

# Labor Day Statement 2024



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## Working for a More Just Economy

*“You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.” -Matthew 20:4*

This Labor Day, let us recommit ourselves to building together a society that honors the human dignity of all who labor. Through the treasure of Catholic social teaching, we have a long history<sup>1</sup> of proclaiming the essential role labor plays in helping people to live out their human dignity.<sup>2</sup>

Our Catholic faith calls us to pray, work, and advocate for protections that allow all laborers to thrive—both those newly arrived in our country and those whose families have been here for generations. We believe in the dignity of work precisely because each of our brothers and sisters is a beloved child of God, made in his own image and likeness, and imbued with inherent dignity. Throughout Scripture, we see time and again how God shows us we must care for those who are vulnerable and honor the sacredness of everyone—no matter his or her circumstances in life. In Matthew’s Gospel,<sup>3</sup> we read the parable of the workers in the vineyard as an example of the Father’s overflowing love for each of his children. In that parable, the master pays all the workers a “just” wage despite working for differing lengths of time. Their remuneration is given simply because he desires that we all have the resources to thrive.<sup>4</sup> Dignified work reflects that our humanity gives us an active role to play in cultivating the world around us. Through work, we exercise dominion over how we provide the material needs for ourselves and our families.<sup>5</sup> God desires for us to do more than simply survive but to thrive.

Yet, in today’s economy, too many people and families are living in poverty due to jobs with low pay that often provide little or no benefits, erratic work schedules, and offer insufficient protections. At the same time, union representation has diminished, especially in the private

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<sup>1</sup> United States Catholic Conference (now United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), *Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops The Summary Report of the Task Force on Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Education*, June 19, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 20: 1-16.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, nos.44-45.

<sup>5</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 25.

sector, leaving workers with less protection and a weakened bargaining position. We know it does not have to be this way.

Many communities and sectors of the economy are grappling with labor shortages due to changing demographics and other factors, with some looking to immigrants to fill the gaps. Pope Benedict XVI pointed out,<sup>6</sup> following his predecessors and consistently confirmed by research, that immigrants boost innovation and overall economic output. In the U.S., immigrants' contributions have a net positive impact on the federal deficit.<sup>7</sup> Despite these economic benefits, the progress we have made as a society toward safer, more just working conditions, and the Church's essential and consistent teaching, we often see immigrant laborers mistreated at a higher rate than their native-born counterparts, including through the evil of human trafficking. Additionally, immigrants face outright hostility and discrimination due in part to misconceptions and harmful political rhetoric dismissive of the human person.

The Church supports both workers and immigrants around the country, especially those who often work in agricultural and other industries without protections because of their immigration status. These workers contribute to the local economy, pay taxes, and own homes. Yet, they are often the victims of wage theft and legitimately fear reprisal if they speak up about missing wages or unjust practices. The Church plays an important role working for change in the face of this injustice. [For example, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development](#) supports organizations like [Escucha Mi Voz](#) (Spanish for "Hear My Voice") which empowers immigrant and refugee communities in Iowa, including helping 25 workers recover their stolen wages in the first part of 2024 alone. This work is powered, in part, by Iowa Catholics working together towards an economy that better supports vulnerable workers.

For decades, the Church has advocated for changes to the immigration system, recognizing that it does not adequately address the needs of American families, employers, communities, or immigrants. These shortcomings, when coupled with the issue of labor shortages, have increased opportunities for the exploitation of immigrants and led some to resort to using children as a supplemental source of labor. We have witnessed concerning affronts to the dignity of children, native-born and immigrant alike, whose innocence has been traded for cheap—and often dangerous – labor.

With the number of child labor law violations having risen dramatically in recent years, several states have also taken steps to further weaken child labor standards, exposing young people to hazardous working conditions and long working hours. The children of families living in poverty stand to suffer the most harm, but the innocence and dignity of all youth must be protected. As we bishops have taught, "Improved child labor law enforcement must be combined with adequate family economic support, so families do not depend on exploitation of children for economic survival."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 62

<sup>7</sup> Congressional Budget Office, "[Effects of the Immigration Surge on the Federal Budget and the Economy](#)," July 23, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> United States Catholic Conference, *Putting Children and Families First*, 1991.

Legal reforms and investments in infrastructure are essential for creating a just immigration system and a thriving economy that together promote the common good. It is possible and necessary to create an immigration system that respects the inviolable dignity of all newcomers.<sup>9</sup> In the absence of a comprehensive reform, however, incremental improvements are still a sign of progress. Only with a commitment to such efforts will our country be able to address its evolving labor needs, while benefiting in a moral and sustainable way from the contributions of immigrant workers.

The Church offers a vision for the future that does not require our society to choose between a thriving economy, economic justice, dignified conditions for all workers, and safeguarding the most vulnerable among us. Catholics have consistently implored civil leaders to recognize and protect the sacredness of the human person. We must reject an economy of exclusion.<sup>10</sup> We can work together with community groups like *Escucha Mi Voz* to organize and seek change. We can advocate for policy improvements, such as the [Farm Workforce Modernization Act](#), and for policies that promote, preserve, and expand protections for all children.<sup>11</sup>

This Labor Day, may we recognize all the laborers in the Lord’s vineyard and embrace them for who they truly are—our brothers and sisters: “So you too should love the resident alien, for that is what you were in the land of Egypt.”<sup>12</sup> Let us strive without ceasing to protect the sacredness of human life and together build a society that respects and uplifts each person’s human dignity.

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<sup>9</sup> Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Migration at the time of writing, “[Migration and the Judgement of Nations](#).”

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 53.

<sup>11</sup> See Bishop Mark J. Sietz, chairman USCCB Committee on Migration, “[Letter to Congress on Safeguarding Unaccompanied Children](#),” November 9, 2023; USCCB chairmen, “[Letter to Congress Regarding Policies to Support Women and Families](#),” October 26, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 10:19.