



LABOR EDUCATION

Memphis & West TN Central Labor Council
An AFL-CIO Labor in the Pulpit partner

LABOR IN THE PULPIT

Bimah & Minbar - A Congregation Toolkit

Faith and labor have always marched together. The AFL-CIO's "Labor in the Pulpit, Bimah & Minbar" program invites congregations of every tradition to honor the dignity of work - especially around Labor Day weekend. This toolkit gives clergy and lay leaders everything needed to bring the message of worker justice to the pews.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

- > **Pick a Sunday (or Sabbath)** - Labor Day weekend is traditional, but any time works.
- > **Preach the dignity of work** - use a sermon starter and the scripture below.
- > **Host a worker or union speaker** - invite someone to share a 3-5 minute testimony.
- > **Sign your congregation up** - join the Mid-South faith-labor network (see back page).

LABOR DAY SERMON STARTERS

- > **"The Worker Is Worthy"** - Work is sacred because the worker bears the image of the Creator. To honor labor is to honor God - and to deny a fair wage is a moral wrong, not an economic necessity.
- > **"An Injury to One"** - Solidarity is the Golden Rule on the shop floor. When we stand with the vulnerable worker, we live out the heart of our faith.
- > **"From Memphis to the Mountaintop"** - In 1968, Dr. King gave his life standing with sanitation workers. The call to justice still echoes from that pulpit to ours today.

SCRIPTURE & SACRED TEXTS ON WORK AND JUSTICE

- > **Hebrew Scripture** - "You shall not oppress a hired worker... pay his wages on the same day" (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). "Woe to him who builds... and does not give wages" (Jeremiah 22:13).
- > **Christian Scripture** - "The laborer deserves to be paid" (Luke 10:7; 1 Timothy 5:18). "Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).
- > **Catholic Social Teaching** - "Rerum Novarum" (Leo XIII, 1891) affirms the just wage and the right of workers to form unions.
- > **Islamic Tradition** - "Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries" (Hadith).
- > **Jewish Tradition** - Tikkun olam - the obligation to repair the world includes economic justice.

THE BLACK CHURCH & LABOR - A SHARED HISTORY

Across every denomination - AME, Baptist, COGIC, Methodist, and more - the Black church has always been a labor institution, and its pulpits produced the movement's greatest leaders. Rev. James Lawson, pastor of Centenary United Methodist in Memphis and the movement's master strategist of nonviolence, organized the 1968 sanitation workers' strike ("I AM A MAN") and invited Dr. King to Memphis. A. Philip Randolph built the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs AND Freedom. Rev. Addie Wyatt - minister and union vice president - co-founded the Coalition of Labor Union Women. From Rev. Ralph Abernathy and Rev. Benjamin Hooks to Rev. William Barber II's Poor People's Campaign today, civil rights and worker justice have always been one struggle. To preach labor justice is to preach the legacy of the movement.

THE CATHOLIC MOMENT - POPE LEO XIV

The first American pope, from Chicago, took the name Leo in deliberate continuity with Leo XIII - the "labor pope" of Rerum Novarum. In October 2025, Pope Leo XIV personally met Chicago union leaders and thanked unions for

representing workers and serving the common good. For Catholic congregations, there has rarely been a clearer moment to preach the dignity of work.

CLERGY TALKING POINTS

- > **Work has dignity** - every person who labors deserves respect, safety, and a living wage.
- > **Workers may organize** - every major faith tradition affirms the right to come together and bargain for fair treatment.
- > **Justice is communal** - a community is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable workers.
- > **Hope, not fear** - the message is invitation and solidarity - calling people toward justice, not against any person.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Sign your congregation up to join the Mid-South faith-labor network at laboreducation.org/labor-and-the-pulpit. We can help you:

- > Connect with a worker or union speaker for Labor Day weekend.
- > Adopt a local union as a congregation partner.
- > Receive updates on faith-labor actions across the Mid-South.

Join the network: laboreducation.org/labor-and-the-pulpit
A program of the Memphis & West TN Central Labor Council, in the spirit of the AFL-CIO
An injury to one is an injury to all.