



Do
you
not
know
that God
entrusted
you with that
money...to feed
the hungry, to
clothe the naked, to
help the stranger, the
widow, the fatherless;
and indeed, as far as it
will go, to relieve the
wants of all?

— **John Wesley**,
*The Dangers of
Increasing
Riches*

PAN-METHODIST RESOURCES FOR WORKER JUSTICE

From its beginnings with John Wesley, Methodism has expressed concern and affirmation for working people. Justice, dignity and equality for workers are hallmarks of Methodist social teachings. This manual reaffirms the tradition of worker justice that unites the African Methodist Episcopal (AME), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion), the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), and The United Methodist (UM) Churches.

You will find the current statements of the denominations, highlights and quotes from Methodist history, liturgical resources and suggested actions for the local church. It is our hope and prayer that this volume will deepen one's understanding of and rekindle the Wesleyan passion for justice and equality in the workplace.

Special thanks go to the Pan Methodist Commission for help in the distribution of this manual and to the United Methodist Concern for Workers Task Force for helping to edit the material.

Methodist Statements on Worker Justice

AME Statement

Liberation for Working Persons: A Statement in Support of Labor Unions on behalf of the African Methodist Episcopal Church *Adopted July 1997*

Since their inception Labor Unions have served as a liberation force for American workers. Labor Unions were established, much like the African Methodist Episcopal Church, to insure that their members received certain immutable rights. The guarantee of safe working conditions, fair pay, health and retirement benefits remain Labor Unions' lofty agenda. Even in 1997, a mere three years before the dawn of the twenty-first century, Labor Unions are as critical and necessary to the American worker as they were nearly a century ago. Labor Unions are endeared to our church as they and their legendary leaders showed unwavering support for African American civil and voting rights movements. The African Methodist Episcopal Church affirms and upholds the outstanding accomplishments and achievements that Labor Unions have made in the past benefiting the entire spectrum of the American economy; and we support their efforts at reformation as well as strengthening themselves for the new millennium.

CME Statement

By Rev. James B. Walker, pastor of Phillips Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Hartford, Connecticut.

A selected portion of the Social Creed of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church states "Jesus taught us...to be concerned for the welfare and the well-being of others, to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be concerned for justice... For the church to be silent in the face of need, injustice, and exploitation is to deny the Lord of the Church."

The creed is meant to serve as a springboard for a larger and more salient dialogue on the ideal of justice for workers within a society where justice often lies dormant. The Social Creed is meant to usher the church to a platform of advocacy and action in a way that brings the message of the

gospel to bear on institutions and systems of power. Congregations therefore will seek God's guidance to become agents of challenge and change institutions on labor issues.

There are precious few resources for pastors and congregations that lift up the concerns of Labor Day Weekend during the worship experience. However, workers are losing ground on the battlefield for just and equitable wages and the church is uniquely positioned to partner with unions and workers to effect change.

UMC Statement

The Social Principles, paragraphs 163.B-C

We support the right of public and private (including farm, government, institutional, and domestic) employees and employers to organize for collective bargaining into unions and other groups of their own choosing. Further, we support the right of both parties to protection in so doing and their responsibility to bargain in good faith within the framework of the public interest.... We reject the use of violence by either party during collective bargaining or any labor/management disagreement. We likewise reject the permanent replacement of a worker who engages in a lawful strike.

Every person has the right to a job at a living wage. We support social measures that ensure the physical and mental safety of workers, that provide for the equitable division of products and services, and that encourage an increasing freedom in the way individuals may use their leisure time. We believe that persons come before profits. We deplore the selfish spirit that often pervades our economic life. We support policies that encourage the sharing of ideas in the workplace, cooperative and collective work arrangements. We support rights of workers to refuse to work in situations that endanger health and/or life without jeopardy to their jobs.

No One Is Really Free Until People Can Live with Dignity

An interview with Rev. Michael Rouse, Pastor of St. Catherine A.M.E. Zion Church in New Rochelle, NY and member of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice (NICWJ) Board of Directors. Interview conducted by Rebekah Jordan, Intern, NICWJ.

How did you first become involved in labor issues?

MR: I first became involved because I was a member of the Teamsters' Union. I worked in the trucking industry for 18 years, and was a shop union steward for about five years. When I entered the ministry and was pastoring in the Chicago area, I was approached to help form the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice.

From your perspective, why should people of faith be involved in worker issues?

MR: Well, you know, I think it's theologically sound, biblically sound [to be involved in worker issues]. We have to be concerned not just about ourselves but about total community. People of faith are charged with caring for all people, being good neighbors. We bring a different perspective of serving than perhaps union leadership would. Those of us who are people of faith contribute our time and talents and sometimes even gifts of our own substance because of our faith, because God would have each person have the right to a living wage and decent working conditions. We believe in the good of all people and for the good of all people. We're sort of the conscience of what's going on in our work.

Are there particular reasons that the A.M.E. Zion church should be involved in worker justice?

MR: In the AMEZ, we call ourselves the freedom church. In the early beginnings of our church, we separated from the Methodist Episcopal Church for not being able to exercise our spiritual gifts. Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth were all members of AMEZ church. We believe in justice; we believe in fairness. People have a right to exist with dignity and honor, even in the workplace. Until no human being wakes and finds that the sky is the roof over their head and the earth is their bed, then no one is really free. We need to work together across the globe so that all people can live with dignity. When there are those of us who have all the con-

veniences of life while others have none, something is wrong. It is a violation of God's covenant with us.

Are there special challenges workers face today that were not there in the past?

MR: The biggest challenge we face in labor today is to get all people to understand that without the labor movement, until there were labor unions, some of them didn't enjoy the comforts and benefits they enjoy today. Labor is not an evil force, but something that is necessary. Modern day workers suffer because they don't know the history of the labor movement and they don't understand that they can win. They don't understand that what they enjoy today someone else suffered for. All of us have some flaws, and there are some negatives to [the labor movement], but there are negatives on both sides. Our biggest challenge today is to educate people in the workforce about how things really came into being. We also have a global community in which big business can spread its wings and exercise its power beyond even one government. All that is part of the struggle.

If a Methodist church told you they wanted to become involved in worker justice issues, what would you suggest they do as a first step?

MR: I would refer them to the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. I know that it is one of the major resources for information about how to get involved in worker rights. The Interfaith Committee is open and willing to the idea of networking with other bodies, and if someone was trying to get a project off the ground, it would be a marvelous place for someone to get started.

Any final words for us?

MR: I wish more people would get involved, that we could get more people around the table to discuss the issues and weigh in where we are on matters. I talk about a sense of urgency. We're not talking about taking something that rightfully belongs to someone else. But it has to be about sharing the wealth of the world in a way that all people can exist in human dignity. We have to use whatever vehicles are available that allow us to do it from a religious perspective and yet let people know that we mean business.

A Heritage of Advocacy for Workers

Ninety years after adoption of the Social Creed, United Methodists continue to uphold the rights of working people.

By Darren Cushman Wood, pastor of Speedway UM Church in Indianapolis, Indiana

1812

In 1812, nearly 80% of the class leaders in New York City were journeymen, master craftsmen, or unskilled laborers.

1820

Rev. William Stillwell helped to found the New York Society for Promoting Communities in the 1820s. The Society issued an “anti-capitalist manifesto” based on Leviticus 25. Stillwell also provided support for the AME Zion Church.

1830

In the 1830s in Baltimore, class leaders Richard Donahue, David Parr, John H.W. Hawkins and several founding members of the Strawbridge Methodist Church were leaders in the hatters and cordwainers strikes and advocated for the ten-hour day.

1834

In 1834 six British farmers were convicted to hard labor for organizing a union. The leader, James Loveless, was a Methodist local preacher. They became known as the “Tolpuddle Martyrs.”

1844

“When Lord Londonderry evicted strikers after the 1844 coal strike [in England], two-thirds of the Durham Primitive Methodist circuit became homeless.” (E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*)

1870

Before becoming a bishop in the AME Church, Henry McNeal Turner introduced a bill mandating the eight-hour day in the Georgia state legislature in 1870.

1872

Boston ship carpenter and Methodist local preacher Edward Rogers helped start the Christian Labor Union in 1872, the first organization dedicated to labor and religion. Rogers served in the state legislature and served on committees that investigated the apprentice system and work hours.

1894

When workers went on strike in 1894 against the Pullman Palace Car Company, Rev. William Carwadine of First Methodist Episcopal Church

in Pullman and the Swedish Methodist pastor were alone in their support for the workers. Carwadine publicized their plight and organized the Pullman Relief Committee.

1908

In 1908 the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted the first Social Creed declaring the church’s opposition to child labor, unsafe working conditions and a reduction in work hours.

1919

Methodist Episcopal Bishop Francis J. McConnell led the Interchurch World Movement’s investigation of the 1919 Steel Strike.

1927

Rev. A.A. Geist and Grace Community Methodist Episcopal Church of Denver opened their doors for union meetings during the 1927-28 miners strike.

1929

Winifred Chappell of the Methodist Federation for Social Action helped organize textile workers in North Carolina in 1929.

1932

The 1932 General Conference of the Methodist Church declared that “the present industrial order is unchristian, unethical and antisocial.”

1938

In 1938 Bishop Bromley Oxnam made a radio appeal to listeners to support the passage of the National Labor Relations Act. Throughout the 1950s he served on the Public Review Board of the United Auto Workers.

1946

Rev. Charles Webber of the Methodist Church was known as the “chaplain of organized labor” for his work in creating the Denver Labor College in the 1920s, serving as president of the Virginia CIO in 1946 and as director of the Office of Religious Relations for the AFL-CIO until 1963.

1975

Bishop Eugene Slater was instrumental in supporting melon field workers in Texas.

Sample Worship Service

This worship service can be used in full or adapted for special times to honor workers, such as Labor Day Sunday or Workers Memorial Day (April 28).

By Rev. James B. Walker, pastor of Phillips Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Hartford, Connecticut.

The Call to Worship

Minister: Today we gather to reflect upon the importance of work and the value of that work to our world.

People: We gather to acknowledge the worth of those who labor and the need to join in efforts that promote justice in the workplace and eradicate poverty in our society.

Minister: Today we reflect upon Paul, not only as a missionary, but we also see him as the tentmaker.

People: Today we recall the image of Jesus not only as savior, but also as a carpenter.

The Opening Hymn

“A Charge to Keep I Have,” “Come thou Fount of Every Blessing,” “Hark the Voice of Jesus Calling”

Responsive Reading

Minister: Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

People: Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

Minister: Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

People: Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward.

Minister: Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

People: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Minister: And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations;

All: and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.

Prayer of Confession

Tender and Fierce God, whose work is justice and whose delight is mercy, forgive us for ignoring the cries of workers who labor under the tyranny of harassment, violence and poverty.

Free us from greed that comforts our bodies and eats away at our souls.

Free us for a life of joyful resistance to evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves; through Jesus Christ our only Lord, Amen.

Dedication of an Offering

L: Great Creator whose work is the redemption of the world;

P: Accept the fruits of our labor. (symbols of the various occupations of the laity are placed on the altar)

L: Consecrate our daily lives so that we may be a reflection of your grace;

P: Accept the offering of ourselves. (offering plates are placed on the altar)

L: And bless our gifts so that they may be a channel of your love, peace and justice through our Savior Jesus Christ.

P: Amen.

(from the *United Methodist Workers' Rights Manual*)

Worker Justice Worship Reflection and Litany

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Most Christians have heard these words many times. Paul gives us a beautiful and startling image, but perhaps our familiarity

with his words make us unaware of their incredible consequences.

It can sometimes be difficult for members of a body who are so diverse to identify with each others' joys and sorrows. What does it mean when a worker has stayed with a company for 12 years but is still called a “temporary” worker and can receive no benefits? What does it mean when the poultry processing

plant in a small town where there are few other employment options suddenly lays off half of its workforce? What does it mean when a group of day care workers finally bargain a union contract after years of trying?

Perhaps these situations would look different to us if we heard with new ears the news that we are members of each other by our membership in the body of Christ. Our very bodies and souls are knit to each other through baptism in the Holy Spirit. Our working and dreaming are bound up in each other. We must suffer together. We must call for justice together. We must heal together. Members of the body may live drastically different lives, yet our common bonds can not be broken, even if we do not recognize those bonds. Lives of separation are ended. Let us remember our baptism into the one body and be thankful!

*by Rebekah K. Jordan
United Methodist Deacon*

Litany

One: Let us gather as members of one body before one God.

All: By one Spirit we were baptized into the body of Christ.

One: As one body, we share common hurts, common joys, and a common labor. When poultry workers' dignity is abused on the job,

All: We all suffer with them.

One: When a group of janitors finally get health care after months of struggle,

All: We all rejoice with them.

One: When health care workers are fired for trying to organize a union,

All: We all suffer with them.

One: When managers find the courage to call for change in their companies,

All: We all rejoice with them.

One: We are members of one another in the body of Christ. Let us celebrate our baptism in our worship and our living.

All: Thanks be to God!

By Rebekah Jordan, United Methodist Deacon and former intern at the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice.



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Reflections of a Union Methodist

By Michael J. Sullivan, Sheet Metal Workers' International Association

As a boy, my attitude toward Church was reminiscent of the classic Sunday scene from the *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Determined to impress the Reverend Thatcher's beautiful daughter, Becky, Tom trades his prized possessions for enough Bible verse tickets to be ceremoniously presented with his own copy of the Good Book in front of the entire congregation. Astounded at Tom's achievement, the Reverend tests our hero's knowledge of scripture by asking him to name two of the 12 Apostles. Tom, who had never legitimately memorized a Biblical fact in his young life, replies, "David and Goliath."

Fortunately, because of my mother's best efforts, my brother and I were not like Tom. Mom taught Sunday School at our Methodist church in Indianapolis, and to her, a proper Sunday morning consisted of song, prayer and fellowship. My brother and I had different ideas. Our Sunday morning ideals were sleep, playing outside and a big bowl of sugared cereal. Accordingly, we'd usually try to dodge church with convenient, but nonexistent, headaches, stomach upsets and flu.

My mother's response was equally predictable: "If you can't give two hours a week to the Lord," she'd say, "you can stay inside the rest of the week to get well." Our recuperations were quick and miraculous.

Suffice to say I started going to church at the behest of others. Didn't appreciate it. Didn't really understand it. But somehow, all that talk about loving and helping and caring and justice began to stick. Not to say that my transformation was quick or complete. But over the years, my attitude toward God and his role in my life began to change.

I'd see the power of prayer first hand when my baby sister fell seriously ill. After six months of hospitalization, given little chance to live, her mouth filled with blisters, she was sent home to spend what we feared would be her final short days on Earth. But my aunt, a faith healer, would have none of it. She took the child into my mother's room and began to pray. She prayed loudly. She prayed all night. Early the next morning, the doctor arrived and examined my sister, who promptly began to cry. The doctor carried her to the living room and announced "the only thing

wrong with this baby is that she is hungry." Her mouth was clear. Her disease healed. I would not have believed it. But I saw it. And I began to understand what we can do for one another with God's help.

Imagine my mother's joy when I decided to become a Methodist minister. But God – who ultimately makes those determinations – had other things in mind for me. And before long, just as others had prodded me into attending Sunday School, others were encouraging me to run for offices in my union. That's when I discovered something wonderful – the deep connection between my religious convictions and my desire to help others.

I realized that labor's goals – living wages, secure jobs, safe workplaces, health care, education, civil rights, social and economic justice for all...are the *works* that all who have received the gift of *grace* are charged to do.

The heroes of Labor, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Lech Walesa, and Cesar Chavez have devoted their lives to helping others. John Wesley, who reminded us that beyond meeting the needs of our families, our money and energy should be directed to "feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the stranger, the widow, the fatherless; and indeed, as far as it will go, to relieve the wants of all mankind." That is Labor's goal. And that is the Church's goal. Together, we must continue to be activists and organizers for change and improvement in how we treat each other.

"We ask for (the Church's) presence beside us," said Chavez. "To sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice, and for love of brother. We don't ask for words. We ask for deeds."

I see every day the social injustice that is caused by greed, ambitions, materialism and the lack of a moral conscience. As a union president I have the opportunity to work for the cause of a living wage for all. As a man raised and guided in a Christian home I have the moral responsibility to practice social charity – to me they go hand in hand. I am thankful that God has given me the opportunity to reach out to others throughout my life and use those values that I have been taught at home and in church to help workers.

I realized that labor's goals – living wages, secure jobs, safe workplaces, health care, education, civil rights, social and economic justice for all...are the *works* that all who have received the gift of *grace* are charged to do.

Additional Resources

United Methodist Workers Rights Manual. Published by the United Methodist Concern for Workers Task Force. Contains Bible studies, worship resources, suggested activities for congregations, etc. Order from the General Board of Church and Society for three dollars at (800) 967-0880 or www.umc-gbcs.org.

The following survey reports are available in the 2000 Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church:

- *Concern for Worker Task Force*
- *Environmental Health and Safety in the Workplace and Community*
- *Rights of African American Farmers*
- *Rights of Farm Workers in the US*
- *Rights of Workers*
- *The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively.*

Social Protest Thought in the AME Church, 1862-1939, edited by Stephen W. Angell and Anthony B. Pinn, University of Tennessee Press, 2000.

Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Ethics, by Theodore Jennings, Abingdon Press, 1990.

The National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice offers the following resources for congregations. They are available by contacting NICWJ, 1020 West Bryn Mawr, 4th Fl., Chicago, IL 60660, (773) 728-8400, info@nicwj.org. Those noted can be downloaded from our website at www.nicwj.org.

- *Why Unions Matter.* An 8 page resource on the role of unions in U.S. society and the process of how and why workers form unions. Cost: 50 cents each. (available online)
- *Justice for Poultry Workers: A Study and Action Guide for United Methodists.* Provides a basic introduction to problems that poultry workers face and provides worship materials, Bible studies, a study of the United Methodist Social Principles, and action ideas to support poultry workers. Cost: two dollars each.
- *What Faith Groups Say About the Right to Organize.* A one-page guide to the teachings of eleven faith traditions on the rights of workers, including the CME and UM Churches. Cost: ten cents each. (available online)
- *Building Projects and Religious Values: Ethical Questions for Congregations to Ask Building Contractors.* Cost: 50 cents each. (available online)

What You Can Do

1. Seminary Summer interns from a variety of faith traditions are working across the country on many worker organizing campaigns. Invite one to speak about his or her experiences. For availability in your area contact Regina at NICWJ at (773) 728-8400 x 15; or e-mail regina@nicwj.org.
2. Invite a labor speaker to talk to your congregation. A Labor in the Pulpits brochure is available to assist you; contact Toure at NICWJ at (773) 728-8400 x 24; or e-mail toure@nicwj.org, or contact your local AFL-CIO office. AFL state federations and central labor councils can be found at www.aflcio.org or call (202) 637-5000. At your Labor Day service, use worship materials found in this booklet.
3. Highlight the needs of immigrant workers by holding a special "Remember the Immigrant Prayer Service." Bulletin inserts are available from NICWJ to use with this service. Contact Toure at (773) 728-8400 x 24; or e-mail toure@nicwj.org
4. Participate in a Labor Day march sponsored by your local labor community. Contact the local central labor council for one in your area. See #2 for contact information.
5. If you are United Methodist, consider starting an adult discussion group about poultry workers. Use the *Justice for Poultry Workers: A Study and Action Guide for United Methodists* resource. For more information contact Michael at (773) 728-2800 x 47 or e-mail michael@nicwj.org.
6. Join or help form a local interfaith committee for worker justice. Visit www.nicwj.org or contact Kristi at (773) 728-8400 x 45; or e-mail kristi@nicwj.org to find local contacts in your area.
7. Hold a special Labor Day collection for your local interfaith committee or for the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. For brochures and special collection envelopes contact Peggy at (773) 728-8400 x 11; or e-mail peggy@nicwj.org.