

'BUT BE DOERS OF THE WORD AND NOT MERELY HEARERS' SUPPORT FOR WORKERS & UNION ORGANIZING

PROPER 17, LABOR DAY, YEAR B

Lectionary Texts:	Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9 Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23	Psalms 15 & 45:1-2, 6-9 James 1:17-27
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Focus Text: James 1:17-27

¹⁷ Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ In fulfillment of [God's] own purpose [God] gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of [God's] creatures. ¹⁹ You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. ²¹ Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³ For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴ for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵ But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. ²⁶ If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming." 'And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to [God's] chosen ones who cry to [God] day and night? Will [God] delay long in helping them? I tell you, [God] will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'

Luke 18:1-8

Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the Sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat." The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

Amos 8:4-7

You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt.

Deuteronomy 24:14-15

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY THE RT. REV. MICHAEL B. CURRY, BISHOP,
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The language of this passage is marvelously energizing and suggestive. One is reminded of multiple images from Scripture: the language of Hebrews which speaks of the word of God as “living and active” (Heb 4:12); the parable of Jesus in which the word of God is sent forth like seed being randomly sown in soil (Mt 13:1-9, 18-23); the words of Isaiah in which the word goes forth, never to return empty (Isaiah 55:10-11); the dawn of the world when God spoke and creation came to be (Genesis 1:1-3). For James the Word of God is a living, vibrant reality.

This vibrancy derives from the fact that the Word of God is the living reality of God, the very heart and essence of God. John’s Gospel says it this way: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). It is that Word which took form and shape and life in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14).

For James, as for John’s Gospel, the living Word of God is the source of the life of God wherever it is found. “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...” (1:17). Thus, James speaks of the origin of the Christian life in the life of the Word living in us: “In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures” (1:18). It is that “implanted word that has the power to save your souls” (1:21).

One commentator says that the reference of vs. 18 to Christian birth by the word likely refers “to the rebirth of Christians by the word of the Gospel (see Jn. 3:3-7; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:3,23)” (The Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV). The word of the Gospel is that way of God, the life of God. Followers of Jesus are those who seek to live the way of Jesus, the way of God. In so doing their lives become bearers of the life of God’s love, God’s compassion, God’s justice, God’s forgiveness.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY FROM “REFLECTIONS ON THE COMMON LECTIONARY”

In the lesson from the Letter of James we are called to be “Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.” When we profess faith, but we do not strive to bring about justice and peace, we deceive ourselves. We are not fulfilling our potential as God’s people in the world. As people of faith, we are called to live out our faith in meaningful and powerful ways. God calls us to challenge unjust laws and oppression. We must strive for God’s perfect law, rather than settling for the imperfect laws created by human beings. When we act for justice and peace, we may face intimidation or criticism. The writer of the letter to James reminds us that doers who act will be blessed in their doing. God is with us as we act and as we persevere.

Throughout the Bible, it is clear that our call is to transform the world into the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of justice, freedom, and peace. Labor Day gives us an opportunity to honor the work that is done by millions of American men and women. On Labor Day, we should consider the ways in which we – as individuals, as congregations, as churches – can help to bring about this transformation, especially for low-wage workers in this country.

(“Reflections on the Common Lectionary” [www.nicwj.org/materials/materials.cl.html], Interfaith Worker Justice; by Teresa Mithen, Intern, Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues, Summer 2000)

IF CAPITALISM IS FAIR THEN UNIONISM MUST BE. IF MEN HAVE A RIGHT TO CAPITALIZE THEIR IDEAS AND THE RESOURCES OF THEIR COUNTRY, THEN THAT IMPLIES THE RIGHT OF MEN TO CAPITALIZE THEIR LABOR.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY THE RT. REV. MICHAEL B. CURRY

In the year 2000 when I was consecrated bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, a group of young people decided to witness to our faith by walking on pilgrimage from Greensboro to Durham where the consecration service was to be held. Whether they knew it or not they walked in the steps of people of faith who witnessed to the love of God long before them.

They walked in the steps of Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims. They walked in the tradition of John Bunyan's character Pilgrim in Pilgrim's Progress. They walked in the steps of Mahatma Gandhi's salt march to the Indian Ocean. They walked the steps of those who marched across the Edmond Pettis Bridge in Selma of 1965. Above all they walked in the steps of Jesus of Nazareth who summons disciples of every generation and epic with the words, "Follow me." Their pilgrimage was a parable of what it means to be disciples of Jesus.

Christian discipleship is, in a sense, about what you do with your feet. There is a wonderful passage in Frederick Buechner's book, *The Alphabet of Grace*.

"Feet are religious too. I say if you want to know who you are, if you are more than academically interested in that particular mystery, you could do a lot worse than look at your feet for an answer. When you wake up in the morning, called by God to be a self again, if you want to know who you are, watch your feet. Because where your feet take you, that is who you are."

Discipleship is about what we do with our feet. The metaphor of feet is a rich one indeed. One of the powerful images of Scripture is that of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper (John 13). To be sure, the washing of feet was a sign of welcome and hospitality. It was in like manner an act of humility. It was also an act and a model of service.

Many workers here in North Carolina and nationally stand on their feet all day for salaries below a living wage with the absence of benefits. The North Carolina Justice Center (www.ncjustice.org) and the Living Wage Resource Center (www.livingwagecampaign.org) keep up to date information on issues of economic justice and the campaign for a living wage nationally.

How can we as people of faith support those who are quite literally on their feet all day at low paying jobs without health insurance and other benefits of life?

What are some ways we can educate ourselves and provide education for our congregations and communities of faith on concerns of the working poor here in North Carolina and principles of biblical economics which can help to guide us in our efforts to change public policy and private practices?

Discipleship is about what you do with your feet. It is about doing the word, and not simply hearing the word of the Gospel (1:22). The word "disciple" in both Hebrew and Greek has some origins in the realm of teaching, learning and education, if you will. Bruce Chilton, in his recent book *Rabbi Jesus*, says that an ancient rabbi was not merely a teacher of the head, but a teacher of head and heart. The rabbi taught a way of life. A pupil or disciple was not, therefore, simply an academic student of the teacher. The disciple sought to live the way of the teacher, to follow in his or her steps.

Jesus reflects this understanding when He said: "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master" (Mt. 10:24-25). It is in this context that He says, "Follow me," or "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Mk. 1:17; Jn. 14:6). It is in this context that 1st Peter speaks of Christian discipleship as following in the steps of Jesus. Discipleship is about feet. More to the point, discipleship is about what you do as an expression of who you are in Jesus.

At some deep level, following Jesus is about the life of God being lived in our lives in such a way that finally we "love as God loves," to borrow from theologian Roberta Bondi. That's where this language from James comes from: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, and the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows." Discipleship is to care for the widow and orphan as God does, it is to love as God loves, to do justice as God does justice, to love mercy as God loves mercy. It is to live the way of the Gospel, the way of Jesus, the way of the Word of God. Discipleship is the life of God living in and through our lives.

WORSHIP AID – ‘BUT BE DOERS OF THE WORD AND NOT MERELY HEARERS’

RESPONSIVE READING

Let us recognize the many people whose work is a blessing, and call those who are in leadership positions to act with justice.

God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray for construction workers who build our homes and places of work and worship.

God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray for injured workers who are too often neglected.

God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray for farm workers and poultry workers who help provide us with our food but who often work in dangerous conditions and struggle to provide food for their own families.

God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray that our legislators and elected officials act on the cries for justice in our community.

God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray that all owners and managers recognize the dignity of workers and uphold the standards of our faith traditions by providing living wages, affordable benefits and the freedom of association.

God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

God of Exodus, you went to your people in Egypt, saw their pain and set them free—free from the bondage of their oppressor. You walked with them to freedom. Walk with all of us who struggle for dignity in the workplace, for a living wage and for fair benefits. Bless all of us as we continue working to bring forth your vision—a vision of justice and peace, kindness and compassion, grace and mercy.

Amen.

(from Interfaith Worker Justice, “Workers Memorial Day,” www.nicwj.org/materials/materials.WMD.html)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving God, you bless us with abundance and prosperity for which we are truly grateful. With humility and respect, we acknowledge the people who work night and day so that we will have food on our tables, clothes on our bodies, care when we are sick, and many other services we may not even be aware of that make our lives better, easier and more comfortable.

God of Justice, we pray for the workers in the fields, in the factories, in the hospitals, hotels and office buildings. May their work be safe from danger and fear. May their labors sustain them and their families with equity and dignity.

God of forgiveness, we repent for our ignorance, our apathy and our greed that makes us blind to the plight of so many of our brothers and sisters. Make us aware of the struggles of workers who labor in unsafe conditions, for too little money, for too many hours.

Eternal God, give us the strength and passion to create a world in which there is no exploitation. Instill in us a burning, righteous indignation at the unjust treatment and suffering of working people. Free us so that we might dedicate our hearts and lives to a vision of life with security, dignity and sustainability for all people.

Amen.

(from Interfaith Worker Justice, “Labor in the Pulpits 2000,” www.nicwj.org/pages/materials.LIP2000txt.html)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| ✓ God, That Madest Earth and Heaven | UMH 688 |
| ✓ All Who Love and Serve Your City | UMH 433/TH 570/PH 413/
CH 670/MW 697 |
| ✓ O Grant Us, God, a Little Space | NCH 516 |
| ✓ Moved by the Gospel, Let Us Move | GA 685 |

w Hymnal Legend w

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| † UMH – United Methodist Hymnal |
| † PH – Presbyterian Hymnal |
| † TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal) |
| † GA – Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic) |
| † MW – Moravian Book of Worship |
| † CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ) |
| † NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC) |

ADDITIONAL PRAYER

Labor Day Prayer

We gather this Labor Day weekend to celebrate the work that people do and the gift of work that God has given us.

We give thanks for our jobs and the opportunity to work.

We know that to work can be an opportunity to do God's will.

We pray that those of us with jobs will discern God's will in our workplaces.

We pray for those without jobs. This Labor Day weekend there are over...

Eight million Americans who are officially unemployed.

And we know that millions more are not included in the official rolls of the unemployed, because they have become discouraged and stopped looking for work, or they accepted part-time work instead of desired full-time work.

Creator God, give special encouragement and blessings to those looking for work.

We lift up all employers...

That they may be just and fair with all their employees.

We know that God's word is clear on treatment of workers.

Deuteronomy 24:9 says, "Never take advantage of poor laborers, whether fellow Israelites or foreigners living in your towns. Pay them their wages each day before sunset because they are poor and are counting on it.

Otherwise they might cry out to the Lord against you, and it would be counted against you as sin."

We ask God's special protection on those who toil in sweatshops.

We know that God hears the cries of the poor.

Touch the hearts of those who...

"Trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed" (Amos 2:7).

We know that God has concern for the poor in society. Proverbs says that if a leader "judges the poor with fairness," the leader's position will be secure (29:14). But the leader who "oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops" (28:3).

Help our leaders judge and treat the poor with fairness.

Help us become a society that cares for the poor, a society that cares for sweatshop workers, a society that cares for immigrants. We serve a God who is "mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes." Our God "defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:17-19).

All: We pledge to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8-9).

Amen.

(from the Interfaith Worker Justice, "Labor in the Pulpits 2004," www.nicwj.org/materials/LIP2004.html)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

• QUOTES •

Labor was the first price, the original purchase - money that was paid for all things. It was not by gold or by silver, but by labor, that all wealth of the world was originally purchased.

Adam Smith

The strongest bond of human sympathy outside the family relation should be one uniting working people of all nations and tongues and kindreds.

Abraham Lincoln

If capitalism is fair then unionism must be. If men have a right to capitalize their ideas and the resources of their country, then that implies the right of men to capitalize their labor.

Frank Lloyd Wright

The labor movement means just this: It is the last noble protest of the American people against the power of incorporated wealth.

Wendell Phillips

SMITHFIELD PACKING, INTIMIDATION, AND THE COMPANY POLICE

(from the NC Council of Churches' Economic Justice Committee)

Smithfield Packing is the world's largest producer of pork, and its factory in Tar Heel, North Carolina is the world's largest hog slaughter and pork processing plant. The Tar Heel facility, located in one of the most economically depressed regions of North Carolina, employs approximately 5,500 workers and slaughters more than 34,000 hogs a day, 2,000 an hour, 33 a minute in their factory off Highway 87 in Bladen County.

Approximately 55% of the workers at Smithfield are Latino, 30-35% are African American, and the rest of the workers are White and Lumbee. All are hardworking people seeking to bring themselves, and their families, out of the grinding poverty that pervades the surrounding area. People work at Smithfield because its starting pay rate of just over \$8 an hour is higher than the \$5 and \$6 an hour jobs that are available elsewhere—when other jobs are available at all. Yet those wages and many other protections and benefits are paltry in comparison to those realized by workers doing the same jobs at unionized Smithfield plants elsewhere in the country and throughout the world. In fact, 19 of those factories in the United States employ workers who are members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) International Union.

It's no surprise that Smithfield workers in North Carolina have been fighting to form a union for more than ten years. In a state with the nation's next-to-lowest union density, it is also no surprise that the company has suppressed workers' efforts; but the extreme nature of the company's tactics is shocking: threats of retaliation for workers who support the union, harassment and intimidation of union supporters, spying on union activists, threatening cuts in wages and benefits should a union be elected in the plant, firing union activists for their pro-union advocacy, and physically assaulting workers who stand up for their rights on the job—all clear violations of the National Labor Relations Act.¹ Perhaps the most glaring illustration of Smithfield's labor relations strategy is the past presence of their own private police force of just over a dozen armed officers (with company-issued bullets and guns and concealed weapons able to be carried on and off duty) with arrest power and a detention cell at the plant. This was the only such force at a meatpacking plant in the United States. In late 2005, the company failed to recertify its private police force with the state. It is now a security force made up of the same individuals.²

In 1997, a union representation election campaign was held among the workers at Smithfield. In response, the Smithfield police and company-employed security persons launched an operation to intimidate, assault, and arrest union-supporting employees. According to one union organizer, the police and security force "turned up in force" when union advocates distributed flyers to workers arriving for work. Another Mexican worker stated that "it was hard seeing police cars lined up there every day when we went into the plant...it scared a lot of people against the union, especially the Mexican workers."³

Since its formation, the Smithfield Company Police—now security force—have arrested nearly ninety people. In November 2003, workers at QSI Inc., a subcontractor that does sanitation in the plant, walked off their jobs in an attempt to improve working conditions. In the same time period, Smithfield workers also went on strike in reaction to the firings of the workers' Hispanic "supervisors." According to Roberto Guerrero, a worker from California present at the strike, "One manager threatened to call immigration if we didn't go back right away. When some of us didn't go back, the police told us to leave. I said my keys were in my locker, [and] I had to go in and get them. The first policeman said OK, but then his boss said no, and he arrested me. He took me to the jail and wrote up papers for about an hour, then let me go."⁴ These acts of intimidation, threats, and violence are compromising the civil rights of 5,500 hardworking North Carolinians, and effectively denying them the ability to exercise rights guaranteed to them as workers in the United States.

The United Food and Commercial Workers has launched a campaign to urge Smithfield to obey the law and respect the human and civil rights of NC workers. Religious, community and union leaders are participating in a nationwide, community-based campaign to win justice for workers at Smithfield Packing.

1. See Smithfield Packing Co., 344 NLRB No. 1 (2004), for a lengthy and detailed list of violations: www.nlrb.gov/nlrb/shared_files/decisions/344/344-1.htm.

2. This private security force provides much the same level of fear and intimidation. Like the private police force in place before, the security force is able to arrest individuals; however, unlike the former police force, they are unable to book and fingerprint those arrested without calling for assistance from Bladen County deputies.

3. Human Rights Watch report, "Blood, Sweat, and Fear: Workers' Rights in U.S. Meat and Poultry Plants," 95. This entire paragraph is adapted from this report.

4. Ibid, 97.

• CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES •

- W www.nccouncilofchurches.org/resources/policystatements/organized-labor-statement.html - North Carolina Council of Churches policy statement concerning organized labor.
- W www.ufcw.org/issues_and_actions/justice_at_smithfield/index.cfm—United Food and Commercial Workers' "Justice at Smithfield" website.
- W www.nicwj.org – Interfaith Worker Justice, an organization that calls upon our religious values in order to educate, organize, and mobilize the religious community in the U.S. on issues and campaigns that will improve wages, benefits, and working conditions for workers, especially low-wage workers. Website contains excellent worship resources for churches and other worship gatherings, as well as pertinent information concerning worker justice.
- W www.aflcinc.org – North Carolina State AFL-CIO, a federation of more than 260 local unions of all sizes from across North Carolina. Chartered in 1957, the North Carolina State AFL-CIO is a democratic organization with two full-time elected executive officers and an elected executive board of twenty-four vice-presidents.
- W www.stitchonline.org – STITCH: Organizers for Labor Justice, a network of women unionists, organizers, and activists that builds connections between Central American and US women organizing for economic justice.
- W www.unitehere.org – UNITE (Union of Needletrades, Textiles, and Industrial Employees) and HERE (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union) website, which states that UNITE HERE boasts a diverse membership, comprised largely of immigrants and including high percentages of African-American, Latino, and Asian-American workers. The majority of UNITE HERE members are women.
- W www.floc.com – Farm Labor Organizing Committee, a farm worker union which successfully negotiated an historic three-way contract between workers, the North Carolina Grower's Association, and Mt. Olive Pickle Company in 2004, ending a five-year boycott of Mt. Olive Pickles. The contract resulted in more than 8,000 H2A (temporary) farm workers in North Carolina becoming the first such guest workers in the U.S. to win union representation and provided for improved wages, safety protections, and grievance procedures.

KEY FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

- q North Carolina is the least unionized state in the country. Most religious denominations have statements supporting the right for workers to organize and bargain collectively for fair wages and working conditions.¹
- q National unionization rates have fallen from about 35 percent in the 1950's to 14 percent of the workforce today. Problems of globalization, the transformation of the economy, government policies that are hostile toward unions, and corporate dominance threaten the future of American unions.²
- q The percentage of workers in North Carolina who were members of a union in 2004 was 2.7% - the lowest of all states in the union. The percentage of workers represented by a union in 2004 was 3.6% - also the lowest in the continental United States.³
- q The basic differences between being a union member and being represented by a union have to do with the amount of money you pay to the union each month and whether or not you have a voice in union decisions, like accepting/rejecting contract proposals. Union members pay dues to the union each month and vote in union decisions (elect union officials, vote on wage proposals and other contract terms, etc). Employees who are represented by a union but are not dues-paying members pay a monthly fee to the union for representing them - called "agency fee" - and cannot vote in union decisions unless the union chooses to include non-members in the process.⁴
- q Public employees in North Carolina do not have the same legal right to bargain collectively as do unionized workers in the private sector. NC General Statute 95-98 (1959) prohibits public employees from bargaining collectively for enforceable agreements that govern the conditions of their employment.⁵
- q While denying that they violate the law protecting the right to organize, some companies routinely discourage union organizing through a variety of subtle or blatant means.
- q Median weekly wages for African American workers in unions are 29 percent higher than for nonunion African Americans; for Latinos, the difference is 59 percent; and for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, it is 11 percent.⁶

CHRISTIANITY AND ORGANIZED LABOR⁷

Scripture shows us that Jesus aligned with the least, the last. He held the privileged to account for how they treated the poor. James reflected this Jesus ethic when he warned profiteers how God hears how they do harm. "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (James 5:4). As he entered public life, Jesus chose in his debut message to recall the Torah's jubilee ethic of fair distribution of wealth. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release of the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). Who are the oppressed in today's workplace? Who are the working poor who deserve good news? Who are the ones enriched by the work of others, the blind ones who need recovery of sight to see the damage done by allegiance to greed over dignity for the working man? Standing on scripture, Christian denominations as a whole have joined with the call of unionists for justice.

The Council's 1980 policy statement on organized labor provides excerpts from several Christian denominations' proclamations in support of workers' rights to form labor unions and bargain collectively with management. These positions remain constant. A flyer called "What Faith Groups Say About the Right to Organize" gives current labor statements from a range of religious faiths and denominations. An excerpt below exemplifies the position of many Council member bodies:

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME)

"Free collective bargaining has proved its values in our free society whenever the parties engaged in collective bargaining have acted in good faith to reach equitable and moral solutions of problems dealing with wages and working conditions. We do not support the opinion voiced in some quarrels that strikes should be made illegal. To declare strikes illegal would be to deprive workers of their right to collective action and, even more seriously, would place in the hands of government the power to force workers to remain on the job" (Discipline of the CME Church, 1982).

Similar statements abound in the Roman Catholic body of social teaching. American Baptists, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church are among other Christian denominations that urge members to learn more about labor unions and support workers' rights to organize and bargain with management. Most of these denominations have educational materials to help members of congregations understand how scripture calls us to support dignity for all working people. Faith groups other than Christians also stand with organized labor; the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, The Central Conference of American Rabbis, and Muslims are among others that hold positions in favor of unions and worker rights.

The National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice serves as a clearinghouse for information, resources, and liturgical materials that help religious communities become more knowledgeable about worker concerns and to engage in pro-labor action.

The call is clear. The need is here. At this time, the Council again speaks out for labor in North Carolina.

1. Interfaith Worker Justice, www.nicwj.org.

2. "Resolution in Support of Organized Labor in North Carolina," North Carolina Council of Churches adopted March 2, 2002; citing the Daily Bruin Online, www.dailybruin.ucla.edu.

3. The Labor Research Association, www.lraonline.org.

4. University of California-Santa Cruz, [/www.ucsc.edu/staff/upte_election_04/faq-unionrep.html](http://www.ucsc.edu/staff/upte_election_04/faq-unionrep.html).

5. "Resolution in Support of Organized Labor in North Carolina," op. cit.; also the source of the following fact.

6. AFL-CIO's "Facts and Stats," found at www.aflcio.org/issues/factsstats.

7. Text from the NC Council of Churches' "Resolution in Support of Organized Labor in North Carolina," adopted March 2, 2002; found at www.nccouncilofchurches.org/resources/policystatements/organized-labor-statement.html.