



## THE DIGNITY AND RIGHTS OF WORKERS



“ There is no worse material poverty... than the poverty which prevents people from earning their bread and deprives them of the dignity of work.”

Pope Francis, to a conference on unemployment, May 2013



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 a role and place within society, finding fulfilment and 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.



### SEE

Many of us spend eight hours a day working. We aim to spend eight hours a day sleeping. And there is a fair chance that the remaining eight hours is spent complaining or worrying about work! Work is fundamental to what we do, and to who we are. It is not just an addition to our lives. How we work, and how work 'treats' us, is therefore vitally important.

- What work do we do, or did we do?
- Is all our work paid?
- How does work define us?
- When is work difficult?
- Are we aware of people in our parish struggling in work, or struggling to find work? Why?



### JUDGE

“ Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

Matthew 20:1-16

“Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food.”

Matthew 10: 1-15

- What is God's hope for us in our work?

The roots of modern Catholic Social Teaching goes back to the industrial revolution and Cardinal Manning of Westminster who was influenced by the dock workers in London. His sharing of the horrific conditions and treatment of the workers helped inspire Pope Leo XIII when he wrote the first real CST encyclical, or letter, from the Pope, Rerum Novarum in 1891.

- Work brings dignity, purpose and fulfilment to people.
- Work enables people to provide for themselves, their families.
- When sending out the disciples, Jesus tells them not to take lots of things or expect lots of things from others, "for labourers deserve their food".
- What do we think about this understanding of work?

## ACT

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?

- Think about what you buy. 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.
- Within our communities, how might we support those seeking work?
- Is our parish community paying its workers a living wage? Are those who volunteer within the parish treated fairly, even if not being paid? Have we worked towards Fairtrade Parish status?
- How can we better support refugees and asylum seekers within our parish and/or local community?

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.

For more background information visit : [catholicsocialteaching.org.uk](http://catholicsocialteaching.org.uk)

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