

CST 101 DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

A discussion guide from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services

OPENING PRAYER: Together, pray, “Prayer for Work.”

WATCH: “CST 101: Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers” on YouTube.

PRAY WITH SCRIPTURE:

Read this Scripture passage twice.

Invite participants to reflect silently after it is read the first time.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. Going out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.’ So they went off. [And] he went out again around noon, and around three o’clock, and did likewise. Going out about five o’clock, he found others standing around, and said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They answered, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard.’ When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.’ When those who had started about five o’clock came, each received the usual daily wage. So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage. And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us,

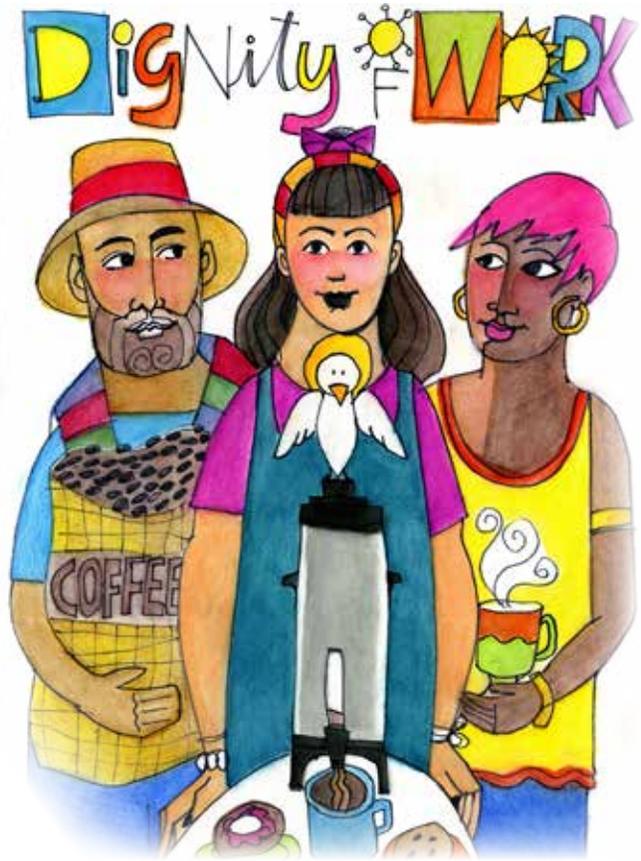


Photo courtesy of Brother Mickey McGrath, OSFS

who bore the day's burden and the heat.' He said to one of them in reply, 'My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you?' (*Matthew 20:1-14*)

SHARE:

- How can this passage help us reflect on the relationship between work, sufficient wages and human dignity?
- Why does every person have a right to decent work?

REFLECT ON TRADITION:

Read these passages aloud.

"The obligation to earn one's bread by the sweat of one's brow also presumes the right to do so. A society in which this right is systematically denied, in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment, cannot be justified from an ethical point of view, nor can that society attain social peace."

—St. John Paul II, *The Hundredth Year* (*Centesimus Annus*), no. 43

"In many cases, poverty results from a violation of the dignity of human work, either because work opportunities are limited (through unemployment or underemployment), or 'because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.'"

—Pope Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth* (*Caritas in Veritate*), no. 63,
quoting St. John Paul II, *On Human Work* (*Laborem Exercens*), no. 8

DISCUSS:

- Where are the dignity of work or the rights of workers violated or protected —both in your own community and around the world?
- How can our purchasing choices impact whether others' rights are violated or protected?

ACT:

Read about one parish's efforts to educate others about how purchasing fair trade products can help vulnerable persons around the world. How can you act in solidarity with workers in your community, or around the world, whose rights are violated?

SEND:

Just God, help us use our power as consumers and voters to ensure that the dignity of workers is respected. May we urge business owners and policymakers to place the dignity of the human person at the center of economic decisions.
Amen

Visit crs.org/CST-101 or usccb.org/cst for all CST 101 resources, including the prayers, stories and videos linked to in these discussion guides.



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