

Happy Monday to all,

On this date, April 27 in the year 1978, a cooling tower under construction at the Pleasants Power Station in Willow Island, West Virginia, collapsed, killing all 51 construction workers on the scaffolding. It is considered the deadliest construction accident in U.S. history.

Investigations by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the National Bureau of Standards determined that the concrete had not gained sufficient strength to support construction loads. Contributing factors included rushed construction schedules, inadequate bolt securing, and lack of field testing of the concrete.

One of the key themes of Catholic Social Teaching is “The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers”

Our faith teaches us that work is more than a way to make a living. Our vocation serves as a form of participation in God’s creation. The work we do is done as a means to create something for others. Whether it is creating a tangible product, an opportunity for someone else, an avenue to access better health, or any other function of our work effort, it should always contribute to the good of our community.

If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected, especially the right to a safe environment in which to work and a fair compensation for the work done. Speaking on the link between justice for workers and poverty, Pope Benedict XVI stated:

"In many cases, poverty results from a violation of the dignity of human work, either because work opportunities are limited or 'because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family'." (*Charity in Truth* [Caritas in Veritate])

Individuals living in poverty are disproportionately forced to work in unsafe, hazardous, and precarious conditions, often with limited options to secure safer employment. These workers, who are frequently low-wage, marginalized, and sometimes undocumented, face higher rates of work-related injuries, fatalities, and environmental hazards. Beyond unsafe conditions, low-wage workers frequently face wage theft, including unpaid overtime and minimum wage violations. Workers, especially those with unstable immigration status, often refrain from complaining about safety violations for fear of losing their jobs or facing retaliation.

Current funding does not allow for Catholic Charities to maintain an onsite program providing comprehensive workforce development. However existing programs work closely with WorkNet and the Veterans Affairs office for job training and periodic Job Fairs.

Catholic Charities remains hopeful that increased donations, and in particular a robust and successful Catholic Charities Appeal weekend in September, will allow for an expansion in our services—including workforce development services.

In the words of St. Paul VI:

...the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person. All people have the right to work, to a chance to develop their qualities and their personalities in the exercise of their professions, to equitable remuneration which will enable them and their families 'to lead a worthy life on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level' and to assistance in case of need arising from sickness or age." (*A Call to Action* [Octogesima Adveniens])

Blessings to all,

Deacon Mike