

Happy Monday and Happy Labor Day!

Observed the first Monday in September, Labor Day is an annual celebration of the social and economic achievements of American workers. Individual states celebrated the holiday before it was a national holiday. New York was the first state to introduce a bill, but Oregon was the first to pass a law recognizing Labor Day, on February 21, 1887. By 1894, 23 more states had adopted the holiday, and on June 28, 1894, Congress passed an act making the first Monday in September of each year a legal holiday.

In the late 1800s, the average American worked 12-hour days and seven-day weeks in order to eke out a basic living. Children as young as 5 or 6 toiled in mills, factories and mines across the country, earning a fraction of their adult counterparts' wages. People of all ages, particularly the poor and recent immigrants, often faced extremely unsafe working conditions, with insufficient access to fresh air, sanitary facilities and breaks.

Catholic social teaching views work as a dignified, God-given participation in creation, not merely an economic necessity. The dignity of work is central to the dignity of the human person, and therefore workers have rights, including fair wages, decent working conditions, the right to organize, and the freedom to economic initiative. Work is crucial for human development, enabling individuals to realize their potential and express their unique contribution to society.

A just social order requires balancing the creation of wealth with ensuring access to necessities for all, especially those on the margins. Immigrants, the elderly, people with physical/mental disabilities, and paroled people deserve the opportunity to work for reasons that include human rights, economic contributions, and the individual and community benefits of employment. Providing access to meaningful work fosters independence, boosts self-worth, and strengthens society as a whole.

- Immigrants residing in our communities are critical to a thriving U.S. economy. They fill essential roles in key sectors with labor shortages, such as healthcare, construction, service industry, and agriculture, and contribute to innovation. A study by the Center for Migration Studies found that legalizing undocumented workers would significantly boost the U.S. GDP. Immigrants, including undocumented workers, pay billions in federal, state, and local taxes.
- Older workers bring a wealth of experience, reliability, and strong work ethic to the workplace. Many employers value their loyalty, critical thinking skills, and knowledge. Many seniors need to work to supplement their retirement income, which may not be enough to cover rising living costs. Working longer can also increase Social Security benefits. Working keeps older adults mentally sharp and socially engaged, which can help fend off cognitive decline and combat feelings of loneliness and isolation that can lead to depression.

- People with disabilities represent a large, underutilized source of talent. People with disabilities bring unique skills, perspectives, and creativity to the workplace, which can enhance problem solving and innovation. Companies that actively hire people with disabilities often see a boost in employee morale and experience significantly lower turnover rates. Employment provides financial independence, increases self-esteem, and allows people with disabilities to participate more fully in community life.
- Stable employment for paroled people (formerly incarcerated) is one of the most effective ways to reduce recidivism. People with jobs are significantly less likely to re-offend and be re-incarcerated. Earning a living wage helps paroled individuals overcome poverty, housing insecurity, and homelessness, leading to more stable lives. When formerly incarcerated people succeed, it strengthens families and communities by increasing tax revenue, boosting economic growth, and improving public safety.

Current budget constraints do not allow Catholic Charities of Stockton to offer employment counseling and job referral services directly to our clients at this time. Increased public and private donations funding these and other services would most certainly benefit our clients and strengthen the social foundation supporting the community of the Diocese of Stockton.

However, many of the services and resources currently offered, directly and indirectly provide assistance, education, and resources that significantly increase the likelihood that the individual, and/or family members, will seek and obtain productive employment – enjoying the dignity of work that is the God-given right of every person.

Blessing,

Deacon Mike