



# The Rank and File Catholic

(Connecting the teaching of the Church with the struggles of Labor)

Volume 11

Number 2

Henderson, Kentucky

September, 2015

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## USCCB LABOR DAY STATEMENT

*Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami, Chairman  
Committee on Domestic Justice & Human Development  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
September 7, 2014*

*Given the newsletter is not able to print the full text of the Archbishop's statements, what follows are excerpts from his comments.*

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis teaches that of all the groups that play a role in the welfare of society and help ensure respect for human dignity, "outstanding among [them] is the family, as the basic cell of society" (no. 157).

Even with some economic progress, things have not truly improved for most American families. We must not resign ourselves to a 'new normal' with an economy that does not provide stable work at a living wage for too many men and women.

This Labor Day, we have a tremendous opportunity to reflect on how dignified work with a living wage is critical to helping our families and our greater society thrive.

Labor should allow the worker to develop and flourish as a person. Work also must provide the means for families to prosper. "Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment" (no. 128). Work is meant to be for the sake of the family. We do not undertake labor for its own sake, but as a way to grow toward lasting and meaningful realities in our lives and communities.

Human labor, at its best, is a deeply holy thing that ought to honor our dignity as we help God "maintain the fabric of the world" (no. 124, citing Sir 38:34).

Pope Francis continues to rouse our consciences and challenge us to live more thoroughly Catholic lives. *Laudato Si'* is, in large part, about something called "integral ecology," an idea that our care for and relationships with one another deeply impact our care for the environment, and vice-versa. The Pope writes extensively about the importance of work in that context.

Labor is one important way we honor our brothers and sisters in God's universal human family. Human labor, at its best, is a deeply holy thing that

ought to honor our dignity as we help God "maintain the fabric of the world" (no. 124, citing Sir 38:34).

This Labor Day, the violation of human dignity is evident in exploited workers, trafficked women and children, and a broken immigration system that fails people and families desperate for decent work and a better life. How do we participate in this wounding of human dignity, through choices about the clothes we wear, food we eat, and things we buy--most of which is unaffordable to the very workers who make it? Do we give a thought to this truth, that for our wants to be met, economic realities are created that cause others to live in ways that we ourselves would not? How can we advance God's work, in the words of the Psalmist, as he "secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, [and] sets captives free" (Ps 146:7)? These are difficult questions to ask, yet we must ask them.

Individual reflection and action is critical. The changes we make to how we live and interact with each other can help change the world.

Yet individual effort should not stand alone. Sufficient decent work that honors dignity and families is a necessary component of the task before us, and it is the Catholic way.

In demanding a living wage for workers we give hope to those struggling to provide for their families, as well as young workers who hope to have families of their own someday. Unions and worker associations, as with all human institutions, are imperfect, yet they remain indispensable to this work, and they can exemplify the importance of subsidiarity and solidarity in action.

This Labor Day and always, let us pray, reflect, and act, seeking to restore our work and relationships to the honored place God has ordained for them.

The full text of the comments from Bishop Wenski about Labor Day can be found on the USCCB website at this address: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/labor-employment/labor-day-statement-2015.cfm>

On Care for Our Common Home (*Laudato Si'*) is the most recent encyclical from Pope Francis. The full text can be found at this address:

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

## ANTI-UNION ANIMUS: IT EXISTS

By *Linda Houck, President*

*Wyoming Valley West Education Association*

*A PSEA/NEA Affiliate Local 45-40-87-0*

Those of us who work in labor-management relations sometimes have a difficult time making our members understand that, although we ourselves find collective bargaining practices and respect for the voice of the workers to be common-sense matters and perfectly reasonable, those thoughts are not always shared by management, and, indeed, by some of the louder voices in our society these days.

Every now and then, though, we get a very public statement upholding our ability to stand up for our rights without being subjected to retaliation. This is a reminder to all of us that these rights are not static, and if they are not defended and protected at every turn, they will be lost.

I have served as president and chief negotiator of my local for eight (8) years now, and in that role I have also filed 35 grievances. Seventy five percent (75%) of those grievances were resolved without arbitration. However, a few years ago, a series of arbitrations that occurred in a short period of time triggered some anti-union animus that led to just such a public statement on union rights for my local and for me.

Some grievances that I filed in late 2011 and early 2012 on various issues proceeded through the grievance process to arbitration, and in late 2012, I participated in four (4) arbitration hearings within the space of five (5) weeks. In the last of these hearings, I directly contradicted some testimony given by management – and that arbitrator ultimately found the district’s testimony to be “not credible.” Although that finding was not stated for several months, within two (2) weeks of my testimony at that hearing, I received notice that my teaching position was being considered for elimination. I was told that I needed to learn the meaning of the word “compromise.”

Three days before the start of the new school year, I was notified that my position was, in fact, being eliminated, and I was arbitrarily given a new assignment. This violated several timelines and other provisions set forth in our CBA. I filed a grievance on the contractual issues and an Unfair Labor Practice charge of anti-union animus and retaliatory activity against the school district.

The grievance case was heard by an arbitrator, and the ULP charge was presented to a hearing examiner with the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board about ten (10) months later. Finally, in June 2015, 22 months after my position was eliminated and two and a half (2½) years after being told that I needed to learn to compromise, the Labor Board issued a Decision and Order.

The hearing examiner found that the school district had no credible explanation for its actions toward me, particularly since they had violated several provisions of the CBA, and had demonstrated anti-union animus against me for my union activities. He ordered the district to restore my position, to reinstate me to it, and to refrain from harassment, intimidation, and retaliation for union activity. The school district

offered to accept the decision and order if the union would agree to drop the outstanding arbitration. Since we expected the arbitration decision to mirror the PLRB finding, we agreed. The decision and order were emailed directly to all union members, and summaries of them were published prominently in two local newspapers.

Although I was fortunate not to suffer a loss of employment or even a reduction in salary during those two years, my abrupt displacement and adjustment to a new job were very stressful events for me personally. The PLRB decision, though it took two (2) years to arrive, was extremely gratifying, and I received many calls and notes of congratulations from friends – and many notes from my union brothers and sisters thanking me for my perseverance. This decision and order will always be a reminder that standing up for what we believe sometimes has a temporary cost, but in the end the only rights we have are those for which we are willing to take a stand.

*Linda Houck is a member of Holy Family Parish in Luzerne, PA.*

## THE CHAPLAIN’S CORNER

Laudato Si “On Care for Our Common Home”

The Pope’s recent encyclical on the environment is easy to read and strikes at the very heart of the great social problem of our time, the disparity between rich and poor and the impact of environmental pollution on the world’s population.

The Pope pulls no punches that we are destroying the future of our grandchildren by allowing global warming to continue. He addresses this encyclical to ‘every person on the planet’. The issues effecting our environment affect every country and spare no one, but its’ our children and grandchildren that will pay the highest price.

For Pope Francis this means that we have to change our lifestyle and here he particularly targets a compulsive consumerism which leads to a feeling of selfishness all the while delaying the difficult decisions concerning environment warming.

Unions have had a wonderful record on worker safety and let’s be clear... pollution is a worker’s health problem. This is an opportunity for unions to show their concern for the common good by supporting a reasonable and responsible movement to clean energy.

St. Francis of Assisi, Pray for Us!

*Fr. Anthony Shonis*

### **KENTUCKY LABOR INSTITUTE IS NOW ON UNION ACTIVE**

Check articles affecting union members and their families and important announcements on the new website. To register as a member go to:

<http://kentuckylaborinstitute.unionactive.com>

The site includes member resources, new member registration, and a link to register for the Union Active News Letter. Register now.

## SCHOOL CHOICE – TUITION ASSISTANCE TAX CREDIT

*By Andrew J. Vandiver, Associate Director  
Catholic Conference of Kentucky  
Frankfort, KY*

Our Catholic faith teaches that parents have a fundamental right to choose a school for their children which corresponds to their personal convictions.<sup>1</sup> However, it is useless to admit that parents have this right unless the Church does all in its power to supply them with the means to exercise it. In Kentucky, many working class families do not have the financial means to send their children to a nonpublic school due to the cost of tuition.

In order to address this injustice, Kentucky's bishops are supporting tax credit legislation which would incentivize donations to organizations providing tuition assistance to families who send their children to nonpublic schools, including Catholic schools.<sup>2</sup> A bipartisan tax credit bill is expected to be introduced during the 2016 session of the Kentucky General Assembly.<sup>3</sup> Yet, this legislation will not pass unless Kentucky families demand action from their state representatives and senators.

Please follow the Catholic Conference of Kentucky on Twitter and Facebook or sign up for its email list at <http://ccky.org> in order to learn more about how you can get involved.

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## PREPARING FOR THE POPE'S VISIT

*From the Memorandum of Richard L. Trumka  
AFL-CIO Executive Council President*

The AFL-CIO joins the Catholic Church in calling individuals, families, and communities to prepare for Pope Francis's upcoming visit to the United States on September 22 - 27. The Pope has inspired millions of people around the world with his challenge for compassion, mercy, and justice. In a recent memorandum distributed by Richard L. Trumka, AFL-CIO Executive Council President, the labor leader includes the following:

*In a few weeks, Pope Francis will make his first visit to the United States, bringing a message of economic justice and solidarity. Working families all over the nation are energized by the Pope's call to community and his insistence that the moral measure of a society is found not in how high our stock market soars or in the might of our military, but in how we treat those on the margins.*

<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition English Translation, 1997 (No. 2229).

<sup>2</sup> Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, #72.

<sup>3</sup> Legislative Update: House Bill 384,

<http://ccky.org/2015/03/legislative-update-house-bill-384/>

*Pope Francis challenges us all to confront a culture of exclusion and indifference, and his words have inspired people across religion, race, class, and ideology.*

*The AFL-CIO agrees with the Catholic Church when it says: "A just economy must create the conditions for everyone to be able to enjoy a childhood without want, to develop their talents when young, to work with full rights during their active years and to enjoy a dignified retirement as they grow older."*

*Attached you will find a toolkit outlining the importance of the Pope's visit, and what you can do to lift up his message in the coming weeks. Many of our allies, like Faith in Public Life, PICO, and NETWORK, are coming together to highlight the words of the Pope, and I encourage you to reach out to those organizations in your community.*

His memorandum included an enclosure entitled "**Pope Francis in the United States: Confronting the Economy of Exclusion.**" The following is excerpted:

*Issues of economic dignity, comprehensive immigration reform, mass incarceration, extreme poverty and inequality are not abstract or simply political. These are fundamental moral issues, deeply rooted in the Gospel and other faith traditions, that impact real people and strike at the heart of what kind of country we want to build today and for future generations. "Everything is connected," Pope Francis said in his recent encyclical, a reminder that building strong communities and just public policies requires an awareness of how issues are interconnected and central to the common good.*

Mr. Trumka invited recipients of the memorandum to direct questions about the toolkit to Lori D'Orazio at [ldorazio@aflcio.org](mailto:ldorazio@aflcio.org) in the Campaigns Department.

### MAJOR EVENTS OF THE PAPAL VISIT

Tues, Sept 22	Pope Francis arrives in US
Wed, Sept 23	Meetings in Washington, DC
Thurs, Sept 24	Address to Congress
Fri, Sept 25	Address to the UN in New York Multi-religious service at National September 11 Memorial Public Mass at Madison Square Garden
Sat, Sept 26	Public Mass at Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, Philadelphia Visit to the Festival of Families
Sun, Sept 27	Mass for the conclusion of the World Meeting of Families Departure for Rome

“The Rank and File Catholic” (TRAFc) newsletter debuted on Television on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005. This ½ hour program was recorded at the “West Kentucky Community and Technical College” located in Paducah, KY as part of a series titled “THE UNION LABEL” and was hosted by Berry Craig. Fr. Anthony Shonis, Chaplain of TRAFc, and Mike Roby, then Editor of TRAFc, were his guest. A “**FREE**” DVD of the program may be obtained from the TRAFc staff.

Additional information may be found on the internet at:

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; [www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/labor.htm](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/labor.htm)

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF KENTUCKY: [www.ccky.org](http://www.ccky.org)

The Catholic – Labor Network: [www.catholiclabor.org](http://www.catholiclabor.org)

Catholic Social Teaching: [www.osjspm.org](http://www.osjspm.org)

Kentucky Labor Institute: [www.KentuckyLaborInstitute.org](http://www.KentuckyLaborInstitute.org)

Current and back issues of “The Rank and File Catholic” (TRAFc) newsletter are also available at the Catholic - Labor Network website (<http://www.catholiclabor.org/R-F%20Catholic%20Nwsltr/R-F%20Catholic.html>).

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