

**Selected Social Witness Policies on Work as Vocation, Unions and Collective Bargaining
From the Presbyterian Social Policy Compilation**

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ACSWP Introduction

Employment, unemployment, labor relations, and the meaning of work are all subjects which have merited the attention of Presbyterian General Assemblies. At the close of World War II, the churches once again became involved with labor related issues, just as they had during the 1930's and earlier, going back to the *1908 Social Creed of the Churches*. The 1932 *Social Creed* expansion was particularly strong. This selection ends with excerpts from the 2008 *Social Creed*.

In 1952, the PCUSA Assembly urged a ". . . greater emphasis upon *free collective bargaining* in labor-management relations," and that Presbyterians ". . . participate more actively in management organizations and labor unions as an expression of Christian vocation. . ." (PCUSA, 1952, p. 204). The first statement of the PCUS on work in the postwar period came in 1953 when its General Assembly directed that ". . . churches undertake the responsibility of impressing men, women and young people of the value and significance of daily work as Christian vocation . . ." (PCUS, 1953, p. 92). Meanwhile, the PCUSA Assembly urged that ". . . every church seek an effective ministry to bring together in Christian fellowship men and women from all occupations and walks of life, since we recognize that our churches all too often fail to minister across economic lines to all groups in their communities . . ." (PCUSA, 1953, p. 185).

The 1960's were a time during which the Assemblies spoke of work as a vocation (PCUS, 1962, p. 150), and in terms of society's ethical obligation to provide useful work for its members (UPCUSA, 1964, p. 303; UPCUSA, 1968, p. 387). The emphasis on the right to meaningful human labor led the 1971 UPCUSA Assembly to support minimum wage laws based on income adequacy and the 1972 and 1977 UPCUSA Assemblies to call on the government to act "as employer of last resort" (UPCUSA, 1971, p. 653; UPCUSA, 1972, p. 483; UPCUSA, 1977, p. 232). In 1976 the UPCUSA Assembly proposed very specific measures to promote full employment (UPCUSA, 1976, p. 503) and reaffirmed the right of all legal residents to employment (UPCUSA, 1976, p. 154).

In 1980, the Assemblies again examined work, as an issue. The 192nd General Assembly of the UPCUSA adopted the resolution on "Ministries of Restoration." The resolution urged ". . . presbyteries to assist congregations . . . in facilitating the formation of projects to create work in their communities; and . . . further urges [them] to explore local tax laws, labor laws, zoning regulation . . . seeking changes to facilitate the ability to create new work to the maximum extent possible . . ." (UPCUSA, 1980, p. 218)

1959 Statement – PCUS, p. 160

. . . the Church must seek to hold open the lines of communication for Christian action in the areas of tension between labor and management. Of course the Church has no special competence in matters of wages, hours, pensions, quality of work and, therefore, puts aside attitudes of arrogance and censure. At the same time, however, the Church does know something of the will of God as it concerns human nature and human relationships.

The means for such relationships could manifest themselves in many ways, but in every case should speak to labor that a job is a vocational trust from God, and in the same manner should speak to management that the manipulation of men [and women] and materials for economic gain is a trust from God, a stewardship of God's possessions and people. Labor, as a militant force, should be reminded that its purpose is to rectify inequality and unfairness to people -- not to destroy industry by condoning less for more. Management, as a governing force, should be called upon to manage fairly for all concerned, to stockholders, customers and employees alike, and not to be a force only for the few.

1959 Statement – UPCUSA, p. 383. [The General Assembly]:

Expresses its confidence in collective bargaining as the most responsible and democratic way of resolving issues in labor-management relations,

Believes that union membership as a basis of continued employment should be neither required by law nor forbidden by law,

Urges that the question of a union shop or other maintenance of membership arrangements should be settled by collective bargaining which meets the basic requirements for responsible and democratic negotiation,

Condemns unequivocally violence and threats of violence in labor disputes,

Urges federal legislation to insure the honest use of union funds and to guarantee the right of appeal and the right of secret ballot,

Calls upon individual Presbyterian union members to take a responsible part in the activities of their unions.

1968 Statement – UPCUSA, p. 386. The 180th General Assembly (1968):

Calls upon appropriate structures of government at all levels to institute immediately programs to offer the opportunity for socially useful work to all persons so that government can be the employer of last resort; and calls upon the Congress of the United States to approve the legislation and continuing appropriations necessary for federal, state, and local agencies effectively to plan and operate such programs.

1971 Statement – UPCUSA, p. 653. The 183rd General Assembly (1971):

1. Reaffirms the biblical doctrine of the dignity, beauty and worth of human work and creativity, even in its most mundane form, recognizing that meaningful labor is man's honor and duty as a response to God's grace.
2. Affirms that every employable person should have access to a job at adequate wages. Minimum wage levels should be established in all areas based on Bureau of Labor Statistics' definitions of what is adequate.

3. Urges that racial, religious, age, and sex barriers to employment, including those barriers imposed by labor unions, be removed.
4. Recommends strongly that retraining and relocation programs be instituted for those persons whose jobs are eliminated.
5. Requests vocational and professional training and rehabilitation for those whose capacities to work and produce have been destroyed, are non-existent or are insufficient for their basic needs.

1976 Statement – UPCUSA, p. 503

[We] recommend policies that would promote full employment, i.e., reduce unemployment below 3 percent, through creation of jobs primarily in the private sector but also by funding public service projects as needed for temporary employment. Private employment opportunities as well as public service jobs should be designed to respond to national priorities in the elimination of poverty, adequate national health care, decent housing, expansion of mass transit, and the conservation of resources. Full employment would, in combination with other measures, positively affect the cycle of stagflation -- falling demand and rising prices -- as well as the spiraling federal deficit which is so aggravated by unemployment.

1977 Statement – UPCUSA, p. 126. The 189th General Assembly (1977):

1. Reaffirms the actions of previous General Assemblies supporting the right of every employable person to a job, decent and safe working conditions and a salary adequate to meet at least his or her basic needs.
2. Affirms the need for a national commitment to guarantee a job or job training for each person willing and able to work.
4. Affirms that for long-range answers to unemployment an expansion of job opportunities must take place in the private sector, but that the creation of a large number of jobs in a relatively short period of time requires direct employment-creating programs sponsored or subsidized by federal, state and local government.
9. Requests the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to communicate in writing to the President of the United States and to the Secretary of the Department of Labor the content of this resolution, particularly urging that youth employment programs be targeted to help those families hardest hit by unemployment.

1980 Statement – PCUS, p. 229

Labor Relations
Theological Affirmations from Biblical Perspectives

The Presbyterian Church in the United States holds as a fundamental conviction that all of life is under the lordship of Christ. Reformed theology has consistently turned to the doctrines of creation, providence, and redemption in affirming the sovereign care of God for the whole of the created order. The clear responsibility of Christian persons to try to act out the redemptive love of Jesus in the world -

- a compelling claim of the gospel -- must apply to labor-management relations as to any other social or personal relationship....

The Presbyterian Church, U.S., which is disproportionately represented in its membership by managers and professionals will need to engage in a conscious effort to view labor-management issues from the perspective of the unskilled, uneducated, and underpaid . . . The style of servanthood means that economic activity needs to be viewed as serving the needs of the world. Decisions should not be based solely on the self-interest of corporations, workers or social interest groups. Servanthood also means that a stronger emphasis needs to be placed on a mutual sharing of burdens instead of the shifting of risks to other people, groups, or societies in a time of growing economic uncertainty.

(5) In view of our theological understanding of grace beyond justice we affirm the need for new approaches to labor-management relations. The point of the Parable of the Laborers and the Vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16) is that while all workers receive a just wage, God's grace reaches beyond the demands of justice. The Church affirms the rights of labor organization and collective bargaining as minimum demands of justice but also points beyond the current adversary system in urging exploration of new methods of labor-management relations, seeking arrangements which offer opportunities for workers through their efforts and productivity to share greater economic rewards.

1982 Statement – UPCUSA, p. 290. The 194th General Assembly (1982):

1. Calls upon Congress to reject legislation that will require the use of cost-benefit analysis as a primary criterion for deciding whether occupational safety and health regulations should be promulgated and enforced; and
2. Urges Congress to increase its support for the Mining Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), so that they may go on to set standards for the multitude of toxic substances that now appear in work places and for which there are no current exposure standards.

ACSWP Commentary

The 207th General Assembly (1995) adopted the paper, God's Work in our Hands, Employment, Community and Christian Vocation, as policy for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The heart of the policy statement is its "Principles of Vocation and Work", through which theology is brought to life in concrete ways. These principles have evolved from the statements of previous General Assemblies, from current theological reflection by the wider church in light of contemporary economic realities, and from the theological perspectives of this paper. It is the expectation that individuals and governing bodies will use the "Principles of Vocation and Work" for guidance.

1995 Statement – PC(USA), pp. 426-427.

PRINCIPLES OF VOCATION AND WORK

1. Vocation is a lifelong response to God in all aspects of one's life. Work, paid and unpaid, is an integral part of the believer's response to God's call. One's vocation may include multiple careers,

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volunteer opportunities, and should involve continual spiritual growth in every step of the life-journey to which God calls us.

2. The social policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should seek to change work from a burden to a glad and collaborative response to Jesus' transformative life and work of redemption. Such good work contributes to the creation as well as to the economy, by providing not only the means for subsistence, but also a way to honor human dignity and participate in community life.
3. The church must seek to become a model employer by providing workers with adequate compensation, meaningful opportunities for participation in decision making, leisure time in which to participate in family and community life, and by developing a ". . . reasonable relationship between the highest and the lowest salaries paid to all church employees."
4. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should provide educational materials so that its members can become informed voters and advocates for economic policies that will serve to alleviate poverty, empower marginalized groups, and generate environmentally sustainable economic growth around the world.
5. All sectors of society---including labor, management, and government---must be engaged in the task of economic renewal of our life together. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should play a significant role as a catalyst for conversation among these sectors.
6. The social safety net that supports individuals, families, and communities suffering from economic dislocation must link both private voluntary agencies and the public sector. The church alone cannot provide an adequate safety net.
7. The foundation upon which all just employment policies are built is access to employment at a level of compensation that allows people to live in dignity and security. In a market economy, the private sector provides the majority of jobs, supported by local, state, and federal government policies designed to ensure that there is sufficient employment for all willing and able to be in paid employment. The cost of such policies must always be weighed against the cost to society of allowing high levels of unemployment or underemployment.
8. Inequalities in compensation and working conditions demand the strictest scrutiny. As our workforce becomes increasingly diverse, these concerns become even more urgent. Employment for persons who have suffered the injustices of prejudice and bias is the object of laws requiring affirmative action....
9. All conditions of paid employment, including compensation and working conditions, should sustain and nurture the dignity of individuals, the well-being of households and families, the social cohesiveness of communities, and the integrity of the global environment.
10. *Justice demands that social institutions guarantee all persons the opportunity to participate actively in economic decision making that affects them. All workers---including undocumented, migrant, and farm workers---have the right to choose to organize for the purposes of collective bargaining.*

11. Domestic economic policies should be judged in the light of their effect on the most vulnerable groups of people in the society, including racial ethnic and national minorities, women, older and younger people, and persons with disabilities.

12. International economic policies should be judged in the light of their ability to raise the standard of living of the world's most vulnerable groups, the human rights of workers, as well as of their effects on the global environment.

2008

A Social Creed for the 21st Century (Excerpted)

. . . In faith, responding to our Creator, we celebrate the full humanity of each woman, man, and child, all created in the divine image as individuals of infinite worth, by working for:

- Full civil, political and economic rights for women and men of all races.
- Abolition of forced labor, human trafficking, and the exploitation of children.
- Employment for all, at a family-sustaining living wage, with equal pay for comparable work.
- The rights of workers to organize, and to share in workplace decisions and productivity growth.
- Protection from dangerous working conditions, with time and benefits to enable full family life.

(. . .)

- An effective program of social security during sickness, disability and old age.
- Tax and budget policies that reduce disparities between rich and poor, strengthen democracy, and provide greater opportunity for everyone within the common good.
- Just immigration policies that protect family unity, safeguard workers' rights, require employer accountability, and foster international cooperation.
- Sustainable communities marked by affordable housing, access to good jobs, and public safety.
- Public service as a high vocation, with real limits on the power of private interests in politics.

(. . . .)