



## What's What

*A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.*

# CST: Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers

## The fourth in a seven part series on Catholic Social Teaching

Issue 45

Catholic Social Teaching:  
Dignity of Work and  
Rights of Workers

October 5, 2008

Modern Catholic social teaching is the body of social principles and moral teaching that is articulated in the papal, conciliar, and other official documents issued since the late nineteenth century and dealing with the economic, political, and social order. This teaching is rooted in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as well as in traditional philosophical and theological teachings of the Church.

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. Employers contribute to the common good through the services or products they provide and by creating jobs that uphold the dignity and rights of workers—to productive work, to decent and just wages, to adequate benefits and security in their old age, to the choice of whether to organize and join unions, to the opportunity for legal status for immigrant workers, to private property, and to economic initiative. Workers also have responsibilities—to provide a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, to treat employers and co-workers with respect, and to carry out their work in

ways that contribute to the common good. Workers, employers, and unions should not only advance their own interests, but also work together to advance economic justice and the well-being of all.

### Scriptural Foundations

Human dignity finds special expression in the dignity of work and in the rights of workers. Through work we participate in creation. Workers have rights to just wages, rest and fair working conditions.

- Genesis 2:2-3, God labors and rests
- Genesis 2:15 humans cultivate earth

### Sabbath gave laborers rest

- Exodus 20:9-11
- Exodus 23:12
- Exodus 34:21
- Leviticus 23:3
- Deuteronomy 5:12-15

### Wage justice

- Leviticus 19:13
- Deuteronomy 24:14-15
- Sirach 34:22

- Jeremiah 22:13
- James 5:4
- Isaiah 58:3 do not drive laborers
- Matthew 20:1-16 Jesus uses wage law in parable
- Mark 6:3 Jesus worked as a carpenter
- Mark 2:27 Sabbath is for the benefit of the people

### Laborer deserves pay

- Matthew 10:9-10
- Luke 10:7
- 1 Timothy 5:17-18

### Quotes from Official Church Documents

"We must first of all recall a principle that has always been taught by the Church; the principle of the priority of labor over capital. This principle directly concerns the process of production: In this process labor is always a primary efficient cause, while capital, the whole collection of means of production, remains a mere instrument of instrumental cause."  
-Pope John Paul II, *On Human Work (Laborem Exercens)*, no.12

All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and bene-

fits, to decent working conditions, as well as to organize and join unions or other associations."

-National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Catholic Framework for Economic Life*, no.5

### References from the Catechism

2428 - In work, the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature. The primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and its beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work. Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community.

2433 - Access to employment and to professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination: men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants. For its part society should, according to circumstances, help citizens find work and employment.



## Saint in the Spotlight — Saint John Leonardi (1541?-1609)

On Wednesday this week, October 8, we celebrate the memorial of St. John Leonardi.

"I am only one person! Why should I do anything? What good would it do?" Today, as in any age, people seem plagued with the dilemma of getting involved. In his own way John Leonardi answered these questions. He chose to become a priest.

After his ordination, he became very active in the works of the ministry, especially in hospitals and prisons. The example and dedication of his work attracted several young laymen who began to assist him. They later became priests themselves.

John lived in a time of reform after the Reformation and the Council of Trent. He and his followers projected a new congregation of diocesan priests. For some reason the plan, which was ultimately approved, provoked great political opposition and he was an exile from his

home town of Lucca, Italy, for almost the entire remainder of his life. He received encouragement and help from St. Philip Neri [whose feast is May 26], who gave him his quarters—along with the care of his cat!

In 1579 he formed the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, and published a compendium of Christian doctrine that remained in use until the 19th century.

Father Leonardi and his priests became a great power for good in Italy, and their congregation was confirmed by Pope Clement in 1595. He died at the age of 68 from a disease caught when tending those stricken by the plague.

By the deliberate policy of the founder, the Clerks Regular of the Mother of God have never had more than 15 churches and today form only a very small congregation.

**Comment:**

What can one person do? If you ever

glanced through a *Christopher Notes* pamphlet you know—plenty! In the life of each saint one thing stands clear: God and one are a majority! What one person, following God's will and plan for his or her life, can do is more than our mind could ever hope for or imagine. Each of us, like John Leonardi, has a mission to fulfill in God's plan for the world. Each one of us is unique and has been given talent to use for the service of our brothers and sisters for the building up of God's kingdom.

**Quote:**

"Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy" (Luke 12:32-33).

[www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay](http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay)



### Want to know more about CST Dignity of Work & Rights of Workers?

**Catholic Framework for Economic Life - Work**

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/ACatholicFrameworkforEconomicLife.pdf>

**Act locally**

<http://www.dor.org/Charities/dioprograms/FaithfulCitizenship.htm>

**Farm Bill**

[http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/rwg\\_pressrelease.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/rwg_pressrelease.pdf)

**Minimum Wage**

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/minwageback.shtml>

**What Would You Do?**

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/whatwouldyoudo.shtml>

**Live Action**

<http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Sep2003/Family.asp>

"What's What" is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield.

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement:

Building on the mission of our parishes to follow the way of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to make Christ more fully present in all who live within our community, the Youth Ministry mission is to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today; to affirm the gifts of our youth and provide opportunities for young people to share their gifts with the larger community; and to meet the religious, spiritual and social needs of all youth with the committed leadership, guidance and support of our parish family, providing an opportunity for our entire faith community to grow together in Christian faith.