committees utilize their moral authority to call business and political leaders to accountability to the scriptural vision of economic justice, they are fulfilling Luther’s understanding of their calling to speak the Word of God.

The Rev. Alexia Salvatierra, an ELCA pastor, is executive director of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) in Los Angeles.
The painful consequences of a recessionary economy include increasing numbers of men and women have had wages reduced, benefits curtailed, and pensions threatened by executive cupidity, or excessive desire for wealth. Other workers – but especially the working poor – have suffered actual loss of livelihood through decisions made in the name of corporate profitability. The most powerless of workers – immigrants, migrants, women and, in some instances, children – exist today on the meager margins of a still affluent economy. At the same time, employer intimidation of employees seeking unionization has intensified in business and industry.

Why is this happening? Whatever other causes may be cited, what many workers are experiencing is more than a cyclic occurrence that will pass in time. Behind the self-justifying rhetoric advanced by those whose actions benefit a few at the expense of the many is the grim reality of the continuing exploitation of working people. This is nothing new, of course. We would rather deny its existence in this country of opportunity and promise. So even so far as to blame the poor and the near poor themselves for their desperate plight. It has been done before, and today new voices join that macabre chorus.

Is all of this of concern to the Church of Jesus Christ? More specifically, does any of this impact the understanding of the pastoral vocation? What does it mean for those who exercise the ministry of Word and Sacraments in our congregations? For some, the answer is “Nothing” or “Very little.” It is not part of the tradition of being a Lutheran pastor as they have come to understand it. Then that tradition is lacking something of essential importance. For the Bible does speak of an option for the poor, the just decision of God on behalf of those who consistently are denied both economic and political justice. There is an unmistakable scriptural polemic against those who exploit the weak and needy. There is a biblical warning against greed, cruelty, hard-heartedness, and injustice. And there is the compelling vision of a human society in which all persons – without regard to class or wealth, position or power – are equally valued and where genuine community can take root. To affirm these truths, and certainly this is part of the calling of the Christian preacher, requires taking up of practical tasks that the God of all righteousness has laid upon us.

Yes, the pastor as pastor, the pastor as leader of the people of God in the local congregation, has responsibility for speaking and acting on behalf of the victims of economic injustice. What will that include?

- Without question, the task of better informing both self and members with respect to the expectations of Scripture and the cruel deformations of economic practice.
- It will mean the recapturing of the profound biblical compassion for working people and the poor.
- It will mean courageous advocacy wherever and whenever human beings are robbed of their dignity, denied what they have earned, and deprived of their rights.
• It will mean – as it has meant in many cities throughout this land – new forms of cooperation with the representatives of organized labor in situations where our shared commitment to justice due working people, the working poor, and the poor is threatened or denied.
• And it means – as a gift and encouragement – that our limited and often inadequate efforts may help to open our eyes to that final gift of grace, the Kingdom in which humanity finds both its true home and righteous and lasting community.

The time is late. Let us begin.

The Rev. Wayne Stumme, a retired ELCA pastor and seminary professor, is a member of the Twin Cities Religion and Labor Network. E-mail: wcstumme@aol.com

ELCA Statements

Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All

Below are selected portions of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) social statements pertaining to workers rights and economic justice. As amended and adopted by a more than two-thirds-majority vote as a social statement of the Evangelical Church in America by the sixth biennial Churchwide Assembly on August 20, 1999, at Denver, Colorado.

Livelihood: vocation, work, and human dignity
Human dignity: Human beings are created “in God’s image” (Genesis 1:27) as social beings whose dignity, worth, and value are conferred by God. Although our identity does not depend on what we do, through our work we should be able to express this God-given dignity as persons of integrity, worth, and meaning. Yet work does not constitute the whole of our life. When we are viewed and treated only as workers, we tend to be exploited.

Employers have a responsibility to treat employees with dignity and respect. This should be reflected in employees’ remuneration, benefits, work conditions, job security, and ongoing job training. Employees have a responsibility to work to the best of their potential in a reliable and responsible manner. This includes work habits, attitudes toward employers and co-workers, and a willingness to adapt and prepare for new work situations. No one should be coerced to work under conditions that violate their dignity or freedom, jeopardize their health or safety, result in neglect of their family’s well-being, or provide unjust compensation for their labor.

Our God-given dignity in community means that we are to participate actively in decisions that impact our lives, rather than only passively accept decisions others make for us. People should be involved in decision-making that directly affects their work. They should also be free to determine their lives independent of particular jobs. Public policy can provide economic and other conditions that protect human freedom and dignity in relation to work.
Power disparities and competing interests are present in most employment situations. Employers need competent, committed workers, but this does not necessarily presume respect for the personal lives and needs of individual workers. Individual workers depend on the organization for employment as their means of livelihood, but this does not necessarily presume respect for the organization’s interest and goals. Management and employees move toward justice as they seek cooperative ways of negotiating these interests when they conflict. Because employees often are vulnerable and lack power in such negotiations, they may need to organize in their quest for human dignity and justice. When this occurs, accurate information and fair tactics are expected of all parties involved.

**A Social Statement on Economic Life (August 20, 1999)**

We commit ourselves as a church to:

- hire without discriminating on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, disabilities, sexual orientation, or genetic factors;
- compensate all people we call or employ at an amount sufficient for them to live in dignity;
- provide adequate pension and health benefits, safe and healthy work conditions, sufficient periods of rest, vacation, and sabbatical, and family-friendly work-schedules;
- cultivate workplaces of participatory decision making;
- honor the right of employees to organize for the sake of better working conditions and for workers to make free and informed decisions; encourage those who engage in collective bargaining to commit themselves to negotiated settlements, especially when participatory attempts at just working conditions fail; and discourage the permanent replacement of striking workers.

We call for:

- other employers to engage in similar practices;
- government enforcement of regulations against discrimination, exploitative work conditions and labor practices (including child labor), and for the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively;
- public policies that ensure adequate social security, unemployment insurance, and health care coverage; a minimum wage level that balances employees’ need for sufficient income with what would be significant negative effects on overall employment;
- Tax credits and other means of supplementing the insufficient income of low-paid workers in order to move them out of poverty.

**Workers’ rights and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

*Below are selected portions of a 1991 Churchwide Assembly Resolution on Workers’ Rights adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the 1991 Churchwide Assembly resolution.*

Whereas, our faith makes us particularly sensitive to those who are adversely affected by economic dislocation and powerlessness; and

Whereas, the collective-bargaining process is fundamental for the attainment of justice in American society; and ...
Whereas, for many years, it was generally recognized that employees who engaged in a legal work stoppage as part of the collective-bargaining process would not be penalized by the permanent loss of their jobs; and in more recent time a growing number of employers have responded to these legal work stoppages by hiring persons to replace permanently the striking workers, and unfortunately, this practice is allowed under existing labor laws, but until recent years was not widely used by employers; and

Whereas, this practice is a direct threat to the collective bargaining process as it has developed in this country since the mid-1930s, causing hardship in families and entire communities where employees have, in effect, been fired from their jobs for engaging in collective bargaining, and a weakened collective-bargaining process deprives American workers of the right to participate effectively in decisions that impact their lives and future … now, therefore, be it

Resolved, that the 1991 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: offer its support and prayers for labor and management who engage in collective bargaining to reach acceptable agreements in their working relationship; urge employers, corporations, and workers to commit themselves to negotiated settlements; express concern for workers and their families who endure hardship and job insecurity due to the breakdown of the traditional collective bargaining practices; call for an end to recriminations against workers who participate in strikes; call upon the appropriate churchwide units, synods, congregations, and members to support legislation that would strengthen the viability of negotiated settlements and prevent the permanent replacement of striking workers; call upon the Division for Church in Society to have available information to assist the members of this church to understand these issues; and commit itself to public policy advocacy and advocacy with corporations, businesses, congregations, this church, and church related institutions to protect the rights of worker, support the collective bargaining process and protect the right to strike.

Episcopal Church of the United States of America

Statements & Resolutions

Economic Justice/ Worker Rights

1997: Urge Church-Wide Promotion of the Living Wage - “The 72nd General Convention…urges all congregations, missions, dioceses and the national Episcopal Church to become actively involved in promoting the enactment of a ‘living wage’ as well as family health benefits in the cities and communities in which they live…All parishes, missions, diocesan institutions of this Church are urged to accept, at minimum, this norm in the compensation of their workers.”

2000: Increase Awareness of Social and Economic Problems of Farmers and Rural Areas – “…expressed Church support for the public policies ensuring farmers a just income, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, supporting healthcare access, education, jobs, housing, and other services in rural communities”
2003: Support the Establishment of a Living Wage – “…called upon the government to establish a living wage including health benefits as the standard of compensation of all workers in the United States…It also affirmed the right of workers to organize, and insisted that the companies in which the Church invests or with which it contracts provide their employees with a living wage and serve as a model for ethical labor practices.”

2003: Urge Legislation to Raise the Federal Minimum Wage – “…urged Congress to pass legislation raising the federal minimum wage.”

2003: Urge Legislation to Expand Temporary Workers Program – “…urged Congress to enact legislation to expand temporary worker’s programs to include all persons residing in the United States engaged in meaningful labor, to ensure that temporary workers receive compensation and benefits parallel to those available to other legal residents, and to give such workers the option of adjusting to permanent resident status and naturalization.”

2006: Support Worker Unions and a Living Wage – “…supports the right of workers to form a union and to earn living wages. It commits the Church to contract solely with union hotels, or to obtain confirmation that local prevailing ‘living wages’ are paid.”

2009: Economic Justice Ministry for and with Lower Income People – this legislation adopts numerous measures for Economic Justice of The Episcopal Church to engage and support people with a lower income to pursue during the next six years.

2012: Deter Blacklisting of Workers - The 77th General Convention condemns the practice of blacklisting workers because it forces workers to “remain in temporary employment agencies or contracting agencies instead of obtaining direct employment;”

Immigration

2003: Support the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride – “Resolution C028 declared the Church’s commitment to actively working support of the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride”

2009: Support for Immigration Equality for Same-Sex Couples – “…urge that the leadership of both Houses of Congress… provide immigration equality for same-sex couples by permitting a citizen or permanent resident alien to sponsor an immigration partner for permanent residence in the United States.”

2012: Halt Unjust Immigration Enforcement – The 77th General Convention supports Comprehensive Immigration Reform and Humane Immigration Reform. It calls for a halt to the U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement’s Secure Communities program. The Church also condemns the use of racial profiling and identity checks for the purpose to determining immigration status.
2012: Reform Unequal Immigration Law – “The 77th General Convention urge enactment of legislation to permit same-gender legal domestic partners and spouses of United States citizens and lawful permanent residents to seek lawful permanent resident status in the same manner as different-gender spouses of citizens and lawful permanent residents…”

Labor Movement

2009: Support for Day Laborers – “laborers are treated fairly and in a manner which befits their communities;”

2009: Fix Our Broken Labor Laws – “…the 76th General Convention of the Episcopal Church urge the Congress of the United States to pass, and the President to sign into law, labor law reform legislation designed to better protect employees seeking to engage in collective bargaining, to simplify and streamline the procedures by which employees may choose to organize, and to assist employers and employees in reaching agreement.”

2012: The Labor Movement –
The General Convention recognizes the importance of the labor movement, of labor unions, and the need of labor unions and the Church to work together for the common good. It opposes legislative attempts to deter collective bargaining rights. It commends the work of Interfaith Worker Justice. In purchasing and contracting decisions the General Convention and the Executive Council will urge The Church to consider union rights as favorable factor.

Wage Theft

2012: Condemning the Practice of Wage Theft
Resolved, the House of ______ concurring, That the 77th General Convention of The Episcopal Church of 2012 condemn the practice of wage theft and urge Episcopal congregations to learn more about wage theft in their own communities, partner with workers centers and wage enforcement agencies to stop and deter wage theft, ask questions of those who provide contracted services, and advocate local, state and national policies to strengthen educational outreach to workers about and enforcement of wage laws; and be it further Resolved, That this Convention encourage individual Episcopalians to support initiatives to stop and deter wage theft and be responsible consumers by asking questions about how workers are paid when visiting stores and restaurants and hiring contracted services; and be it further Resolved, That this Convention vow, when engaging with outside businesses or restaurants, to support ethical businesses that pay workers fairly and legally, recognizing that such ethical businesses are placed at a competitive disadvantage by employers that cheat workers and commit payroll fraud by calling workers independent contractors when they are really employees; and be it further Resolved, That this Convention vow to support and participate in educational programs on worker rights such as Interfaith Worker Justice’s Labor in the Pulpits program.
The Baptismal Covenant

The waters of Baptism envelop us in rich symbolism and transformation. Water connects us to our ancient stories, traditions, and roots. It has always been a source of new life from creation to Christ’s baptism in the River Jordan. In the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, water is an outward sign of the inward change we experience.

Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
People: I will, with God’s help.

Celebrant: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
People: I will, with God’s help.

Celebrant: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
People: I will, with God’s help.

(BCP 417)

Pan-Methodist

Statements

AME Statement

Since their inception Labor Unions have served as a liberation force for American workers. Labor Unions were established, much like the African Methodist Episcopal Church, to insure that their members received certain immutable rights. The guarantee of safe working conditions, fair pay, health and retirement benefits remain Labor Unions’ lofty agenda. Even in 1997, a mere three years before the dawn of the twenty-first century, Labor Unions are as critical and necessary to the American worker as they were nearly a century ago.

Labor Unions are endeared to our church as they and their legendary leaders showed unwavering support for African American civil and voting rights movements. The African Methodist Episcopal Church affirms and upholds the outstanding accomplishments and achievements that Labor Unions have made in the past benefiting the entire spectrum of the American economy; and we support their efforts at reformation as well as strengthening themselves for the new millennium.
UMC Statement
The Social Principles, paragraphs 163.B-C

We support the right of public and private (including farm, government, institutional, and domestic) employees and employers to organize for collective bargaining into unions and other groups of their own choosing. Further, we support the right of both parties to protection in so doing and their responsibility to bargain in good faith within the framework of the public interest…. We reject the use of violence by either party during collective bargaining or any labor/management disagreement. We likewise reject the permanent replacement of a worker who engages in a lawful strike. Every person has the right to a job at a living wage. We support social measures that ensure the physical and mental safety of workers, that provide for the equitable division of products and services, and that encourage an increasing freedom in the way individuals may use their leisure time. We believe that persons come before profits. We deplore the selfish spirit that often pervades our economic life. We support policies that encourage the sharing of ideas in the workplace, cooperative and collective work arrangements. We support rights of workers to refuse to work in situations that endanger health and/or life without jeopardy to their jobs.

CME Statement
By Rev. James B. Walker

A selected portion of the Social Creed of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church states “Jesus taught us...to be concerned for the welfare and the well-being of others, to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be concerned for justice... For the church to be silent in the face of need, injustice, and exploitation is to deny the Lord of the Church.” The creed is meant to serve as a springboard for a larger and more salient dialogue on the ideal of justice for workers within a society where justice often lies dormant. The Social Creed is meant to usher the church to a platform of advocacy and action in a way that brings the message of the gospel to bear on institutions and systems of power. Congregations therefore will seek God’s guidance to become agents of challenge and change institutions on labor issues. There are precious few resources for pastors and congregations that lift up the concerns of Labor Day Weekend during the worship experience. However, workers are losing ground on the battlefield for just and equitable wages and the church is uniquely positioned to partner with unions and workers to effect change.
A Heritage of Advocacy for Workers: Ninety years after adoption of the Social Creed, United Methodists continue to uphold the rights of working people.

By The Rev. Darren Cushman Wood

1812 - In 1812, nearly 80% of the class leaders in New York City were journeymen, master craftsmen, or unskilled laborers.

1820 - Rev. William Stillwell helped to found the New York Society for Promoting Communities in the 1820s. The Society issued an “anti-capitalist manifesto” based on Leviticus 25. Stillwell also provided support for the AME Zion Church.

1830 - In the 1830s in Baltimore, class leaders Richard Donahue, David Parr, John H.W. Hawkins and several founding members of the Strawbridge Methodist Church were leaders in the hatters and cordwainers strikes and advocated for the ten-hour day.

1834 – In 1834 six British farmers were convicted to hard labor for organizing a union. The leader, James Loveless, was a Methodist local preacher. They became known as the “Tolpuddle Martyrs.”

1844 - “When Lord Londonderry evicted strikers after the 1844 coal strike [in England], two-thirds of the Durham Primitive Methodist circuit became homeless.” (E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men)

1870 - Before becoming a bishop in the AME Church, Henry McNeal Turner introduced a bill mandating the eight-hour day in the Georgia state legislature in 1870.

1872 - Boston ship carpenter and Methodist local preacher Edward Rogers helped start the Christian Labor Union in 1872, the first organization dedicated to labor and religion. Rogers served in the state legislature and served on committees that investigated the apprentice system and work hours.

1894 - When workers went on strike in 1894 against the Pullman Palace Car Company, Rev. William Carwadine of First Methodist Episcopal Church in Pullman and the Swedish Methodist pastor were alone in their support for the workers. Carwadine publicized their plight and organized the Pullman Relief Committee.

1908 - In 1908 the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted the first Social Creed declaring the church’s opposition to child labor, unsafe working conditions and a reduction in work hours.

1919 - Methodist Episcopal Bishop Francis J. McConnell led the Interchurch World Movement’s investigation of the 1919 Steel Strike.

1927 - Rev. A.A. Geist and Grace Community Methodist Episcopal Church of Denver opened their doors for union meetings during


1932 – The 1932 General Conference of the Methodist Church declared that “the present industrial order is unchristian, unethical and antisocial.”

1938 - In 1938 Bishop Bromley Oxnam made a radio appeal to listeners to support the passage of the National Labor Relations Act. Throughout the 1950s he served on the Public Review Board of the United Auto Workers.

1946 - Rev. Charles Webber of the Methodist Church was known as the “chaplain of organized labor” for his work in creating the Denver Labor College in the 1920s, serving as president of the Virginia CIO in 1946 and as director of the Office of Religious Relations for the AFL-CIO until 1963.

1975 - Bishop Eugene Slater was instrumental in supporting melon field workers in Texas.
Additional Resources

- *United Methodist Workers Rights Manual*. Published by the United Methodist Concern for Workers Task Force. Contains Bible studies, worship resources, suggested activities for congregations, etc. Order from the General Board of Church and Society for three dollars at (800) 967-0880 or www.umc-gbcs.org.

- The following survey reports are available in the 2000 Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church:
  - Concern for Worker Task Force
  - Environmental Health and Safety in the Workplace and Community
  - Rights of African American Farmers
  - Rights of Farm Workers in the US
  - Rights of Workers
  - The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively.


Presbyterian Church of the United States of America

Book of Confessions, Confession of 1967, 9.46

“... 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.”

Social Policy Compilation, Economic Justice, Ch. 7

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.

Labor Statements of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

1959...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.
1971 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.

1980...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 necessity 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 organizations and collective bargaining as minimum demands of justice...and arrangements which offer opportunities for workers...to share greater economic rewards.

1987...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 [should] be made available....

1995 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.

1997 The 209th General Assembly of the PC (USA) 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 (U.S.A.) 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

2006 The 217th General Assembly of the PC (USA) resolved that “the 217th General Assembly (2006) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), through the Stated Clerk of the PC (USA), communicate to all members of Congress its desire that legislation to increase the minimum wage be swiftly passed and accurately reflect the increase in the cost of living since the last minimum wage increase in 1997. Additionally, middle governing bodies, local congregations, and individuals are encouraged to support efforts to increase the minimum wage at state and local levels as well.”
Religion & Labor Timeline: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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 was 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 transformation. 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 From the work of the Labor Temple came the realization 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 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 in 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, was its director. In 1970, after 25 years of tremendous ministry, PIIR was merged into ICUIS. ICUIS’ ministry lasted about 20 years.

2000 McCormick Theological Seminary, the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and the AFL-CIO, building on the vision and foundations of PIIR and ICUIS, founded Seminary Summer. This 10-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 20th Century

Socially conservative in the 19th century, the Presbyterian church found itself challenged in the 20th as it faced the seismic shift taking place in the United States. By the end of the first decade of the new century, it had embraced the Social Gospel movement in a dramatic way. New leadership responded in innovative ways to the dual social forces of massive immigration and rapid industrialization, accelerating the processes through which the church reviewed its mission as a 20th century denomination.

Immigration into Northeastern and Midwestern cities in the late 19th and early 20th 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 trying to decide whether or not 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 also 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 the creation of the Federal Council of Churches in 1908.

Upon his call to head the Board of Home Missions in 1898, Thompson began to search for a leader 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. From a working class background himself, Stelze was cut out for the job. 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 proudly said that his only diploma was his certificate of apprenticeship as a machinist.

Stelze felt that among social ministries he created to address the needs of immigrant working people, the best was the Labor Temple, established in 1910 at the former site of a Presbyterian Church at 14th St. and Second Avenue. The Labor Temple, with its multiple programs, served the multi-ethnic population of Stelze’s former East Side neighborhood. For more than 40 years, the Labor Temple enjoyed a global reputation for its ability to reach immigrant working people. Stelze was only able to serve the Presbyterian Church for 10 years before denominational conservatives forced his resignation, but his influence remained as others continued his ministries. Following WWII, Jacob “Jake” Long, head of the Unit of City and Industrial Work (the 1940s inheritor of Stelze’s Department of Church and Labor) created a
program, the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR), to train pastors and church leadership to address postwar labor-management conflicts.

Housed at the Labor Temple, the PIIR, under the deanship of Marshal L. Scott, established a program that would shape the urban-industrial mission movement for the next generation. Scott brought an appreciation for the technological changes taking place in the U.S. and an understanding of the processes needed to prepare pastors for these changes. Using New York City as his laboratory, Scott began with a two-week seminar for pastors and seminarians on the issues of urban and industrial change. He soon moved to a full-time summer program for seminarians that brought them into direct contact with workers. The first program, held in Pittsburgh in 1950, had 18 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 impacted seminarians as they chose their calling after seminary. This was a time of upheaval in inner cities across the nation, as “white flight” left downtown 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.” Over its 30-year history, more than 3,000 graduates of the PIIR program participated in the transformation of the mission and work of the church to meet the needs of an economy in transition.

Once again we live in a time of economic transition. Previous assumptions about work are no longer valid. While those who are engaged in the struggle for worker justice stand on the shoulders of previous generations, it is time to devise and implement creative responses to the reality of a global economy and its impact on working people everywhere. We can move forward knowing that it is the same God of justice who both accompanies and waits for us.
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 every person.

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 re 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
Walter Jaspar is a natural leader. He is gregarious and smart. He encourages others to do their best. He was a natural leader of the car wash workers employed by Shur Brite car wash in Nashville, Tennessee.

Although Shur Brite’s managers prospered, they pocketed ill-gotten gains by cheating workers of wages. Walter and his colleagues were expected to show up each day at 8 a.m., but they weren’t “clocked in” until the first car showed up. When the car left the carwash, they were clocked back out again. Even though they were expected to be on site for 12 or more hours a day, they were only paid for six or seven hours.

The workers were also upset about how they were treated. “We were treated like fixtures on a machine, not human beings,” claims Walter Jaspar. “The owners wouldn’t even thank us for our work.” Workers were concerned about the cleaning chemicals they were exposed to and wanted a break room where they could relax and get warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

The Nashville Homeless Power Project and Middle Tennessee Jobs with Justice/Interfaith Worker Justice supported the workers desire to get paid fairly and be treated with respect and dignity.

The workers filed a lawsuit and then began organizing events to pressure the employer to pay them and address their concerns. They marched on the boss, they wrote letters and they held membership meetings twice a month. After a year of activity and multiple negotiation sessions with the employer, the workers were repaid $130,000 in unpaid wages. Equally important to Walter and his colleagues, the employer created a nice break room and began thanking them for their work.

What You Can Do to Stop Wage Theft

Wage theft – underpaying or not paying wages legally owed workers – is a national crisis. Unethical employers are stealing billions of dollars from millions of workers. Although some employers complain that labor laws are complicated, which is indeed true, the underpayment of wages has such serious consequences for workers and their families that employers must take their wage-payment responsibilities seriously.

The religious commandments against theft, including wage theft, are clear. Thou shalt not steal. Luckily, there are many things we can do to stop, reduce and deter wage theft.

1) Make sure those you or your congregation hire are paid fairly. Especially be careful when you:

- Hire a contractor. Are all the workers paid fairly? Be sure to ask as part of the bidding process.
- Leave a tip. Will the wait-staff receive it?
- Hire a service person. Ask how much the service person is paid and if the person is paid overtime (although not all service professions are required to pay overtime, many are).

2) Learn more about wage theft so you can talk with your friends and colleagues about the problems. You can:

- Read *Wage Theft in America: Why Millions of Americans are Not Getting Paid and What You Can Do about It*.
- Organize a wage theft forum lifting up wage theft problems in your community.
- Visit www.CanMyBossDoThat.com to learn if you have been a victim of wage theft.

3) Support policy initiatives to stop and deter wage theft. You can:

- Contact your Congressional leaders in support of the Stop Wage Theft bill. Send e-mails directly from www.iwj.org.
- Support local wage theft initiatives coordinated by community-based workers centers.
- Join the Interfaith Worker Justice e-mail action list. Sign up at www.iwj.org.
Raise the Minimum Wage

“There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American whether he [or she] is a hospital worker, laundry worker, maid, or day laborer.”

– Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Federal Minimum Wage Campaign
Interfaith Worker Justice is working with a coalition of groups to pass the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013, which would raise the minimum wage to $10.10/hour, tie the tipped wage to 70% of the minimum wage, and “index” both so they can keep pace with inflation. Members of the U. S. House of Representatives and the U. S. Senate need to commit to supporting this bill.

Minimum Wage Facts:
• The current federal minimum wage of $7.25 is far too low. Compare this to 1968 when the value of the minimum wage (in today’s dollars) was around $10.50.
• A mother of 2 working full-time at the current minimum wage earns below the federal poverty line.
• Contrary to opponents arguments the vast majority of research shows that raising the minimum wage has no effect on unemployment.
• Indexing is crucial to protect worker’s future wages. Without it minimum wage workers ability to keep pace with inflation are prey to the whims of partisan politics.
• Over 30 million workers would directly and indirectly receive a boost from raising the minimum wage
• Research shows that raising the minimum wage would boost the economy by putting more money in the pockets of those who will spend it.

What You Can Do
1. Pray for all workers earning wages inadequate to sustain their families.
2. Call your Congressional Representative and Senators at (202) 224-3121 and encourage them to sign on to the Federal Minimum Wage Act of 2013.
3. Send an email to your representative at www.iwj.org.
4. Educate yourself on the issue at www.iwj.org

Sources: Why Does the Minimum Wage Have No Discernible Effect on Employment? February 2013. CEPR. John Scmitt. Raising the federal minimum wage to $10.10... Center for Economic Progress. March 2013. David Cooper and Doug Hall

Prayer for a Living Wage

Living God, we confess that we have not fully accepted the challenge of seeking Your justice in the world. We define justice in ways that preserve our own self-interest, forgetting that Your justice may call us to great sacrifice.

We pray for workers whose wages are so low that they face terrible choices between paying the rent and feeding their families.

God of compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray that the courageous cries of workers for justice will be heard by their employers, by the community, and by our government.

God of compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray for employers in our city, that they will accept their responsibility to pay their workers enough to live.

God of compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray for companies that abuse the dignity of their workers and refuse to see their employees as brothers and sisters.

God of compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray for all the citizens of our community, that we will hold our government and businesses in our community accountable for the ways they treat their workers.

God of compassion, hear our prayer.

Hear now O God the prayers that we lift aloud or in silence to you.

By Rev. Rebekah Jordan, Mid-South Interfaith Network for Economic Justice

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Wal-Mart: ‘From Whom Much is Expected’

As people of faith, we believe that Wal-Mart should be a good employer and a good neighbor. All of our faith traditions – Christian, Jewish, Muslim – have statements urging employers to pay wages that can support families, provide benefits for families, ensure that workers are treated with respect and dignity on the job, guarantee workers’ right to organize, and challenge sweatshops at home and abroad.

In our traditions, “to whom much is given, much is expected.” As the largest employer in the nation, Wal-Mart establishes the national standards for work. We call upon Wal-Mart to establish:

- **Family wages**: Work compensation must be measured not only as reimbursement for individuals, but as a means to allow workers to raise their families in dignity.

- **Family health care**: Too many Wal-Mart workers do not qualify for health care or cannot afford it.

- **Respect and dignity on the job**: Workers are not just employees, they are human beings created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

- **Right to organize**: All major faith traditions support the rights of workers to organize into unions and associations of their choice, without harassment and interference.

- **Challenging sweatshops**: As one of the largest worldwide purchasers of products, Wal-Mart must become a leader in fighting sweatshop and child labor around the world.

Wal-Mart is not an ordinary company. It is a trendsetter. It is a pioneer. We call upon Wal-Mart to become an ethical leader, paving the way for family wages and benefits, good jobs, and challenging sweatshops. Wal-Mart has been given much. Much is expected!

“To whom much is given, much is expected.”

What People of Faith Can Do

People of faith are concerned about the standards Wal-Mart is setting for the nation and often ask, “What can I do?” Below are five concrete things you and your congregation can do:

1. **Organize a group in your home or congregation** to watch the Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Prices movie. To order a copy of the DVD, visit www.walmartmovie.com.

2. **Lead a small delegation of religious and community leaders** to meet with the manager of your local Wal-Mart. Ask the manager about the wages and benefits paid in the store. If you get the information, you can compare the answer with what it takes to raise a family in your community. Just asking the question demonstrates community concern about these core issues and will surely be conveyed to the regional and national management.

3. **Publicly choose Costco for your congregation’s bulk purchases.** If the congregation has a Sam’s Club membership (the bulk purchasing club owned by Wal-Mart), switch from Sam’s Club to Costco. Costco pays significantly higher wages and health care benefits and allows workers the right to organize. If your congregation intentionally chooses Costco, please:
   - Inform Interfaith Worker Justice so it can publicize your choice.
   - Send a letter to both Costco and Sam’s Club explaining your choice.
   - Send a press release about your congregation’s choice to area newspapers and your denomination’s publications.

4. **Participate in campaigns seeking community benefit agreements.** Whenever Wal-Mart wants to open a new store, it is an opportunity to get commitments from the company about wages, benefits, and working conditions.

5. **Support city and state legislation** that requires higher standards for large employers such as Wal-Mart.

For sample letters and press releases, visit www.iwj.org. For information on community benefit agreements and community standards legislation, visit walmartwatch.com or www.wakeupwalmart.com.
Leader: In these times of economic uncertainty, we turn to the words of God to Joshua:

All: As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. (Joshua 1:5)

Leader: If you have lost a job, know that you serve a God who

All: Will not fail you or forsake you.

Leader: If you have lost your home or cannot make ends meet,

All: You still serve a God who will not fail your or forsake you.

Leader: God tells us to

All: Be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that God’s servant Moses commanded you. (Joshua 1:7a)

Leader: In times of struggle, we must stay focused on the work God has given us to do.

All: Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. (Joshua 1:7b)

Leader: When we don’t know what to do, God tells us to

All: Meditate on God’s word day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. (Joshua 1:8a)

Leader: For then you shall make your way prosperous,

All: and then you shall be successful. (Joshua 1:8b)

Leader: We shall prosper and we shall be successful, but we know that God does not count prosperity and successfulness in financial terms.

All: We will prosper in righteousness and be successful in using the gifts God has given us to serve God’s people.

Leader: Therefore, Be strong and courageous. (Joshua 1:9a)

All: Do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9b)

Leader: When you go to work,

All: God is with me.

Leader: When you are without work,

All: God is with me.

Leader: When you have great joys,

All: God is with me.

Leader: In times of stress and turmoil,

All: God is with me.

Leader: Do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9b)

All: I will be strong and courageous as God has called me to be.
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

Resources

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Suggestions for improvement:

____________________________________________________________________________________

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

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

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