

Labor in the Pulpit
United Church of Christ

Over one hundred years ago the mothers and fathers of the United Church of Christ called for

- the abolition of child labor
- the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational disease and mortality
- the protection of the worker from the hardships of unemployment
- provision for old age of the worker and for those incapacitated by injury
- the right of employees and employers alike to organize
- the gradual and reasonable reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practical point, and for that degree of leisure for all which is a condition of the highest human life
- a living wage as a minimum in every industry, and for the highest wage that each industry can afford¹

One hundred years later many of these values remain only partially realized, and currently many of the steps taken over those one hundred years to fulfill them are being attacked and eroded. That this century old call should sound so eerily contemporary should give us pause and encourage urgent response.

Here in Chicago many United Church of Christ congregations have been active defending laws raising the minimum wage toward a living wage and ensuring every worker can earn paid sick days. They have encouraged our local UCC related college and health and human service ministries to be just employers, honoring the rights of their workers to organize. They have partnered with organizations like Arise Chicago to defend the rights of low wage and immigrant workers.

Labor Day weekend is a time for us to renew our commitment to justice in the work place. Learn about the UCC's engagement over decades with worker justice in the public and private sector, among farm workers and industrial laborers. https://www.ucc.org/justice_worker-justice Invite workers and union members to speak to groups in your church to help you understand today's threats to a just workplace for all. Join with groups like Arise Chicago to fight for a living wage for all workers, to defend immigrant workers from abuse and deportation, to support the rights of all workers to organize, restoring a proper balance of power between workers and management.

Elmhurst College graduate Reinhold Niebuhr, memorializing a dear friend and labor advocate, Episcopal Bishop Charles Williams, said, "The bishop did not change Detroit industry, but if the church ever becomes a real agency of the kingdom of God in an industrial civilization, his voice, though he is dead, will be in its counsels."² This Labor Day Weekend let us not remain aloof from the struggles of workers, but join the counsels of those who seek justice for all who labor.

The Rev. John H. Thomas
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¹ Reports of the Committee on Social Service and the Commission on Christianity and Social Problems, Evangelical Synod of North America and the Reformed Church in the US, 1917 and 1925

² Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, 1929