

LABOR DAY What is it?

The last holiday of summer?

A commemoration of a vaguely understood history of labor in the USA, and the achievements of unions in bringing about middle-class standards of living, the 8-hour workday and the 40-hour week, and the end of child labor in our factories?

An honoring of the human right of association, the right of workers to organize and bargain for better pay and better working conditions?

Labor Day is all of the above, plus an affirmation of our faith commitment to economic justice, deeply rooted in our sacred scriptures.

In the Jewish Torah, we find mandates for worker justice, such as Deuteronomy 24:14-15:

“You shall not withhold the wages of the poor and needy laborers...otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you.”

In the words and deeds of Jesus and the letters of the New Testament, we find the good news proclaimed to the poor and specific admonitions, such as:

“The wages of laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out...and have reached the ears of the Lord” (James 5:4).

The Qur’an reminds the community of Islam about its duty to promote fairness and economic justice for all people:

“And O my people! Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due” (Qur’an 11:85).

Our faith traditions are united in honoring the dignity of labor. Our scriptures emphasize the importance of equity and justice in matters of wealth and work. They agree in insisting that the employer-worker relationship must be based on justice and mutual consent.

On Labor Day, religious congregations across the country have an opportunity to reflect on these things, and to think about how our shared values might be more fully expressed in our economic life.

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Don't we all deserve a chance at the American Dream? What *you* can do:

1. Pray for working people, especially low-wage earners and those that are exploited.
2. Remember to ask questions about how workers are treated. Speak up in support of working people who are seeking respect and a voice in their working situations.
3. Concretely today, read and sign the postcards available after the service in support of the Employee Free Choice Act.

This bill will remove obstacles to union organizing that have developed during recent decades. Passage of the Employee Free Choice Act by the new president and Congress in 2009 is one way to make work pay and move from poverty to prosperity. The legislation does not cost taxpayers a dime, and it gives workers a way to take responsibility and action to remedy their own situations.

We will deliver the postcards signed today to elected officials in Washington, D.C. Or you are welcome to mail your card to our parent organization, Jobs with Justice. Call us for more information about the Employee Free Choice Act.

The LRC is an independent coalition of congregations, labor unions, community groups and individuals. Its focus is on the struggles of low-wage workers for justice, at the point of convergence of our faith commitments with the best values of the labor movement. For more information, contact Marjorie DeVoe, coordinator, at 482-5595 or LRCoFCD@gmail.com

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