

Labor Day 2020 Reflection Guide

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 6, 2020

<https://www.usccb.org/committees/domestic-justice-and-human-development/labor-employment>

Introduction:

On the Sunday before Labor Day, we have an opportunity to reflect on what the Church teaches us about the dignity of work and the rights of workers. We mark Labor Day this year with [our annual chairman's statement](#) as our communities are facing the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and a renewed call to dismantle systems of racial injustice. In a special way, we are invited to reflect on [Pope Francis' call](#) for "more inclusive and equitable economic models" that place people, not capital, at the center.

Begin by reflecting on your own experience of work, especially in the last five months—in an office or remote setting, in essential services, as a student, working in the home, or unexpectedly without employment. How have you experienced work as a form of participation in God's creative action? How are persistent low wages, rising unemployment, or unsafe conditions a barrier to full participation in that creative action? What role can you play in reshaping workplaces built upon justice and dignity?

Reflection:

- In the second reading, Paul reminds us that the call to love one another is at the center of our faith: "The commandments . . . are summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Rom 13:9). The importance of this call to love of neighbor is furthered in the Gospel, as Jesus instructs his disciples to always seek reconciliation and restoration of relationships with brothers and sisters who have been harmed (Mt 18:15-20). The devastating and unequal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed deep economic inequalities within our society. As we seek to love our neighbors as ourselves, we must work together to build new systems and structures that promote the dignity of the human person.
- Catholic teaching tells us that not only are workers due a "just wage" with which they can provide for their families' needs; they also deserve opportunities for rest and dignity-affirming benefits such as quality health care and paid time off. In addition, work should be something that enhances one's human dignity (see [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#), nos. 284, 287, 301, 302).
- Due to the economic devastation caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the number of unemployed workers in the U.S. has increased by more than 14 million, from 6.2 million in February to 20.5 million in May 2020 – substantially greater than the increase seen during the great depression. These economic ramifications have had an even larger impact on those already living near the poverty line, leaving the newly unemployed now

without access to food, health care, and in danger of eviction and utility cut-offs. In addition, many low-wage workers without benefits are unable to work remotely or in safe conditions and are at greater risk of contracting the virus.

- These inequalities are not new. The persistence of low wages, unsafe working conditions, and the experience of many workers in low-wage jobs tell us that we must give serious consideration to how we can address areas of inequality in our economic systems. We are called to prioritize the well-being of the human person over the capital they produce (see St. John Paul II in [Laborem Exercens](#), no. 12, on “The Priority of Labor”).
- How can we respond to these devastating impacts in a way that empowers our neighbors who have been most impacted by this economic devastation? For **over 50 years** the [Catholic Campaign for Human Development \(CCHD\)](#), has supported low-income led anti-poverty projects across the country that empower new mothers, immigrants, the elderly, families, and individuals to be active participants in their lives and work with their community to transform our society into one which supports the flourishing of all our brothers and sisters. In the last five months, CCHD’s community organizations have quickly amplified their efforts to address COVID-19’s devastating impacts.
- As we mark the 50th anniversary of CCHD, we are challenged to reimagine an economic system that honors the dignity of work and the rights of the worker:
 - How can we join the effort to promote worker’s rights in a time of unemployment and economic shutdown? Many CCHD-funded groups are working with communities to empower low-wage workers to improve their careers through educational programs and support services such as childcare assistance. As a result of the economic impact of the pandemic, a CCHD-funded group in Des Moines IA has ramped up their efforts to support workforce development and transition from low-wage to career-track jobs. On July 23 **AMOS Institute of Public Life** partnered with local business and community leaders to host a Virtual Workforce Summit to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing Iowa’s workforce in light of COVID-19, the economic slowdown, and rising unemployment rates.
 - These last few months have highlighted the impact of decades of historical racism that has created a lack of opportunity for many communities of color. CCHD-funded **Restore OKC** is a relationship-based community organization working to heal divisions and reconcile neighbors in the predominantly Black Northeastern Oklahoma City. Through their economic development project *Restore Farms*, they are providing job training and educational opportunities through local universities for historically marginalized youth. In a community where more than 60% of youth are food insecure, produce grown and harvested by *Restore Farms* interns in 2019 served over 1500 community members.
 - How do we create opportunities to value the potential and contributions of all workers in our society? One of CCHD’s funded organizations, **Code the Dream** is doing just that. Through free intensive training in software development to people from diverse low-income backgrounds, many of whom are young

immigrants without status who would not otherwise have access to such education. In CTD Labs, students work with experienced mentors to hone those skills by building apps and technology platforms for a range of startups, nonprofits, and government clients. In response to COVID-19, the Code the Dream team has worked on everything from an application to help coordinate delivery of tens of thousands of meals to families in poverty to a new website for a national coalition of volunteer sewers producing face masks for those who can't get commercial masks.

- Reconciliation and restoration must apply to all who desire to participate in God's creative action in the world. Through their project EXPO (Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing) CCHD-funded **WISDOM** is empowering previously imprisoned women and men to rebuild their lives and rejoin the workforce in Wisconsin. EXPO members have helped lead campaigns that prompted policymakers to pass "ban the box" laws that prohibit employers from asking about a person's criminal history on a job application for federal jobs as well as jobs in the cities of Madison, Milwaukee, and Racine. EXPO members have also led campaigns that resulted in expanded funding for Wisconsin's transitional jobs program.
- Our creative re-imagining of our economic system must be one that honors the dignity of work but also our call to care for God's creation. One example is CCHD supported **Opportunity Threads**, a worker-owned, immigrant-led cut and sew cooperative in rural Western North Carolina that focuses on fair labor, the dignity of workers, and sustainable environmental practices. With their emphasis on fair labor and the dignity of workers, the health and safety of workers on the production floor has been a no-brainer during the pandemic. In addition, Opportunity Threads has recently expanded its work to sew facemasks for a cooperative network of home healthcare workers.
- How are you called to respond to the devastating impacts of COVID-19 in your local community? What can you do to love your neighbor and restore the dignity and rights of workers in your city?

How Can Catholics Respond?

- In the workplace, if we are business owners, managers, or supervisors, we can help ensure that our businesses and organizations are offering family wages and the dignity-affirming benefits that our long Catholic tradition affirms should be available for all workers and their families.
- As we listen to the needs of those in our community, we are challenged to support those organizations that are empowering their employees to be owners and decision-makers. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the importance of these worker-owned businesses who are ensuring the safety of their workers during this time. [Find a local CCHD-funded group](#) that supports employee ownership in your community and get involved in creating a more just economic system.

- This year marks [the 50th anniversary](#) of the founding of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). The organizations supported by CCHD have been working for decades to address the racial and economic disparities revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Learn more about the work of CCHD and join the celebration.
- We can also join local efforts to support a just wage/family wage, which is a wage at which workers and their families can have access to what they need to fulfill basic needs and thrive.
- Learn about efforts in your parish or local community to assist workers and their families, or to support their needs through advocacy or other efforts and get involved.

Join the Conversation

Share this sample message on social media, in an email, or with a friend to join the conversation this Labor Day.

Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. This Labor Day, I'm reflecting on the dignity of work and rights of workers by visiting www.usccb.org/jphd to read the annual Labor Day statement from @USCCB.

On Labor Day, I am celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD)—that's 50 years supporting initiatives that empower families, immigrants, new mothers, the elderly, and those experiencing poverty. Learn more about how you can celebrate the #PowerofCCHD: povertyusa.org/cchd50 #CCHD50

Prayer for the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

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.

Activity Suggestions

- **Host a virtual discussion session on the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers.** Show the [CST101 video on that theme](#) and use [this discussion guide](#) from the bishops' WeAreSaltAndLight.org/cst101 page.
- **Host a Virtual Labor Day Picnic/gathering.** Use the Prayer for Workers above and focus the gathering on celebrating the dignity of work and the rights of workers.
- **Share the above message and prayer(s)** on the Sunday before Labor Day. Invite a parishioner to write a reflection—for example, a supervisor or manager about how he or she tries to practice respect for the dignity of work and workers in the workplace; a parishioner who has newly entered or re-entered the workforce after a period of unemployment; or someone who takes great pride in his or her work.
- **Use one or more of the following as a reflection guide with your family or virtual faith-sharing group**
 - [Primer on Labor in Catholic Social Thought](#)
 - [Background on Protecting Workers and Promoting the Dignity of Work](#)
 - [Background on Just Wage and the Federal Minimum Wage](#)
 - [Background on Worsening Economic Inequality](#)
 - [Background on Protecting the Rights of Workers in a Globalized Economy](#)
 - [Background on Paid Sick Leave](#)

Sample Prayers of the Faithful

Possible Responses:

- Lord, hear our prayer.
- In your mercy, hear us Lord.
- In your compassion, answer us God.

Possible Prayers:

We pray for a renewal of spirit for the men and women who must work in jobs that ignore the dignity of their personhood. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all essential workers who work in the agricultural, manufacturing, and public service sectors. That they are provided safe working conditions and access to affordable healthcare. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the men and women who have recently lost employment. We pray for their continued perseverance and determination as they continue to seek ways in which to participate in God's creative work. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the men and women who own companies, who lead companies, and who make decisions regarding safe work conditions and adequate wages. We pray that these leaders will act in the best interests of their laborers. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for union leaders, national and local, who are responsible for speaking for workers. May they be guided by the grace and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to be servant leaders. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for men, women, and children who experience a lack of solidarity and support in their daily struggle to survive. May we be aware of our responsibility to listen to the needs of our brothers and sisters in the world. We pray to the Lord.

We pray that as we are reminded that it is right and just to receive a fair wage for work, we may strive to promote dignity and respect for all in the workplace. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who have lost their lives while working, and especially those who died from COVID-19, that they might be welcomed into the heavenly kingdom; and for their families, that they might be comforted and find security. We pray to the Lord.

Copyright © 2020, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. All rights reserved. This text may be reproduced in whole or in part without alteration for nonprofit educational use, provided such reprints are not sold and include this notice. This resource and many others are available at [usccb.org/jphd](https://www.usccb.org/jphd).

Excerpt from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

