

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LEXINGTON

THE CATHOLIC CENTER
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

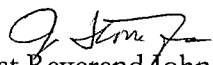
Kentucky House Bill 1

As the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Lexington, I represent a Church community with a long tradition of social teaching. Our social doctrine is a means of applying the principles of our Christian faith to the better ordering of society. Social teaching is rooted in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures and the Tradition of passing on that faith and its principles through 2,000 years. When we address the public good, and engage in the democratic process, it is with the intention of promoting common good, that is, the well-being of all people. We speak to the moral dimension of public issues and are always mindful of the effects of laws and decisions on the most vulnerable members of the population. When we address economic issues, it is from the perspective that economy is not an end in itself, but is to serve people and help them to flourish. The good of the human person is at the center of all economic activities.

The dignity of work and the rights of workers are critical to our approach to economic issues and laws. Workers cannot be treated merely as a means for corporate profit and production, but must be seen as autonomous human beings who contribute to the common good through their work. Modern Catholic Social teaching began in 1897 with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* which emphasizes the dignity and rights of workers, and in particular affirms the rights of workers to organize for the protection of their just rights. Among those rights are the right to decent wages and safe-working conditions. In Catholic teaching, unions are described as an indispensable element of social life. Unions are to promote solidarity among workers. They are essential for economic justice and to protect the rights of workers.

It follows from the strong support of organized labor for the common good, that unions need the support of the workers they represent. The falsely named "right to work" legislation proposed does not in fact create new rights to work, but rather strives to limit the effectiveness and power of the unions. When all workers benefit from the negotiations of the labor unions, through better wages and conditions, it is only just that the workers should participate by paying dues to the union which represents them in the workplace.

The weakening of unions by so-called "right to work" laws, has been shown to reduce wages and benefits overall in the states where such laws have been enacted. This cannot be seen as contributing to the common good. I implore Kentucky legislators, at this new moment in the state's history, to consider the well-being of working men and women in the state and to realize that stronger labor unions lead to more fair negotiations which benefit all workers in the state.


Most Reverend John Stowe, OFM Conv.
Catholic Bishop of Lexington
4 January 2017