



The Rank and File Catholic

(Connecting the teaching of the Church with the struggles of Labor)

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IMPORTANCE OF RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE

**By: Larry Clark, Speaker Pro Tem
Kentucky House of Representatives
St. Athanasius Parish, Louisville, KY
IBEW Local Union 369**

First, I would like to introduce myself. I am a Catholic who attends St. Athanasius Catholic Church in Louisville, Kentucky. I have been a State Legislator in the Kentucky House of Representatives since 1984. I have maintained a 100% voting record all of my 23 years in the Kentucky General Assembly.

I am pleased to know that churches are beginning to get involved with issues like the minimum wage issue. Raising the minimum wage is a moral issue that affects so many of our citizens.

House Bill (HB) 305, An Act relating to increasing the state minimum wage, has been filed by Rep. J. R. Gray and I have signed on as a co-sponsor. Should it pass, HB 305 would increase the state minimum wage in Kentucky to \$7.25 per hour in three steps over 2 years.

The current minimum wage in Kentucky is \$5.15 per hour which has not changed since 1997. At \$5.15 per hour, the average worker makes only about \$10,700 per year. That is \$5,888 less than the \$16,600 needed to bring a family of three above the federal poverty threshold. An increase in Kentucky's minimum wage would benefit the lowest paid workers in Kentucky. Approximately 172,300 Kentuckians make at or less than \$7.00 per hour.

As of January 9, 2007, 29 states and the District of Columbia have passed state minimum wage levels that are higher than the federal minimum wage. Where a state minimum wage is higher than the federal minimum, the state minimum applies to all employees covered by the state's provisions.

In Washington, the Senate and House are both considering measures to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 per hour to \$7.25 per hour. The House passed a clean version of the minimum wage bill early in January. The Senate version of the minimum wage bill would also raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 per hour to \$7.25. However, it also includes tax breaks for small businesses. As of the writing of this article, the House Ways and Means Committee had approved a modest package of tax breaks for restaurants and small businesses, hoping to break the impasse between the House and Senate.

Raising the minimum wage is long overdue. Congress may pass a bill in the next few weeks but Kentucky's working poor cannot wait for Washington to get this done. Kentucky must act now.

I urge each of you to contact your state legislators in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. Tell them to vote in favor of HB 305, the minimum wage bill. You can also follow this and other bills being considered by the 2007 Kentucky General Assembly by going online to www.lrc.ky.gov.

“Practicing What We Preach.. Part 4”

Catholic Bishop's Statement on Unions

**By: Mike Roby IBEW LU 1701,
Blessed Mother Parish, Owensboro, KY**

As promised in the last issue we will take a look at “Prevailing Wage”. The first prevailing wage law was passed by Congress and enforced by President Ulysses Grant in 1868. In 1931, President Herbert Hoover signed into law the current federal prevailing wage law, known as the Davis-Bacon Act. This law stated that Contractors on federal projects must pay their workers no less than the wage rates prevailing in the local area for each craft, as determined by the U.S. Department of Labor. Kentucky's first prevailing wage law was passed in 1940. Its purpose then as now, was to prevent unscrupulous contractors from unfairly underbidding public projects, thereby doing damage to the wages prevailing in a geographical area. Such contractors usually employed unskilled, underpaid and imported labor. This bill like the Federal Davis-Bacon Act has as its guiding principle that bids for construction of public works projects should be based on the relative skill and efficiency of the contractors concerned and not on a difference in wages paid. To state it another way, Government money, coming from the taxes of all of us should not subsidize contractors who are depressing the wages in a local geographical area.

What is prevailing wage? Prevailing wage is defined as the hourly wage, usual benefits and overtime, paid to the majority of craftsmen for each trade and occupation employed in the performance of public work. They are established separately for each county, and are reflective of local wage conditions.

How are prevailing wages established and what is the process? Contractors (union and non-union alike) are generally surveyed at regular intervals (2 to 3 years) to determine the prevailing wage rates. In Kentucky, hearings are held and evidence is submitted, under oath, by the area contractors of what wages and benefits they paid to each job classification of their employees. Prevailing wage rates, for the local market area, are calculated for each job classification based on the survey data i.e., carpenters, electricians, laborers, etc.

Aren't Prevailing wages union wages? No! Prevailing wages that are paid on tax payer funded projects are based upon typical wages and benefits paid for construction work in each community, regardless of whether those workers are union members. According to the Department of Labor, a whopping 72% of wage determinations issued in 2000 were based upon non-union scales of labor. A union wage only prevails if the wage survey process determines the local union wage to be the prevailing wage.

This is a basic look at the intent and process for arriving at the prevailing wage rate set for your area.

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Back issues of TRAFIC may be found on Fr. Shonis's WEB page, www.thecatholicjourney.com under "THE RANK AND FILE CATHOLIC" Tab.

The Chaplain's Corner

By: Fr. Anthony Shonis

Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Henderson, KY

Recently I read a book by Arthur Goldberg, AFL-CIO Labor United. Arthur Goldberg was the legal council for the AFL-CIO when they merged in 1955. It traces the AFL to its roots in the Knights of Labor. Terence Powderly an Irish Catholic from Scranton, PA was one of the early labor leaders in the Knights of Labor. It discusses the split of the AFL in 1938 and the creation of CIO. When the two federations came back together in 1955 it was largely because of two great labor leaders, George Meany (Catholic), AFL and Walther Ruther (Lutheran), CIO. They both felt that it was a scandal and counter-productive for the rights of working men and women and for the House of Labor to be divided. On the other hand, the split came about because some unions felt that the larger federation was not listening to their needs.

In the Church we have had a lot of experience with splits, especially since the year 1000 AD. When organizations split, it is almost impossible to bring them back together...like trying to put toothpaste back in the tube. The labor movement in the United States can be grateful for George Meany and Walter Ruther who had the courage and skills to do just that.

God bless and protect the rank and file, Fr. Shonis.

Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Henderson, KY Practicing What We Teach

Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Henderson, KY is putting into practice the Catholic Bishop's document, "Practicing What We Teach". At the urging of Bishop John McRaith and the Priests Council, Holy Name parish is working with its architect to implement the Bishops document on the Church and construction in its bid requirements for its new Church office building.

Fr. Ed Bradley, pastor, recently was on the panel of the Workers Right Board held in Henderson and Fr. Tony Shonis, the Associate, is the Chaplain for the Rank and File Catholic.

A FRIEND OF LABOR

Fr. Ed Bradley

Pastor Holy Name of Jesus Parish,
Henderson, KY

It was a privilege to be part of the KY Workers' Rights Board held September 17, 2006 at the Zion United Church of Christ in Henderson, KY. I was very impressed and "moved" by the sincerity of those who gave their testimonies as well as the concern and compassion that was expressed on the part of the panelists. I left the meeting energized and renewed in my commitment to do whatever I could as a Catholic priest to uphold the dignity and value of all persons. And I have a newfound respect for the Workers' Rights Board and for all those committed to workers' rights.

I believe that all persons are created in the image and likeness of God and that each person is totally unique in all the world. Because of this belief, our religious tradition teaches that employers should be held to a high moral standard because all workers deserve justice. I am happy to be part of the Catholic tradition because it has a long history of supporting justice and dignity for workers.

The goals of the KY Workers Rights' Board are goals that can be embraced by all Christians. Hopefully there will be more of an ecumenical participation with this board so that community leaders, faith leaders and business leaders will be working together to enhance and ensure the democratic rights of all workers.

Pope John Paul II

Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, September 1981

The Church is convinced that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth...The Church considers it her duty to speak out on work...It is her particular duty to form a spirituality of work which will help *all* people to come closer, through work, to God...This Christian spirituality of work should be a heritage shared by *all*.