

Unions, Catholic bishops, health care providers reach accord on organizing

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI)— The nation's Catholic bishops and leaders of unions that represent health care workers have agreed on a set of principles to cover labor-management relations in U.S. Catholic hospitals, nursing homes, and other health care facilities.

But the principles, unveiled June 22 by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, D.C., AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, and Service Employees Local 1199 President Dennis Rivera, have no enforcement power behind them. Instead, they are based on more than a century of Catholic Social Teaching, which the church wants its hospital and nursing home boards and administrators to follow.

Taken together, the guidelines com-

prise a "peace agreement," whereby Catholic hospitals drop their aggressive tactics in fighting unions, such as delays, one-on-one meetings, captive audience sessions, and threats and intimidation, in exchange for a unions pledge not to run public leverage campaigns against the hospitals.

Parties to the agreement include the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Catholic Health Association of the United States, the AFL-CIO and its affiliates American Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and the Service Employees International Union.

The guiding principles suggest seven key elements for appropriate conduct.

They include:

- Respect. No negative campaigning by either side.
- Equal access to information by the employer and the union representatives.
- No biased statements that would give misleading impressions about the advantages and disadvantages of joining a union.

- No aggressive or coercive behavior.
- A fair and timely process.
- Meaningful enforcement of a "local agreement" that would be set at the beginning of the organizing campaign to outline specific rules and measures.

- Honoring employee decisions, with no attempt to reverse the outcome of the workers' decision on whether or not to unionize.

Labor officials said they were optimistic that the agreed-upon principles would help ease current labor-management tensions at Catholic health care facilities.

"This reaffirms the church's support of workers' right to form and join unions," Sweeney said.

"We're trying to honor the rights of workers, and I believe we have achieved that," Rivera added.

McCarrick said the guidelines are the result of "respectful, candid, constructive dialogue" over several years and represent "a practical consensus" for Catholic health care ministries.

The Catholic health care network includes 600 hospitals and 1,200 other health care agencies employing nearly 600,000 workers across the country.

Siemens closes, 43 IBEW jobs lost

A Northeast Portland electric panel factory owned by the German multinational Siemens terminated its workforce and closed permanently June 30. The layoffs of the 43 assembly workers, members of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 48, took place in stages in June.

The shop — at 6427 NE 59th Place just off Columbia Boulevard — has been union-represented since at least the 1980s. Half the members have 20 to 25 years with the company, said Local 48 Union Representative Nancy Cary.

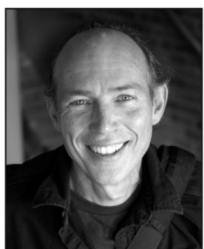
Thanks to a provision negotiated in the most recent contract, Cary said workers will get one week's severance pay for every year of service, up to 16. After the closure announcement, the company also agreed to pay for three months of health care benefits.

Cary said Siemens has been regarded as a good union employer; the closure is a response to the construction downturn. Production of electric panels will be shifted to Siemens plants in California and Texas.

Siemens' Energy and Automation division has 10,000 employees at 28 locations in the United States.



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