

# Labor Day Statement 2023

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## Radical Solidarity with Working Families

On this Labor Day, we hear a passage from the Gospel of Luke: Jesus reading Isaiah in the synagogue.

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor...”*

This is how Jesus chooses to announce himself as he embarks on his public ministry. Bringing glad tidings to the poor is a distinguishing mark that the good news is truly good. Jesus concludes, “Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” What do we hear about bringing glad tidings to the poor today?

There are signs of improvement and concern regarding the economy. Inflation is slowing as price increases return to near-normal levels.<sup>1</sup> For several months, workers’ wages have risen faster than inflation,<sup>2</sup> which will ease some of the burden of enduring high prices. The labor market remains strong with unemployment low and new jobs being added.<sup>3</sup>

However, despite some of these indications, a report from the Federal Reserve on economic well-being found that more families feel like they are worse off today than the year before.<sup>4</sup> Inflation has forced families to spend more and save less.<sup>5</sup> The percentage of Americans who cannot afford an unexpected \$400 expense has increased to 37%.<sup>6</sup> While price increases are not as steep as they once were, grocery prices have still risen nearly 5% over the last year.<sup>7</sup> Three out of ten mothers report that there have been

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Consumer Price Index - July 2023," August 10, 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cpi.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Real Earnings - July 2023," August 10, 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/realer.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "The Employment Situation - July 2023," August 4, 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empisit.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, *Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2022*, May 2023, <https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/files/2022-report-economic-well-being-us-households-202305.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Aditya Aladangady et al., "FEDS Notes: Excess Savings During the COVID-19 Pandemic," Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, October 21, 2022, <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/excess-savings-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-20221021.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, *Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2022*.

<sup>7</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Consumer Price Index - July 2023."

times in the past year when they could not buy food.<sup>8</sup> Millions have been priced out of homeownership while rental housing becomes even less affordable.<sup>9</sup> Healthcare is yet another expense that is becoming out of reach for too many. Roughly one out of two adults have difficulty affording medical care, causing many to delay or forgo care.<sup>10</sup>

We are called to join Jesus in his ministry to bring glad tidings to the poor. We must do more to support families. It has been almost one year since my predecessor and fellow bishop chairmen wrote to Congress in the wake of the Supreme Court’s decision in the *Dobbs* case, [calling for radical solidarity](#) with mothers, children, and families, sharing the bishops’ vision for an authentically life-affirming society that truly prioritizes the well-being of families and generously welcomes new life. They highlighted the USCCB’s long history of support for nutrition programs, affordable housing, access to healthcare, safety net programs, and justice for workers – including things like just wages, support for organized labor, and safe working conditions regardless of immigration status – and called for policy solutions to support all children and families.

The purpose of the economy is to enable families to thrive. This notion is deeply rooted in Catholic social teaching. The Church teaches that “it is necessary that businesses, professional organizations, labor unions and the State promote policies that, from an employment point of view, do not penalize but rather support the family nucleus.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the Second Vatican Council concluded that “[t]he entire process of productive work... must be adapted to the needs of the person and to his way of life, above all to his domestic life, especially in respect to mothers of families....”<sup>12</sup> Are we meeting these standards? There is much more we can do.

Congress enacted important laws at the end of last year that the U.S. bishops had supported including the [PUMP Act](#) and a permanent option for states to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage for one year after birth. While these are promising steps, there remains much to be done to advance policies that help women, families, and children. The USCCB continues to urge bipartisan solutions on these issues.

- Congress should [strengthen the Child Tax Credit](#). The credit is a powerful pro-family and anti-poverty program, yet it currently excludes too many children in need. Congress can better support families by structuring the credit so that it is fully refundable in order to have the biggest impact on the lowest-income families. It is also vital that the credit continue to serve all families with U.S. citizen children regardless of their parents’ immigration status, be made available for the year before birth, not undermine the building of families, and not be paid for by cutting programs that serve those most in need.

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<sup>8</sup> Dana Braga, “One-in-Four U.S. Parents Say They’ve Struggled to Afford Food or Housing in the Past Year,” Pew Research Center, December 7, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/12/07/one-in-four-u-s-parents-say-theyve-struggled-to-afford-food-or-housing-in-the-past-year/>.

<sup>9</sup> Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, “The State of the Nation’s Housing 2023,” June 21, 2023, [https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/reports/files/Harvard\\_JCHS\\_The\\_State\\_of\\_the\\_Nations\\_Housing\\_2023.pdf](https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/reports/files/Harvard_JCHS_The_State_of_the_Nations_Housing_2023.pdf), 25, 36.

<sup>10</sup> Audrey Kearney and Alex Montero, “Americans’ Challenges with Health Care Costs,” KFF, July 14, 2022, <https://www.kff.org/health-costs/issue-brief/americans-challenges-with-health-care-costs/>.

<sup>11</sup> Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004, no. 294 (Quoting *Laborem Exercens*, no. 10; *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 23).

<sup>12</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), 1965, no. 67.

- There should be national support for paid family leave. The policy should be crafted in a way that does not unduly burden lower-income organizations or individuals, does not penalize larger families, and will not destabilize existing social service programs. The United States is one of only a handful of countries that does not guarantee paid family leave.<sup>13</sup> It is pro-life to support families as they welcome new life and care for loved ones.
- There needs to be better access to affordable, quality child care and pre-kindergarten, which also ensures just wages for child care workers and teachers. In addition, families that choose to care for children at home should be supported. Faith-based child care and early education programs have served families for decades and should be included as part of the solution, in a manner consistent with their freedom to retain their religious character. Child care is one of the biggest expenses in many families' budgets,<sup>14</sup> and it is causing many families to have fewer children than they would like.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the child care sector itself is plagued with low wages for workers, making it difficult for them to meet the needs of their own families.<sup>16</sup> Working families need a solution to this child care crisis.

It is good that bipartisan discussions are happening right now around all of these issues. Congress should take prompt action in all of these areas to protect the well-being of mothers, children, and their families.

Public policy changes are not the only way we can help families thrive. Communities can organize to call attention to the problems facing families and to bring about solutions. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) supports this work and is a great help to families that are struggling. Recently celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the CCHD was established by the bishops to empower people experiencing poverty to take action to help themselves. For example, with the support of CCHD, [Washington Home Care Cooperatives](#) in western Washington state provides good-paying jobs through worker-owned businesses to those who deliver in-home care to elders and people with disabilities. The [Mountain Voices Project IAF](#) in Colorado has helped secure child care for low-income families who commute many miles to work in expensive resort towns. [Powerful Moms Who Care](#), made up of low-income women living in Salt Lake City, are working with their community and local government to secure more affordable housing for families and are exploring ways to address their child care needs. These examples of local communities organizing to create positive change in the lives of families remind us of the power we have when we come together to address the challenges that prevent families from flourishing.

Finally, the essential role labor unions can and often do play in society must be acknowledged and affirmed. As Pope Francis stated when meeting delegates from Italian trade unions, "... one of the tasks

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<sup>13</sup> WORLD Policy Analysis Center, "Is Paid Leave Available to Mothers of Infants, Including Maternity and Parental?," January 2022, <https://www.worldpolicycenter.org/policies/is-paid-leave-available-to-mothers-of-infants-including-maternity-and-parental>.

<sup>14</sup> Economic Policy Institute, "Child Care Is One of the Biggest Expenses Families Face," October 2020, <https://www.epi.org/child-care-is-one-of-the-biggest-expenses-families-face/>; Josh Zumbrun, "Children Can Cost Parents a Fortune or Not so Much," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 26, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/children-can-cost-parents-a-fortune-or-not-so-much-11661506202>.

<sup>15</sup> Claire Cain Miller, "Americans Are Having Fewer Babies. They Told Us Why.," *The New York Times*, July 5, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/05/upshot/americans-are-having-fewer-babies-they-told-us-why.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2022," April 25, 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes399011.htm>.

of the trade union is to educate in the meaning of labor, promoting fraternity between workers... Trade unions... are required to be a voice for the voiceless. You must make a noise to give voice to the voiceless”<sup>17</sup> Unions should continue to be supported in their work that supports healthy, thriving families, especially those who are most in need, and encouraged in maintaining and increasing their focus on performing that critical role. Indeed, as Pope Francis has suggested, “there are no free workers without trade unions.”<sup>18</sup>

Each of us is called to follow the Lord and bring glad tidings to the poor. There is still urgent work needed to exercise radical solidarity with mothers, children, and families. Let us pray and act towards this end, always listening to the Lord who fulfills glad tidings in our hearing his word each day.

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<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to Managers and Delegates of the Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL),” December 19, 2022, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/december/documents/20221219-cgil.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to CGIL.”