

Presbyterian Resources for Worker Justice



As Presbyterians, we believe that work is a godly endeavor and as such, that our own work is to have integrity and contribute to the transformation of society. As part of the scriptural imperative regarding work, we are also directed to ensure that all workers are treated with justice. Through the prism of the Reformed tradition and the writings of John Calvin, these two values come together.

This document highlights those traditions through denominational statements about worker justice; historic and current programs designed to achieve that end; liturgical resources; suggested actions; and perspectives on worker justice and the Presbyterian Church. Our prayer is that these materials serve as a helpful reminder of the Presbyterian commitment to worker justice and inspire continued service in this arena.



John Calvin changed the world's understanding of labor, which saw it as a necessary evil to provide food, clothing and shelter. But Calvin understood work as a calling from God, by which people could help build a better community free of sin and injustice and as a means to glorify God. The only goal in work was to honor God and improve the community's life. Since work was a divine activity in Calvin's eyes, all work should be shrouded in justice, safe working conditions, a living wage, and fair relations between employer and employee. Those who abused, exploited or sought advantage of the other were seen as sinners. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues to support this understanding of work through actions that flow directly from Scripture and the Confessions. The words of Jesus and the prophets are particularly pointed.



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Amos:5:11-12,21-24

Therefore, because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins— you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate... I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Matthew 25:41-46

Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I

was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Book of Confessions, Confession of 1967, 9.46

"... A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs...makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God."

Social Policy Compilation, Economic Justice, Ch. 7

The church has stood in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, called for reform of corporate misdeeds and actions, proposed living wages, supported economic boycotts, demanded safe working conditions, supported fair and equitable policies and practices and ratified the collective bargaining process.



The Problem

Too often we treat work as an imposition or a burden, a necessary evil: what has to be done in order to put food on the table, a roof over our head, and clothes on our body; something we don't want to do but must, accompanied by complaints and resentment.

Sometimes there are good reasons for this attitude. Work can be difficult, maybe even dangerous and bad for our health. Authoritarian bosses. Low pay. Unpleasant and dirty work sites. No one listens to our suggestions. Too many rules and short breaks.

We start seeing “the good life” in terms of leisure time, vacation time—in fact, any time that takes us away from work.

Work as Blessing

But there was a time when work of every kind was seen both as a call from God and divine activity where God's presence was palpable. Thus, the quality of work done was important, because it was God's work, after all. John Calvin introduced this idea five centuries ago. He proclaimed that all people, no matter what their status in life, had what he called an office, a calling from God.

We are made in God's image. It only follows then that the work of our hands and the ideas of our minds should also reflect that image and, in turn, be respected as such. In this understanding of work there is no ranking of types of work and its value is not based on pay scale. A child care worker and a CEO make equally valid contributions and are equally worthy of respectful treatment. A person picking tomatoes in Immokalee, Florida, has as much right to safe work and fair pay as a computer programmer or a high school teacher.

Work as Praise

Not only should work be vocational, utilizing the unique talents and interests that God has given us; our work should somehow enrich the broader community as well. One of life's most elusive yet profound lessons is the direct connection between meaning and service: we find our deepest meaning in service to others. To understand work as an essential part of service excludes the possibility of making extreme profits at the expense of others, the payment of inadequate wages, allowing inhumane and unsafe working conditions, or any other mistreatment of employees.

The Needle's Eye

Calvin also argued that it was acceptable to be rich, as long as these guidelines were followed:

- Wealth is a gift from God to be shared with others. It is not, as some claim, simply the result of our own hard work or good fortune.
- Since all gifts, including wealth, come from God, all are to be used to glorify God and serve those in need. Wealth for the sake of wealth is never acceptable. Rather than being a sign of favor from God, wealth comes with an obligation to care for others.
- Since the purpose of work is to honor God and help others, exploitation of others is forbidden.

The use of oppressive measures, speculation, or harmful activity to increase wealth is a sin in God's eyes. Compassion for others is the bottom line in God's economy, not profit at any cost.

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Labor Statements of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

All workers
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gaining

Employment, unemployment, working conditions and labor relations have all been addressed by a variety of Presbyterian General Assemblies. A few notable examples follow.

...the church must seek to open the lines of communication for Christian action in the areas of tension between labor and management... Management, as a governing force, should be called upon to manage fairly for all concerned...and not to be a force only for the few. **1959**

The General Assembly expresses its confidence in collective bargaining as the most responsible and democratic way of resolving issues in labor-management relations...calls upon individual Presbyterian union members to take a responsible part in the activities of their unions.

1959

Since God has created life and material resources to sustain life, [humanity] does not have the right to deny life by withholding the means of existence to some...justice demands that everyone have the material conditions necessary for their physical and social existence... a guarantee to every American for an income...large enough to provide for basic needs and to sustain every person's participation, with dignity, in society.... **1971**

...we affirm that the Church should espouse for all persons the opportunity and responsibility for productive work ...we affirm for all persons the right to be paid adequately and treated with fairness and dignity... we affirm the right of all workers...to join labor organizations and participate in collective bargaining...we affirm the necessity of the church to view economic issues from the side

of the lowly and oppressed and for Christians active in our economic system to be concerned for serving the needs of the world...

The Presbyterian Church ...will need to engage in a conscious effort to view labor-management issues from the perspective of the unskilled, uneducated and underpaid... The point of the Parable of the Laborers and the Vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16) is that all workers receive a just wage... The Church affirms the rights of labor organizations and collective bargaining as minimum demands of justice...and arrangements which offer opportunities for workers...to share greater economic rewards. **1980**

...employment training [should] be for jobs that will pay a living wage... the focus [should] be on job creation where jobs at a living wage do not exist...continued health benefits for parents and children [should] be made available.... **1987**

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. **1995**

In 1997, the 209th General Assembly of the PC (USA) resolved to:

- Endorse the Day of Conscience and Holiday Season of Conscience as a public witness to the need to eliminate sweat shops and urge members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to support and participate in the events
- Call for the Workplace Code of



Conduct and Principles of Monitoring to include provisions that assure wages above subsistence levels and guarantee independent monitoring of compliance

- Urge the Presbyterian Hunger Program and the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) in collaboration with other offices and networks to give leadership to the education and mobilization effort

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217th General Assembly (2006) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), through the Stated Clerk of the PC (USA), communicate to all members of Congress its desire that legislation to increase the minimum wage be swiftly passed and accurately reflect the increase in the cost of living since the last minimum wage increase in 1997. Additionally, middle governing bodies, local congregations, and individuals are encouraged to support efforts to increase the minimum wage at state and local levels as well.”

Shared Values Bring Faith and Labor Communities Together

In the Presbyterian view, faith informs our understanding of fair labor practices even as labor challenges faith to live out its beliefs. People from labor and faith communities share fundamental values, in large part because the labor movement is rooted in a faith understanding. For example, the labor movement’s successful campaign back in the 1880s for an eight-hour work day was undergirded by faith’s affirmation that all people are children of God. Labor unions, like faith communities, affirm the dignity and worth of all persons. They believe that every human being should have the right to have a say in decisions that impact his or her livelihood, which is the essence of the collective bargain-

ing system. They insist on a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work.

Labor unions and faith communities both believe in the importance of standing with the poor and the oppressed of our society. The sacred texts of every faith demand just treatment of the most vulnerable among us. The majority of people in the labor community are members of faith communities as well, inspired by many of these same texts. Labor union people know that justice demands that the poor be raised up and the oppressed set free. That is why they argue so compellingly for fair wages, safe working conditions, a living wage, and a voice in the workplace.

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Religion & Labor Timeline: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Management,
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1880s Many urban congregations founded and supported neighborhood houses to minister to the needs of rural and immigrant people moving to industrial urban centers for employment.

1903 The Rev. Charles Stelzle was appointed the director of the Presbyterian Church's Workingman's Department, a ministry of the Board of Home Missions. The Department's task was to minister to the working people who were part of that era's industrial transformation. Years later this Department became the Department of Church and Labor.

1910 Stelzle, as part of the work of the Workingman's Department, founded the Labor Temple, in New York City. He took a dying Presbyterian congregation and focused its attention on the needs and wishes of working-class people. It became a large congregation with a wide variety of programs. It became the model for social service congregations open seven days a week instead of just Sunday morning.

1945 From the work of the Labor Temple came the realization that a training center was needed to educate pastors on the culture of industrial society and how to minister to working class people. This clarity created the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR). PIIR became an integral part of the ministry of McCormick Theological Seminary and was directed by the Rev. Marshal Scott.

1950s The 1950s saw a growing interest in international mission work by the Presbyterian Church, which coincided with a burst of industrial economies in Asia. Thus, a number of missionaries were sent to Asia to assist our sister churches in ministering to workers in urban industrial settings. Thus was born the urban industrial mission model.

1966 The urban industrial mission model, pioneered by Presbyterian missionaries, was institutionalized by the World Council of Churches with the establishment of their Urban Industrial Mission Office, staffed by the Rev. George Todd, a Presbyterian pastor.

1968 The Institute of the Church in an Urban Industrial Society (ICUIS), as part of the World Council of Churches' urban industrial ministry, was formed at McCormick Theological Seminary to provide resources and training for pastors interested in urban industrial ministry anywhere around the world. The Rev. Richard Poethig, a former urban industrial missionary in the Philippines, was its director. In 1970, after 25 years of tremendous ministry, PIIR was merged into ICUIS. ICUIS' ministry lasted about 20 years.

2000 McCormick Theological Seminary, the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and the AFL-CIO, building on the vision and foundations of PIIR and ICUIS, founded Seminary Summer. This 10-week summer internship provides opportunities for ministry students to work alongside labor unions and low wage-workers on matters of economic justice.



Presbyterians Face Industrial Change In the 20th Century

Socially conservative in the 19th century, the Presbyterian church found itself challenged in the 20th as it faced the seismic shift taking place in the United States. By the end of the first decade of the new century, it had embraced the Social Gospel movement in a dramatic way. New leadership responded in innovative ways to the dual social forces of massive immigration and rapid industrialization, accelerating the processes through which the church reviewed its mission as a 20th century denomination.

Immigration into Northeastern and Midwestern cities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had a direct impact upon local urban congregations. Congregations centered on serving a largely homogenous ethnic population were suddenly confronted with increasing numbers of new immigrants. Charles Thompson, appointed to head the Board of Home Missions in 1898, represented the new thinking of the church. A successful pastor, who had served urban churches in Cincinnati, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Kansas City, Thompson was called to Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York at a time of crisis. When Thompson arrived in New York, the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church was trying to decide whether or not to leave its present site and move north, away from the incoming immigrants. Thompson convinced the congregation to stay and create a social program meant to meet the needs of newcomers.

Thompson also recognized that institutional change could not be achieved alone. Other congregations in the city were facing similar situations and Thompson saw that there needed to be a way of sharing experience and supporting one an-

other in a common cause within the city. Thus it was that he became a leader in the “Open and Institutional Church” movement which ultimately laid the foundation for the creation of the Federal Council of Churches in 1908.

Upon his call to head the Board of Home Missions in 1898, Thompson began to search for a leader to relate to the growing working class in U.S. cities. He found that leadership in the person of Charles Stelze, whom he appointed to head the newly created Workingman’s Department in 1903. It was the first such program among national church bodies. From a working class background himself, Stelze was cut out for the job. He was raised in the tenements of the lower East Side of New York and carried a union card as a member of the International Association of Machinists (IAM). He proudly said that his only diploma was his certificate of apprenticeship as a machinist.

Stelze felt that among social ministries he created to address the needs of immigrant working people, the best was the Labor Temple, established in 1910 at the former site of a Presbyterian Church at 14th St. and Second Avenue. The Labor Temple, with its multiple programs, served the multi-ethnic population of Stelze’s former East Side neighborhood. For more than 40 years, the Labor Temple enjoyed a global reputation for its ability to reach immigrant working people.

Stelze was only able to serve the Presbyterian Church for 10 years before denominational conservatives forced his resignation, but his influence remained as others continued his ministries. Following WWII, Jacob “Jake” Long, head of the Unit of City and Industrial Work (the

it is time to devise and implement creative responses to the reality of a global economy and its impact on working people everywhere



Promoting social righteousness is one of the Great Ends of the Church. One way to do this is to use consumer power to express disapproval and seek change

1940s inheritor of Stelze's Department of Church and Labor) created a program, the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR), to train pastors and church leadership to address postwar labor-management conflicts.

Housed at the Labor Temple, the PIIR, under the deanship of Marshal L. Scott, established a program that would shape the urban-industrial mission movement for the next generation. Scott brought an appreciation for the technological changes taking place in the U.S. and an understanding of the processes needed to prepare pastors for these changes. Using New York City as his laboratory, Scott began with a two-week seminar for pastors and seminarians on the issues of urban and industrial change. He soon moved to a full-time summer program for seminarians that brought them into direct contact with workers. The first program, held in Pittsburgh in 1950, had 18 seminarians working "incognito" as workers in various steel plants. The program was moved to Chicago in 1952, where it became based at McCormick Seminary.

The "Ministers-in-Industry" summer project impacted seminarians as they chose their calling after

seminary. This was a time of upheaval in inner cities across the nation, as "white flight" left downtown churches in disarray. The PIIR experience helped create a new generation of pastors who chose to minister to these inner-city congregations. Other PIIR alumni chose to develop industrial mission programs with direct engagement in industrial and corporate structures. Others chose an even more direct route by following in the tradition of the "worker priests." Over its 30-year history, more than 3,000 graduates of the PIIR program participated in the transformation of the mission and work of the church to meet the needs of an economy in transition.

Once again we live in a time of economic transition. Previous assumptions about work are no longer valid. While those who are engaged in the struggle for worker justice stand on the shoulders of previous generations, it is time to devise and implement creative responses to the reality of a global economy and its impact on working people everywhere. We can move forward knowing that it is the same God of justice who both accompanies and waits for us.

Advocating for Workers Today: The Campaign for Fair Food



Promoting social righteousness is one of the Great Ends of the Church. One way to do this is to use consumer power to express disapproval and seek change. Through engagement with corporations, public protest, and boycott, lives have been saved, people have been empowered, and social and economic barriers have been challenged in the name of the gospel.

Tomato pickers toil long days for 45 cents per 32-pound bucket of tomatoes, earning about \$10,000 a year according to the U.S. Department of Labor. They have no right to overtime pay, no health insurance, no sick leave, no paid vacation, and no right to organize to improve these conditions. In the most extreme cases, workers have been held against their will and forced to work in modern-day slavery rings. The CIW has

worked with the US Department of Justice and FBI to successfully investigate and prosecute cases of slavery in recent years. Because giant retail food corporations (fast-food and grocery) help to create the conditions in which farmworker poverty and modern-day slavery flourish, it is critical to correct these detrimental business practices. Major corporate buyers have increasingly used their buying power to drive down their costs. In turn, growers have sought to maintain their margins by squeezing their suppliers, and in particular the one supplier with the least power to negotiate its price, labor.

By demanding that fast-food and grocery companies pay a penny-per-pound increase to farmworkers and working with the CIW to establish and enforce rigorous Codes of Conduct, these corporations can counteract the downward pressure on wages and human rights that their purchasing practices exert.

The Work of the Campaign for Fair Food

The Campaign for Fair Food is as an ongoing effort of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in partnership with farmworkers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), to establish purchasing practices within the fast-food and grocery industry that ensure and advance fair wages and other human rights of tomato pickers who labor at the base of these corporate supply chains.

The premises of the Campaign for Fair Food are that:

Retail food corporations have a responsibility to improve the wages of farmworkers because their procurement practices have helped to suppress those wages at a sub-poverty level.

Farmworkers must be full partners

with retail food corporations and the growers that supply them in protecting and advancing their own rights (such as the right to overtime and the right to organize), as a matter of human dignity and effectiveness in changing the conditions in the fields.

Consumers have a responsibility to influence retail food corporations to ensure the human rights and dignity of the men and women harvesting produce through purchasing decisions, shareholder actions and shared public witness.

These premises grow out of the Presbyterian Church's teaching, policy and engaged work on these matters with the CIW, ecumenical and interfaith religious bodies, human rights, student and labor organizations. This partnership work has been formalized through the General Assembly Council's September 2005 vote that the PC (USA) become a founding member of the Alliance for Fair Food, the network of human rights, religious, labor, student, and grassroots organizations that work cooperatively with the CIW to advance farmworkers' human rights by advocating for socially responsible purchasing within the retail food industry. Further, in June of 2006, the 217th General Assembly passed a resolution affirming the church's ongoing work with the CIW and the Campaign for Fair Food in light of the confessional heritage of the PC (USA).

Next Steps: The Subway, Chipotle Mexican Grill, and Whole Foods Campaigns

Now attention is focused on SUBWAY. SUBWAY has ignored letters and other communications from the CIW since 2001, postcards from consumers across the country since 2005, and a letter from the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. So the CIW is asking consum-

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Continue to pray for farmworkers and the work of the Campaign for Fair Food...Send postcards, write letters...inform and animate your congregation

ers of conscience to begin another postcard campaign and to drop of a letter to franchisees when they visit SUBWAY restaurants. SUBWAY is heavily franchised and franchisers own just one or two restaurants, so this campaign will have new dimensions.

Chipotle Mexican Grill is a company built on a philosophy that it calls “Food with Integrity.” It sources locally grown produce and ensures humane conditions for the animals raised by its suppliers. Chipotle believes that it has the power and responsibility to raise standards among its suppliers in these areas. However, when it comes to human rights for farmworkers, Chipotle has not lived up to its own standards. Since the campaign began in 2006, Chipotle announced that it would no longer source its tomatoes from Florida and that it would study the issue in its supply chain. This type of avoidance is extremely disappointing given Chipotle’s philosophy. But the CIW and its allies are committed to demanding Chipotle live up not only to its own philosophy, but to the elevated standards for human rights and corporate responsibility that have been set in the Campaign for Fair Food.

Similarly Whole Foods Market, based in Austin, TX, prides itself in building a “sustainable future” through organic produce, animal welfare standards, and environmental poli-

cies. This Austin-based corporation, however has failed to acknowledge or address the human rights abuses faced by human beings in its own supply chain.

What you can do

Continue to pray for farmworkers and the work of the Campaign for Fair Food. Give thanks for the ground-breaking agreements between CIW, McDonald’s, Taco Bell/Yum, and Burger King Corporation!

Send postcards, write letters, and drop off manger or franchisee letters to SUBWAY, Chipotle and Whole Foods Market. Visit www.pcusa.org/fairfood and www.ciw-online.org for education and action resources.

Use the church’s educational, worship, and preaching resources to inform and animate your congregation, and join the low-traffic, fair-food listserv at www.pcusa.org/fairfood for the latest updates.

Rev. Noelle Damico is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) National Coordinator for PC(USA) Campaign for Fair Food. She holds a Masters of Divinity degree and a Masters of Theology degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. She is also a minister in the United Church of Christ. For more information about the PC(USA) Campaign for Fair Food visit www.pcusa.org/fairfood.



Labor Litany

One: God of all things, we thank you for work.

Many: For in our work you call us to give you honor, serve others and create a loving community.

One: God of grace and hospitality, we thank you for the many immigrants who come to work in our land.

Many: May we serve them as they serve us. May we welcome them, for the Word tells us that as we entertain strangers we entertain God.

One: When we give drink to the thirsty or feed the hungry,

Many: We serve Jesus our Savior.

One: God of justice, you call us to treat the laborers in the vineyard fairly. Your prophets decry the oppression of the workers. Your people traveled forty years to escape the oppressive work of the Egyptians.

Many: Merciful and forgiving God, When we establish just and living wages, When we create safe and healthy working conditions, When we provide harassment-free working places,

One: We are setting free the oppressed. We are creating justice. We are doing God's work.

Many: Thanks be to God that in our work we can be faithful and that working with others makes us faithful to our God and Savior. Amen.

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Labor Prayer

Wonderful God

Mightiest Worker

Parent of the

Carpenter Jesus



we offer prayers for our brothers and sisters in labor.

As our labor serves others by providing services, goods and profits may it also serve you in its diligence, dignity and justice. May our employees and employers be guided by the common good and not selfish interest.

May justice rule over profit.

May safety reign over risk.

May love overwhelm harsh rules

Bless us all, living God, and raise up workers clear of mind, glad to labor in your name and striving together to build your Beloved Community.

Amen.

Adapted from a Labor Day prayer,
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Book of Common Worship, 1946

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What You Can Do To Help Workers

1. Pray for low-wage workers, unemployed workers and their families. Pray for employers and elected leaders who set policies and make decisions that affect low-wage workers.

2. Sign up for updates via the Interfaith Worker Justice newsletter (Faith Works) and e-mail alerts by going to www.iwj.org.



All illustrations by Rini Templeton

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