

# Catholic bishops strongly back unions in Labor Day statement

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Saying the nation's economy is failing workers, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is strongly backing unions and the right to organize, as one way to help workers out of the economic turmoil.

The pro-union language, drawing on 120 years of Catholic social teaching, is a large segment of the bishops' 6-page 3,400-word Labor Day message.

Human Costs And Moral Challenges Of A Broken Economy, by Bishop Stephen Blaire, chair of the conference's Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, reiterates the need for unions to protect workers.

But like other pro-worker statements from the bishops, it can be disregarded by Catholic laypeople — or even by fellow bishops.

The Catholic Diocese of Syracuse, N.Y., is "reorganizing" the city's Catholic cemetery system. Its plan would abolish the separate non-profit firm that runs the city's one unionized Catholic cemetery, St. Mary's-St. Agnes, throwing six veteran workers, members of a Service Employees local, out of jobs at the end of August.

And the head of the diocese in St. Louis has long opposed the Carpenters' efforts to organize teachers and staff in the diocesan schools.

Catholic-run businesses have also ignored or defied the church's pro-worker teachings. The board of one of the nation's leading Catholic hospital

systems, Chicago-based Resurrection Health Care, still refuses to obey labor law in its campaign to prevent AFSCME from organizing workers there.

Nevertheless, the bishops declare unions are vital to protecting workers.

"The church consistently supported efforts of workers to join together to defend their rights and protect their dignity," the bishops said.

Pope Benedict XVI recently reaffirmed that social teaching, saying "promotion of workers' associations that can defend their rights must therefore be honored today even more than in the past.

"There have been some efforts, as part of broader disputes over state budgets, to remove or restrict the rights of workers to collective bargaining as well as limit the role of unions in the workplace. Bishops in Wisconsin, Ohio, and elsewhere have faithfully and carefully outlined Catholic teaching on worker rights, suggesting that difficult times should not lead us to ignore the legitimate rights of workers. Without endorsing every tactic of unions or every outcome of collective bargaining, the church affirms the rights of workers in public and private employment to choose to come together to form and join unions, to bargain collectively, and to have an effective voice in the workplace," the bishops stated.

"Unions remain an effective instrument to protect the dignity of work and the rights of workers. At their best,

unions are important not just for the economic protections and benefits for their members, but especially for the voice and participation they can offer to workers. They are important not only for what they achieve for their members, but also for the contributions they make to the whole society," they said.

"The teaching that workers have the right to choose freely to form and belong to unions and other associations without interference or intimidation is strong and consistent" in Catholicism, the bishops reiterated.

But the bishops faulted unions on three counts. Two were economic: "Failure to avoid the temptations of excessive partisanship, and pursuit of only narrow interests. Workers and their unions, as well as employers and their businesses, all have responsibility to seek the common good, not just their own economic, political, or institutional interests," the bishops' statement said.

In the third, bishops said "some unions in some places have taken public positions the church cannot support, which many union members may not support, and which have little to do with work or workers' rights."

Leaders of the church and the labor movement cannot avoid these differences, but should address them in principled, respectful and candid dialogue," the bishops conceded. "This should not keep us from working on our own and together to advance common priorities of protecting worker rights, economic and social justice, overcoming poverty, and creating economic oppor-

tunity for all."

In general, the bishops called the economy a disaster for almost everyone, and blasted the widening inequality of wealth. They also said economic trends are eating into political life, which in turn is increasingly polarized — a condition they condemned.

"A fundamental task is to create jobs and spur economic growth. Decent jobs at decent wages are the best path out of poverty, and restoring growth is a powerful way to reduce deficits. ... A

just framework for future budgets cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor persons. It requires shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly ... A moral measure of this budget debate is not which party wins or which powerful interests prevail, but rather how those who are jobless, hungry, homeless, or poor are treated."



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Wishes our clients and friends  
a safe and Happy Labor Day!

*Genius begins great works; labor  
alone finishes them.*

~ Joseph Joubert

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Congratulations to the

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CYCLING TEAM

on a great summer.

## Celebrating our day!



Special greetings to our newest members at Local 1546 (City of Lake Oswego) and Local 1481 (City of Sutherlin) as they celebrate their first Labor Day as AFSCME members. *Congratulations!*

Gary Gillespie, President  
Ken Allen, Executive Director  
... and 26,000+ members statewide!

