

Labor Day, September 4, 2023

Pray: Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers (USCCB)

Lord God, Master of the Vineyard,

How wonderful that you have invited us
who labor by the sweat of our brow
to be workers in the vineyard
and assist your work
to shape the world around us.

As we seek to respond to this call,
make us attentive to those who seek work
but cannot find it.

Help us listen to the struggles of those
who work hard to provide for their families
but still have trouble making ends meet.

Open our eyes to the struggles of those exploited
and help us speak for just wages and safe conditions, the
freedom to organize, and time for renewal.

For work was made for humankind
and not humankind for work.
Let it not be a vehicle for exploitation
but a radiant expression of our human dignity.

Give all who labor listening hearts
that we may pause from our work
to receive your gift of rest.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit
that you might work through us to let your justice reign.

Amen.

Reflection

“The obligation to earn one’s bread by the sweat of one’s brow also presumes the right to do so. A society in which this right is systematically denied, in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment, cannot be justified from an ethical point of view, nor can that society attain social peace.”

—St. John Paul II, *The Hundredth Year (Centessimus Annus)*, no. 43

“In many cases, poverty results from a violation of the dignity of human work, either because work opportunities are limited (through unemployment or underemployment), or ‘because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.’”

—Pope Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate)*, no. 63,
quoting St. John Paul II, *On Human Work (Laborem Exercens)*, no. 8

Discussion Questions:

- Where are the dignity of work or the rights of workers violated or protected - both in your own community and around the world?
- How can our purchasing choices impact whether others' rights are violated or protected?

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Learn: Inequality in Labor & Economics

"Inequality is the root of
social ills"

POPE FRANCIS,
EVANGELII GAUDIUM

Racial Economic Inequality: In the November 2018 Pastoral Letter Against Racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the Catholic Bishops of the United States urged all Catholics to acknowledge the "scourge of racism" that still exists in our hearts, words and actions. In his 2015 Congressional Address, the Pope spoke of the economic inequality in the U.S., challenging leaders and all Americans to work for the common good so that every individual, created in God's image, can flourish.

- In 2020, 37 million people lived in Poverty in the United States, including people working at minimum wage, even holding multiple jobs, live in poverty (www.povertyusa.org/facts).
- In 2022, Black and Hispanic adults are more likely than White and Asian adults to move down the income ladder - and less likely to move up it - from one year to the next. Likewise, adults with lower levels of education are more likely than those with more education to see economic regression and less likely to see progression (*Black and Hispanic Americans, those with less education are more likely to fall out of the middle class each year*, Pew Research Center, May 10, 2022).
- Unemployment rates for African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans are considerably higher than the national average, thereby growing income inequality increasingly affects minorities. (*What is Systemic Racism?*, USCCB, 2018)

Building a Just Economy for Women & Families: Pope Francis said in his 2015 visit to the United States, "We cannot call any society healthy when it does not leave real room for family life". While some reports find that the economy is returning to pre-pandemic norm with regards to unemployment, others show that, while wages are rising, much or all of the increases are lost to inflation which affects low-income families the most (*Building a Just Economy for Women and Families*, USCCB, Sept. 5, 2022).

- The USDA reported in February 2023:
 - Food insecurity disproportionately impacted people of color: 1 in 5 Black, Non-Hispanics, 1 in 5 Native Americans, 1 in 6 Hispanics compared to 1 in 15 White, Non-Hispanics.
 - Low-income households spend 27% of their budget on food, this increased spending requires tough choices between food and other necessities like rent, child care and medication.



Watch the Video: "CST 101: The Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers" (USCCB & CRS)

Watch the Video CST 101: The Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers by the USCCB and CRS!

Below is a discussion guide adapted from the USCCB and CRS:

Opening Prayer:

Creator God, thank you for providing us with the gift to share our talents.

Provide our community, our nation, our world the fortitude to provide work for all which is decent and fair.

Make us faithful stewards of your creation to enhance the human dignity of our global family.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit now and forever.

Amen

Watch the Video:

- Visit: https://youtu.be/G2G8jGOva7Y?si=uc2_4CLyPQYih_mE
- Search: "CST 101 Dignity of Work" on YouTube

Prayer with Scripture: Read this Scripture passage twice.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. Going out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.’ So they went off. [And] he went out again around noon, and around three o’clock, and did likewise. Going out about five o’clock, he found others standing around, and said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They answered, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard.’ When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.’ When those who had started about five o’clock came, each received the usual daily wage. So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage. And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day’s burden and the heat.’ He said to one of them in reply, ‘My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you?’” (Matthew 20:1-14)

Discussion Questions:

- How can this passage help us reflect on the relationship between work, sufficient wages and human dignity?
- Why does every person have a right to decent work?

Take Action!

Support Local Businesses: Local businesses are owned by and provide employment to your neighbors. Local businesses are more likely to support positive changes in the community and help keep a stable economy for residents. Supporting a local business can also help children and families live in a healthy economic situation.

Support CCHD! The USCCB's Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) was established in 1970 as an instrument of the Catholic Church working to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ by empowering low-income people, families and communities.

- **Visit:** <https://www.usccb.org/committees/catholic-campaign-human-development>

Work to Relieve Hunger in Your Community! Hunger is a year-round issue, it forces families to choose between food and other basic living expenses.

- Your donation to your local food pantry can provide much needed vegetables, fruits and dairy items that provide nutritious and healthy food to families.
- You can volunteer at your local food pantry, locker or food bank and help families and build a healthy community as well!
- **To find out where and how to volunteer:** <https://www.scd.org/eucharist/works-charity>

Sign up for Action Alerts from the USCCB! The USCCB Action Center provides information about current action alerts so that you can contact your elected representatives to express your concerns and opinion on upcoming Federal Legislation:

- **Visit:** <https://www.usccb.org/take-action>