

## Excerpts from Catholic Social Teaching on Labor, Unions, and Workers Rights

In the first place, the worker must be paid a wage sufficient to support him and his family.

**Quadragesimo Anno (The Fortieth Year ) #71**  
**On Reconstruction of the Social Order**  
**Pius XI, 1931**

The Church fully supports the right of workers to form unions or other associations to secure their rights to fair wages and working conditions. This is a specific application of the more general right to associate. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "The experience of history teaches that organizations of this type are an indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrial societies."

**Economic Justice for All #104**  
**Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, U. S. Catholic Bishops, 1986**

Workers not only want fair pay, they also want to share in the responsibility and creativity of the very work process. They want to feel that they are working for themselves -- an awareness that is smothered in a bureaucratic system where they only feel themselves to be "cogs" in a huge machine moved from above.

**Laborem Exercens (On Human Work) #15**  
**John Paul II, 1981**

We consider it our duty to reaffirm that the remuneration of work is not something that can be left to the laws of the marketplace; nor should it be a decision left to the will of the more powerful. It must be determined in accordance with justice and equity; which means that workers must be paid a wage which allows them to live a truly human life and to fulfill their family obligations in a worthy manner.

**Mater et Magistra (Mother and Teacher) #71**  
**Pope John XXIII, 1961**

Other factors too enter into the assessment of a just wage: namely, the effective contribution which each individual makes to the economic effort, the financial state of the company for which he works, the requirements of the general good of the particular country ... and finally the requirements of the common good of the universal family of nations....

**Mater et Magistra (Mother and Teacher) #71**  
**John Paul II, 1981**

Yet the workers' rights cannot be doomed to be the mere result of economic systems aimed at maximum profits. The thing that must shape the whole economy is respect for the workers' rights within each country and all through the world's economy.

**Laborem Exercens (On Human Work) #17**  
**John Paul II, 1981**

We must pay more attention to the one who works than to what the worker does. The self-realization of the human person is the measure of what is right and wrong.

**Laborem Exercens (On Human Work) #6**  
**John Paul II, 1981**

Work is in the first place "for the worker" and not the worker "for work." Work itself can have greater or lesser objective value, but all work should be judged by the measure of dignity given to the person who carries it out.

**Laborem Exercens (On Human Work) #6**  
**John Paul II, 1981**

We must consequently continue to study the situation of the worker. There is a need for solidarity movements among and with the workers. The church is firmly committed to this cause, in fidelity to Christ, and to be truly the "church of the poor."

**Laborem Exercens (On Human Work) #8**  
**John Paul II, 1981**

But above all we must remember the priority of labor over capital: labor is the cause of production; capital, or the means of production, is its mere instrument or tool.

**Laborem Exercens (On Human Work) #12**  
**John Paul II, 1981**

It is right to struggle against an unjust economic system that does not uphold the priority of the human being over capital and land.

**Centesimus Annus (The Hundredth Year) #35**  
**John Paul II, 1991**

The capital at the disposal of management is in part the product of the labor of those who have toiled in the company over the years, including currently employed workers. As a minimum, workers have a right to be informed in advance when such decisions are under consideration, a right to negotiate with management about possible alternatives, and a right to fair compensation and assistance with retraining and relocation expenses should these be necessary. Since even these minimal rights are jeopardized without collective negotiation, industrial cooperation requires a strong role for labor unions in our changing economy.

**Economic Justice for All #303**  
**Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, U. S. Catholic Bishops, 1986**

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