

GUIDELINES

FOR

CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONS

IN THE

ARCHDIOCESE

OF MILWAUKEE

CONCERNING LABOR

AND

EMPLOYMENT

RELATIONS

WITH EMPLOYEES

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are to be used by parishes, agencies, educational, health care, and social service institutions as benchmarks for considering the impact of Catholic social teaching on employer-employee relationships.

Catholic institutions, through the work of their employees, carry on the teaching, healing, and service ministries of Jesus Christ in and to the people of this world. In the area of social justice, the Church is at one and the same time prophet, teacher, and employer.

Church documents, from Rerum novarum (1981) to Centesimus annus (1991), have emphasized many considerations that apply to the relationship between employer and worker. So, for example, Catholic social teaching recognizes the inherent right of workers to form unions or other associations to secure their rights to fair wages and working conditions. If the Church, in the light of this traditional teaching that was restated in the documents of Vatican Council II, is to be a credible prophet and teacher of justice, it must also be a model for justice in its day-to-day ministry. That teaching becomes a reality only when the principles of social justice are integrated into the functioning of all Church institutions.

THE WORKER

Within the limits of their human capabilities, all workers, created in the image of God, can be seen to share in God's creative activity. This awareness that people participate in God's creation through work is to permeate ordinary everyday activities and give workers a sense of their dignity and worth. In addition, in this way workers can provide the substance needed for life both for themselves and for others dependent on them. Finally, it is through work that they can also contribute to the whole of society.

Catholic social teaching has expressed this concept by saying that role of the worker is not just another element in the economic system but the purpose of the system itself. In this sense the worker is more important than the work or profit itself. The worker thus cannot be judged solely in terms of productivity.

THE WORKPLACE

The workplace environment of each institution contributes to the dignity and worth of the individual worker. That workplace must involve good stewardship or the right use of resources. Stewardship goes beyond ownership and recognizes that the goods of this earth were created by God for the use of all and

were given not only for our present use but also for the use of those who come after us. Such a recognition will begin to set right relationships between management and workers.

Workers, on the other hand, must contribute by an honest day's labor as a part of their contract with employers. They must also be seen as sharing in the whole mission of the institution.

1. Adequate wages, salaries and benefits are the usual means to achieve and maintain human dignity in today's world.

The standards for adequate wages and benefits are usually determined by comparison with local community wages and benefits and through analysis of competent government and private resources. However, a just and living wage cannot be solely determined by what the market dictates, if that standard fails to provide the resources needed to live in human dignity. Neither employer nor employee should be satisfied with such a situation.

2. Clear procedures for pay determination, advancement, and grievances are necessary for both employer and employee.

3. Reasonable job satisfaction, working conditions, and participation in decisions which affect individual and family well-being are to be provided. Employers are to involve actively employees in decisions that affect the workplace.

4. Compliance with state and federal laws and regulations that define and limit discrimination practices are to be regarded as a minimal standard for Catholic institutions. The Church as employer is to develop and follow affirmative action plans in seeking and advancing workers within those institutions. It has a right to expect that unions will assist it in attaining these goals.

5. Additional rights of workers are listed in Catholic social teaching: adequate health care, security for old age or disability, unemployment compensation, healthful working conditions, weekly rest, periodic holidays for recreation and leisure, and reasonable security against arbitrary dismissal. (See Economic Justice for All, #103.)

RIGHT OF ASSOCIATION

1. The worker has the right to form associations for the sake of collective bargaining without fear of threat, coercion, or intimidation.

This principle has been repeated from the time of Pope Leo XIII in the last century to the writings of

our own present Holy Father, Pope John Paul II: It is very much in keeping with our own American tradition of the right of free-association.

The principle, of itself, does not give approval to any specific association or trade union. Nor does it state that such unions always act rightly and in accord with justice, nor always wisely and prudently for the benefit of all employees.

"Labor unions themselves are challenged by the present economic environment to seek new ways of doing business. The purpose of unions is not simply to defend the existing wages and prerogatives of the fraction of workers who belong to them, but also to enable workers to make positive and creative contributions to the firm, the community, and the larger society in an organized and cooperative way. Such contributions call for experiments with new directions in the U.S. labor movement" (Economic Justice for All, #304).

2. The choice of the worker to select or reject union representation is to be free of intimidation by either side. The institution is free to comment on the prospects of unionization to its employees. Such comments are to be factual and reflect Catholic social teaching. Any coercive actions by either side are against the spirit of free choice.

3. A Catholic institution may hire a consultant, provided a) that the consultant's approach is consistent with the rights of employer and employee as reflected in Catholic social teaching, b) that the methods used assure the worker's freedom and attempt to generate a spirit of trust, and c) that resolutions focus on the common responsibility for the ministry of the institution, such as, for example, patients' welfare, or students' education.

4. Following the decision to form or not form a union, a healing process for workers and employees is an essential pastoral consideration.

5. Catholic institutions are to involve the worker in decision-making that affects the workplace and workplace conditions. The decision is to be made at the level most appropriate. Such a process might well require a rethinking of the traditional adversarial relationship that dominates our society.

6. Efforts of workers to organize do not necessarily reflect unfavorably on management of the institution. The right to organize is inherent in the workers' right to participate in decisions that affect their lives and dependents.

7. Leaders of Catholic institutions are to foster an

atmosphere of open and candid communication with workers, unions, and the public. Such communication will lead to a clearer recognition of the way to balance the demands of providing services to clients with their specific needs, on one hand, with the rights of workers, on the other.

8. The leadership and members of a union are to recognize the specific mission of the institution and its often unique role in providing the services it does. In this way they will be more open to the problems faced by management. This is especially important for Church institutions since so many are charitable and not-for-profit organizations.

9. A union is to involve all members in its decisions by using equitable means of self-governance in dealing with membership needs, excluding all illegal discrimination against workers. The failure of a union to fulfill these conditions does not excuse violations of worker's rights by any institution.

CONCLUSION

The Catholic Church in the United States has been associated with the rights of workers for generations. That identification has been its great strength as it befriended countless thousands of immigrants. To be faithful to that tradition, Catholic institutions are to extend the same support today to people of color, women, and new immigrants from Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the Pacific basin. The Church must also challenge the unions to the needs of these same people.

Economic enterprises in the U.S. and the world reflect a growing disregard for the value and dignity of the individual and the family. What was said above about this country should hold when U.S. enterprises operate abroad. Catholic institutions are to be challenged to advocate, on both the national and international level, that kind of social justice that recognizes the worth and dignity of all people and the value of their work.

But we must remember that "the transformation of social structures begins with and is always accompanied by a conversion of the heart. As disciples of Christ each of us is called to a deep personal conversion of the heart. As disciples of Christ each of us is called to a deep personal conversion and to 'action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world.' ...But personal conversion is not gained once and for all. It is a process that goes on through our entire life." (See Economic Justice for All, #328.)