

CATHOLIC SCHOLARS FOR WORKER JUSTICE

Promoting Catholic Social Teaching on the Indispensable Role of Unions for Every Profession

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TO: President-Elect Obama Transition Team

I am Dr. Joseph J. Fahey, Professor of Religious Studies at Manhattan College in New York City and a member of the Catholic Theological Society of America. I appear before you today on behalf of Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice (CSWJ). CSWJ is an independent national association of scholars who subscribe to Catholic Social Teaching on workers' rights generally and on labor or employee unions specifically. Our Mission is to advance the cause of workers' rights through scholarship and through active support of workers' as they seek to form or join labor unions. Catholic teaching holds that labor unions are an "*indispensable element of social life*" and that "*unions have the duty of acting as representatives working for 'the proper arrangement of economic life.'*" The Church teaches that unions must play a positive and active role "in the whole task of economic and social development and in the attainment of the universal common good." (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 307.)

CSWJ believes there are three principles based on Catholic Social Teaching that should guide workers' decisions to form or join unions.

- 1. The right to join a labor union is rooted in the right to free association that is found in the natural law.** This right cannot be abridged or abolished by civil or ecclesiastical law. Employers have the duty to *recognize* and *promote* this right.
- 2. The decision to form or join unions belongs to the workers alone.** Employers do not have a right to resist or discourage their employees' decision to join unions; rather employers should demonstrate an "ethic of welcome" when workers decide for a union.
- 3. The method or venue that workers employ to signal their support for a union is to be decided by the workers themselves.** Workers can employ a wide variety of methods to choose a union: they raise their hands, say yea or nay, sign cards, stand and sit, and have a secret ballot election. Employers should respect whatever method workers' choose to join unions and should begin bargaining in good faith immediately.

Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice is prepared to work with the Obama administration in the follow areas:

- * *We intend to offer vigorous support for the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA).*
- * *We urge the Obama Administration and Congress to enact EFCA as part of the nation's economic recovery program.*
- * *We will support a labor reform bill that will recognize the right of immigrants, workers in religious institutions, and private university professors to join unions.*

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Please visit our website to consult our Foundational Statement for an in-depth discussion of Catholic Social Teaching and workers rights: "Catholic Social Doctrine and Workers' Rights: A Call to the Common Good." www.catholicscholarsforworkerjustice.org

For information on CSWJ's statement on EFCA see under "Where We Stand" our "Statement on EFCA."

For a discussion of EFCA in a wider economic and social context, see under "The Common Good" articles by Thomas A. Kochan, "A Labor Policy Strategy for Transforming the American Workplace" and Joseph J. Fahey, "Catholic Social Teaching, EFCA and the Current Crisis."

CSWJ has made five Statements of Support for workers at U.S. institutions in the past year: St. Joseph Health System (CA), Teachers in the Diocese of Scranton (PA), Central Park Workers (NYC), Bon Secours Charity Hospitals (Warwick, NY) and Providence Health & Services (OR). These statements can be found under "Where We Stand."

Joseph J. Fahey may be reached at: joseph.fahey@manhattan.edu and 914.948.2993.

"The Church fully supports the right of workers to form unions or other associations to secure their rights to fair wages and working conditions....No one may deny the right to organize without attacking human dignity itself....We vehemently oppose violations of the freedom to associate, wherever they occur, for they are an intolerable attack on social solidarity." The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All* (1986)