

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES



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Labor Day: More Than Just a Day Off Work

Given the state of the country and the suffering of so many of our neighbors, we cannot view Labor Day as just a day off from work. With tens of millions employed in low-wage, dead-end jobs, this Labor Day let us resolve to join the struggles of low-wage workers for improved jobs and living wages.

The reality for too many workers is grim. Over one in every four jobs (28%) pays poverty-level wages, so low that even a full-time worker cannot support a family above poverty.

Over 8 in 10 low-wage workers do not have a single paid sick day. If they get sick and cannot work, or if they must stay home with a sick child, they are not paid. And if they are gone too long they may be laid off.

Every week over half of all low-wage workers are cheated – by their unscrupulous *employers* – out of some of their wages.

Over one-quarter (27%) of low-wage workers do not have health insurance, either from their own job or through a family member, and, whether insured or not, nearly two-thirds of low-wage workers say it is difficult to pay for needed health care.

Many low-wage workers have unpredictable work schedules that vary week to week and day to day. Many are required to be continually on call, available at all times to come in to work or risk

being penalized with reduced hours or even layoffs. They may be sent home during scheduled

shifts if business is slow. Such scheduling makes workers' incomes uncertain and variable. It also makes a second job, schooling, or scheduled child care nearly impossible.

But along with all the bad news there is good news. Workers and their allies across the country are standing up and pushing back. In just the last few months, workers have surprised employers with one-day strikes at Wal-Mart, fast food outlets including Taco Bell and McDonalds, and at sites – like McDonald's and Subway – run by federal government contractors operating in Washington, D.C. Workers are seeking living wages, more consistent hours, and respect from their employers.

Across the country, over 225 worker centers have sprung up to serve low-wage and immigrant clients. They are making a difference. The Workers Defense Project, a worker center in Austin, TX, has restored to workers over \$1 million in stolen pay.

Traditional unions are also scoring victories. Just last month, after a long struggle that included a global boycott, hotel housekeepers – members of the union UniteHere – reached an agreement with the Hyatt Hotels Corporation that gives them higher pay and more freedom to form unions.

Across the country, workers are mobilizing and making gains. But they still have a very long way to go. They need our help. This Labor Day, let's resolve to join these struggles. Let's resolve that all jobs will also be good jobs with good pay, good benefits, and good working conditions. That would truly be something to celebrate on Labor Day, a fine reason to take the day off.

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