

Almighty God, you have so linked our lives one with another that all we do affects, for good or ill, all other lives: So guide us in the work we do, that we may do it not for self alone, but for the common good; and, as we seek a proper return for our own labor, make us mindful of the rightful aspirations of other workers, and arouse our concern for those who are out of work or exploited in their work; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Episcopal Book of Common Prayer)

Labor Day will soon herald the end of summer: the first Monday of September, a federal holiday established by Congress and signed into law by President Grover Cleveland in 1894. Our Episcopal worship calendar provides scripture and prayers for a Labor Day Eucharist – thus the Church invites us to consider how God fits into this secular holiday and all that it means.

Our General Convention meets every three years to accomplish the governing vision for our denomination. Again and again, the Body passes resolutions that give voice to a Christian vision of economic justice in our society – they call for a living wage for all workers, for gender equity in compensation, for a just system of taxation, for guaranteeing the rights of all workers to organize and to protect the collective bargaining rights of employees in the public and private sectors.

The harder challenge is to determine the concrete actions of our ordinary lives that will incarnate those values and vision in a society plagued by income inequality of huge magnitude and by an ongoing climate of threat for immigrant workers.

Episcopal congregations are slowly learning about Arise Chicago (www.arisechicago.org) and how this interfaith organization with a mission of upholding the rights of workers invites us to participate in its efforts. At the intersection of faith and action, we join a community seeking economic justice and partner with low wage immigrant workers to challenge the fear, and exploitation that mark their working lives.

Labor Day invites us to remember that the vision of the Labor movement was, at its best, a Gospel vision. A vision of the Kingdom, of God's shalom, more than mere peace, but a vision that embraces harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquility for all.

Labor Day is a moment to place the meaning of a holiday within a larger context – to give Labor Day the biblical underpinnings that mark the best of a human movement. To claim how it must reflect the prophetic concern for justice for the hardworking, poor, and vulnerable. Arise Chicago offers people of faith a way to act on the vision of justice in the workplace with others and celebrate the meaning of Labor Day all year long.

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