

LIVING OUR FAITH at St Philip Neri

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Dignity of Work and Workers. Welcome to the latest issue of the Peace & Justice Commission newsletter. This issue highlights the last of the seven major themes of Catholic Social Teaching – the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers. This Labor Day, we invite you to learn more about the value our tradition places on work and workers.

Catholic Social Teaching on work reflects a compelling Christian revelation - the human person, created in God's image and likeness, shares in the tasks of the Creator through work. Work is for the person, not the other way around. In our Catholic tradition, work is not just a burden or how we make a living. Work is a way of supporting our families, realizing our dignity, promoting the common good and participating in God's creation.

Because we are social beings, human dignity is not realized in isolation but in community with others. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected. Pope John Paul II identifies four rights of labor which take priority over capital: the right to suitable employment for all those capable of it; the right to just remuneration for the work done; the right to the organization of the labor process to respect the requirements of the person and his or her life; and the right to form unions. Respecting these rights promotes an economy that protects human life, defends human rights, and advances the well-being of all.

Work belongs to the vocation of every person. Work is an essential means by which the goods of the earth and the creative capacities of human beings are engaged to provide for human flourishing and the common good. This means often doing the ordinary well, making the most of our talents and opportunities, treating others fairly and with dignity, and working with integrity and creativity. As people of faith we should be encouraged to choose work based on how we can best use the gifts God has given us. All that human beings need for their survival and well-being is provided by God but requires our creative effort and toil.

What Does the Catechism Say About Work?

- "Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from the Creator." (2427)
- "In work, the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his or her nature." (2428)
- "Everyone has the right of economic initiative; everyone should make legitimate use of his or her talents to contribute to the abundance that will benefit all and to harvest the just fruits of his or her labor." (2429)
- "A just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice." (2434)

Work remains a good thing, not only because it is useful and enjoyable, but also because it expresses and increases the worker's dignity. Through work we not only transform the world, we are transformed ourselves, becoming "more a human being."

-Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*

Some questions for reflection & discussion:

1. What is the nature of the work you do? What gifts and talents of yours does it engage?
2. Would you define the work you do as your vocation? Why or why not?
3. As you look back over your family history, how has the kind of work done by members in your family changed through the years? How has it changed for the men in the family, how has it changed for the women in the family?
4. How does the work you do uphold or promote your human dignity? Does it uphold the dignity of others? Does it contribute to the common good?

Labor Day Quiz

As people of faith, we have a special concern for immigrant workers, those who toil in sweatshops, and those who work but still live in poverty. Take this quiz to look at some areas of challenge for our nation.

1. How many adults work full-time but earn poverty-level wages?
 - a. one out of ten
 - b. one out of five
 - c. one out of four
 - d. one out of two
2. How many Americans are without health insurance?
 - a. 22 million
 - b. 33 million
 - c. 44 million
 - d. 55 million
3. What percentage of families go into bankruptcy because of health care costs?
 - a. 90 percent
 - b. 50 percent
 - c. 30 percent
 - d. 10 percent
4. Do sweatshops exist in the U.S.?
 - a. No
 - b. In a few garment shops
 - c. In ten major cities
 - d. Throughout the nation
5. What percentage of workers are in unions?
 - a. 50 percent
 - b. 27 percent
 - c. 13 percent
 - d. 5 percent

quiz borrowed from National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice

Prayer to St. Joseph, Patron of Workers

St. Joseph, Patron of Workers,
Help us to respect the dignity of all workers.
Help us to learn about and to care about
Workers who do not have fair wages, just benefits, safe
working environments.
Help us to raise our voices for justice for workers.
Help us to ask our government and our representatives
To develop policies that create jobs with dignity.

You taught your son
The value of work and the joy of work well done.
Teach us these lessons.
Guide us in our own work
And in the work of justice we are all called to participate in.
Renew our strength and commitment
Each day as we face the work ahead
As we labor for the common good of all.
Amen.



Quiz Answers

1. *Full-time Workers Earning Poverty Wages* – c. Poverty wages are those at minimum wage or just above (\$18,400/year for a family of 4 in 2003). One in four workers earn poverty wages.
2. *Health Insurance Coverage* – c. Approximately 44 million Americans, primarily low-wage workers and their children, do not have health insurance. This number increases each year.
3. *Bankruptcy because of health care costs* – b. Health care costs are a major cause of approximately 50 percent of family bankruptcies. Of the 1.1 million personal bankruptcies in 1999, 326,441 were directly caused by illness or injury to family members while 267,575 had substantial medical bills as a contributing factor.
4. *Do sweatshops exist* – d. A sweatshop is a routine violation of labor laws, characterized by low wages, unsafe working conditions and disrespectful treatment of workers. Sweatshops often rely on immigrant workers who are less likely to complain. Industries in the US that often fit sweatshop definitions include farm labor, landscape work, poultry and meatpacking, many nursing homes, garment factories and restaurants.
5. *Percent of Workers in Unions* – c. Only about 13 percent of the total workforce is represented by unions – a higher percentage in public sector jobs and a lower percentage in private sector jobs.