

Labor Day, 2009: Pray and Advocate for Workers' Rights

Labor Day Litany

Lord, Bless the work of our hands.

For all those who toil and labor:

Lord, Bless the work of their hands.

For those who have lost their jobs, who are unemployed or underemployed, let us pray:

Lord, Bless the work of their hands.

For those who work in hazardous conditions without sufficient protection, let us pray:

Lord, Bless the work of their hands.

For those who face discrimination, harassment, or abuse in the work place, let us pray:

Lord, Bless the work of their hands.

For those who are not paid fair wages or who are denied legally due overtime pay, let us pray:

Lord, Bless the work of their hands.

For migrant agricultural workers and for all who work the land, let us pray:

Lord, Bless the work of their hands.

For all employers that they may seek to provide a just work environment, let us pray:

Lord, Bless the work of their hands.

For those who struggle to balance job commitments with the needs of their family, let us pray:

Lord, Bless the work of their hands.

For all humans who seek to become the co-creators of the promised Kingdom, let us pray:

Lord, Bless the work of our hands.

Loving God, through your Son you gave us an example of how to love one another and how to embody this love in labor to serve the poor and the oppressed. Give us the strength to continue working to bring forth your kingdom here on earth—a kingdom of justice and peace, where all know compassion, grace and mercy. Grant this through Christ, our Lord. *Amen.*

(adapted with permission from an Interfaith Worker Justice resource)

Through the combination of social and economic change, trade union organizations experience greater difficulty in carrying out their task of representing the interests of workers, partly because Governments, for reasons of economic utility, often limit the freedom or the negotiating capacity of labor unions. Hence traditional networks of solidarity have more and more obstacles to overcome. The repeated calls issued within the Church's social doctrine, beginning with Rerum Novarum, for the promotion of workers' associations that can defend their rights must therefore be honored today even more than in the past, as a prompt and farsighted response to the urgent need for new forms of cooperation at the international level, as well as the local level.

- Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, #25

LABOR



2009 Labor for Justice: Raise Your Voice for Workers' Rights

Employee Free Choice Act

Catholic Social Teaching has always affirmed the right of workers to form and join unions. From Pope Leo XIII to Pope Benedict XVI, church leaders have been clear on this key issue for workers: union membership is a basic human right. The core CST principles of human dignity and solidarity are promoted when workers have the choice to join a union. These principles have been challenged by corporations who have launched well-funded campaigns to fight union organization efforts. Putting profits above people, which Benedict warned against in his 2009 encyclical, is a grave injustice, one that still continues.

The **Employee Free Choice Act** (H.R. 1409, S. 560) would ensure that, when a majority of employees in a workplace decide to form a union, they could do so without the harassment, intimidation, illegal firings, threats or actual physical violence that employers now use to block workers' free choice. Please send a letter like the one below to your senators and representa-

Dear Senator (or Dear Congress Member):

*I am writing to ask your support of the **Employee Free Choice Act** (H.R. 1409, S. 560) As a person of faith, I have a strong commitment to social justice and the reduction of poverty. The Catholic social tradition has long promoted the right to unionize as a key element of justice.*

*Workers have the right to decent jobs with benefits, as the U.S. Catholic Bishops have reminded us. **The Employee Free Choice Act** will help working families by ensuring workers' ability to negotiate their own economic security--without fear of intimidation and firings.*

We must not allow our own fear of the present economic downturn to compromise basic ethical standards and basic rights for all who toil in this country.

Wage Theft Prevention Act

Many U.S. workers are not paid the minimum wage the law requires and not paid for overtime when they are entitled to it, which amounts to theft of their wages. Unfortunately, a recent 2009 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation revealed the U.S. government's failure to enforce the nation's wage and hour laws that address such wage theft. The GAO report found that many wage and hour investigations were inadequately handled by the U.S. Department of Labor, and eventually dropped because the investigations were taking too long and the statute of limitations were too short.

The **Wage Theft Prevention Act** (H.R. 3303) would ensure that delays in investigating claims of wage theft will not result in a permanent loss of back pay for workers. The bill would freeze the statute of limitations from the date an employer is informed of an investigation until the employer is notified that the investigation has concluded. Contact your congress members on

Dear Congress Member:

*I am writing to ask your support of the **Wage Theft Prevention Act** (H.R. 3303) As a person of faith, I have a strong commitment to social justice and the reduction of poverty. The Catholic social tradition has long promoted the rights of workers to just pay and decent working conditions.*

*The **Wage Theft Prevention Act** (H.R. 3303) will ensure that delays in investigating claims of illegal practices that deny workers full pay in compliance with the law will not result in a permanent loss of back pay for workers. It will help ensure that the Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division operates effectively to protect workers.*

Our working families must be protected in these difficult economic times.

Thank you for your attention to this bill

