



THE DIGNITY AND RIGHTS OF WORKERS



“ The Church considers it her task always to call attention to the dignity and rights of those who work, to condemn situations in which that dignity and those rights are violated, and to help to ensure authentic progress by man and society.”

Pope Saint John Paul II, *On Human Work*, 1



The Church has long been a supporter of the right of people to work. Work is more than simply being able to earn money. It is about being able to support oneself, and one's family. It is about finding one's place within society. It is linked to flourishing as a person, and finding fulfilment, a sense of purpose and worth.

It is also about people being paid a just wage and having adequate facilities to do the work they are tasked with, which is why the Church has long been a supporter of both the Living Wage and Fair Trade movements. It is a way in which we can show our love in action.

As we continue to experience high levels of unemployment, especially for the young and those nearing the end of their working lives, how are we called, as a community, to support our sisters and brothers whose dignity is not being respected?

Helen has always been a hard worker. It's how she was brought up. They've never had much, but they've always made do, and she's instilled in her children to also work hard. For most of her life she's been a cleaner. She enjoys the satisfaction of seeing something shine after it's been filthy, although all the bending down has taken its toll on her over the years. When she saw a job advertised at her local church hall to do some cleaning a couple of hours a few mornings a week, it seemed ideal as it was closer to home, and fitted around some of her other clients. The amount of money she was on was roughly the same as she got for her other jobs.

One day she had a meeting with the Parish Priest. The Parish Council had decided to review the contracts in the parish. Helen worried she would be let go. Actually, she got a pay rise. They had been thinking about how they treated others. Although Helen had been receiving just above the minimum wage, they'd realised that this wasn't a fair amount for what she did. They started paying her the living wage, almost £10 an hour. Helen feels far more valued as a person, and although it's only a few extra pounds a week, she's able to put some of the money aside and although money is still tight, she's not quite so worried about each bill that comes in.

“ Lord God look down upon us! Look at this city.
Look upon our families.
Lord, you were not without a job, you were a carpenter, you were happy.
Lord, we pray for those who have no work.
The idols want to rob people of their dignity.
The unjust systems want to rob people of hope.
Lord, do not leave us on our own.
Help us to help each other;
so that we forget our selfishness a little and feel in our heart the “we”,
the we of a people who want to keep on going.
Lord Jesus, you were never out of work, give us work and teach us to fight for work and bless us all.
In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pope Francis at the Meeting with
Workers in Sardinia 2013

REFLECTION



Using the model from Cardinal Cardijn, reflect on where people living in poverty are being ignored locally and globally, what our faith calls us to do about it, and what actions we may be able to take to enable all people to flourish.

What are the unemployment figures for your area?

SEE

What decisions do you make which affect people working to produce the things you eat and use?

JUDGE

How will you enable others to earn money to support their family?

ACT



In a genuinely developed society, work is an essential dimension of social life, for it is not only a means of earning one's daily bread, but also of personal growth, the building of healthy relationships, self-expression and the exchange of gifts

Pope Francis, On Fraternity and Social Friendship



The principle of the dignity of work and rights of workers places high value on the need for people to work and support themselves, but not at any cost. Work must take into account the human dignity of each worker. Workers cannot be exploited to make the highest profit. Humans are greater than any things.

Look through any receipts you have from this week. Who has been involved in the production of the things you've bought? How were they treated?

Think of the services you make use of – how were the people who have served you been treated? Were they paid a living wage? How did you treat them?

Find out about the people involved, and make an effort to be conscious of how you treat others, and do all you can to ensure they are treated with respect.



GET INVOLVED!

Can you support your parish to set up a project to help people into work? For example, some parishes support local people arriving from other countries to learn English and to access other support. Or do you have an idea for a socially responsible business that treats workers with dignity? Caritas Westminster's Social Enterprise Hub can help www.seids.org.uk

Volunteer to set up a Young Christian Workers (YCW) group, who use 'See-Judge-Act' to support young people to have a dignified working life ycwimpact.com

Establish a MCW group in your parish (Movement of Christian Workers) for adults in or seeking work mcworkers.org

Buying Fairtrade products ensures the suppliers get a fair deal. Parishes, towns, and even dioceses can achieve Fairtrade status. fairtrade.org.uk

PARISH PLAN

Think about gathering a few times to look together at how we can respond to the needs of our local community in the light of what we're learning in Love in Action.

Resources and ideas are available to help identify the needs of the community and plan how to respond.

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