

**Address to the Chicago Federation of Labor  
Archbishop Blase J. Cupich  
Archbishop of Chicago  
Plumbers' Union Hall  
September 17, 2015**

**Introduction**

Thank you all for your generous welcome.

Leaders of the labor movement in our city have been both welcoming and patient with me in this first year as Archbishop of Chicago. Until now, I have been unable to respond to the many invitations offered over these past months to visit you. I am grateful for these gestures of welcome and your understanding. Coming here today to the Chicago Federation of Labor seemed the most appropriate way to respond to all of you. Thank you, President Jorge Ramirez, for creating this opportunity and gathering us together. Thanks as well to President Coyne and the Local 130 Chicago Journeymen Plumbers for opening this hall to us this morning.

One of my priorities since arriving in Chicago is to build bridges and partnerships. Today, I reach out to leaders of the labor movement and all who are here today. I see this opportunity as the first of many to build on the proud tradition of collaboration and common commitment between Labor and the Church. You know better than I how that collaboration has been fostered, especially by Chicago priests. First and most notably, there was the late Msgr. George Higgins, a giant in both the Church and the labor movement, whom I knew well from our days together in Washington, DC. We miss his voice. Then there is Fr. Clete Kiley who is very much alive and we are blessed to hear his voice in these important times.

I come today to offer my friendship and support as Chicago's new Archbishop and to renew an essential and longstanding relationship between the Catholic Church and the labor movement. Our ties are built not on personalities, though we have been blessed with great leaders, but on enduring principles: the dignity of each and every human being made in the image and likeness of God, the dignity of work and the rights of workers. The principles of solidarity, which give priority to the poor and vulnerable, of community and the common good. I seek an ongoing relationship that honors the past and builds a strong and better future for all the people we both serve here in different ways in Chicago and the broader metropolitan area. I believe a strong, respectful, effective and open relationship between the Church and the labor movement is good for Labor, good for the Church and good for Chicago.

Admittedly, I'm new to Chicago, but I grew up in the Midwest and feel very much at home here due to the welcome and the advice I have received. One piece of advice I got early on was: "Archbishop, you've got to learn the Chicago way." Something told me he wasn't talking about deep dish pizza. He then added: "Here, it's business, government and Labor together. We all come to the table and seek to find ways so that things can work out for everybody involved." In the Church, we call that solidarity, a word I know is very familiar to union members. Simply put, solidarity means that we are in this life together, that we are connected to one another, and that we can never operate as if we were isolated and self-sufficient agents. Pope Francis who knows something about solidarity put it this way:

"I would like to make an appeal to those in possession of greater resources, to public authorities and to all people of good will...: never tire of working for a more just world, marked by greater solidarity! ...Everybody, according to his or her particular opportunities and responsibilities, should be able to make a personal contribution to putting an end to so many social injustices...Solidarity means seeing others not as rivals or statistics, but brothers and sisters. And we are all brothers and sisters!"

He said this when he was in Brazil in July 2013, but I hope and expect he will bring this same powerful message to our country next week. My central message today is that I want the Church to become an even more committed partner in this civic solidarity, joining with business, government, and Labor in promoting the common good, especially in protecting the lives and dignity of those who are too often left behind in our city, nation and world.

Many of you in this hall have heard of the ground breaking encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII, called *Rerum Novarum*, published in 1891. Pope Leo expressly urged Catholic bishops and priests to "go to the worker". I ask that you see my presence here today as a response to that mandate of nearly a century and a quarter ago. I have come today to tell Chicago's workers, the Catholic Church is with you; Pope Francis is with you; I am with you. And I do so recognizing that my message to business leaders and elected officials is the same as we work together to build a better Chicago and promote the common good.

## **What Can Union Members Expect from the Catholic Church Here in the Archdiocese of Chicago?**

There are at least four things the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Chicago offers organized labor, given the historically deep connection and history between the labor movement in Chicago and the Catholic Church in Chicago.

1. The Church can offer its vision, its principles and a moral framework that can lift up the dignity of work and affirm the human dignity of all and rights of every worker, man or woman.
2. The Church can raise its voice on issues that affect workers and their rights and their families.
3. The Church as an employer can try to practice what it preaches about the dignity and rights of workers in terms of wages and working conditions.
4. The Church can be a voice, an ally and a partner in the search for greater justice and the pursuit of the common good.

### **Vision**

What brings the labor movement and the Catholic Church together is not politics, economic theories, or ideology, but rather a set of beliefs and commitments about human life and dignity, about work and the rights of workers, about solidarity and subsidiarity, about justice and the common good. We have to remind each other and ourselves that these principles are not just slogans or footnotes, but a way of thinking, acting and measuring our efforts.

For centuries, but especially over the last 125 years, the Catholic Church has offered a strong and principled vision on the dignity of work and justice for workers. Pope Leo XIII called for standards of justice in the work place including the right to a living wage, the right to safe work places, the right to health care, and to the need to provide for retirement.

Similarly, the Church has consistently taught that workers have a right to have a voice in the workplace, to form and join unions, to bargain collectively and protect their rights. And the Church has never made a distinction between private and public sectors of the work. It was not

Msgr. Higgins who called unions “indispensable,” but Pope, now Saint, John Paul II in his powerful and still timely encyclical “On Human Work”

Work and unions are important not simply for what a worker “gets,” but how they enable a worker to provide for a family and participate in the workplace and society. Unions are important not simply for helping workers *get* more, but helping workers *be* more, to have a voice, a place to make a contribution to the good of the whole enterprise, to fellow workers and the whole of society. In *The Joy of the Gospel* Pope Francis writes about the connection between a just wage and participating in society calling at the same time for “education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives.” And then he added, “A just wage, enables them to have adequate access to all other goods which are destined for our common use.” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 192).

Across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, ten Popes have affirmed and expanded this very vision. The Church believes work is important not just for the wages it provides, though fair wages are a basic right, but for its contribution to human dignity.

A society that fails to see the link between work and the promotion of human dignity risks its future as the Holy Father warned in his 2014 address to Italian youth. This is what he said: “We cannot resign ourselves to losing a generation of young people who do not have the dignity of work! ... A generation without work is a future defeat for the country and for humanity. ... We must fight against this, and help each other to find a solution, through help and solidarity.”(Address to youth of the diocese of Abruzzo and Molise, Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows, Castelpetroso, Italy, July 5, 2014).

And this past July, Pope Francis spoke in Bolivia to an international gathering of grassroots activists at the World Meeting of Popular Movements in Santa Cruz. His concluding words are very powerful. “The future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of people and their ability to organize. It is in their hands, which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change.” (*Speech to Popular Movements in Bolivia*, 4). For me these words mean that leaders both in Labor and in the Church need to stay close to the rank and file members if the transformational change the Pope is calling for is to take place.

These words are both stirring and challenging for all of us. They also help build our anticipation of the Pope's upcoming visit to the United States. Already, many in the labor movement have offered a warm welcome to the Pope. I am confident his message will strengthen our ties and challenge us to renew our commitment to our common values.

### **A principled voice on issues that affect workers and their rights**

The Church does not simply provide a vision for a just economy and for the rights and dignity of workers. The Church also is called to speak out, to offer a challenging voice, sometimes a prophetic voice, to advance these principles in economic and political life.

In defending human life and dignity, in promoting solidarity and the common good, we will defend workers and their rights, the roles and responsibilities of unions. We will seek to be clear and consistent in defending human life and dignity and those who are excluded or treated unjustly and we hope the labor movement will do the same no matter which party or powerful interest it may offend.

We share so much in common when it comes to standing with those left behind or those who are left out. We have already worked together in promoting comprehensive immigration reform. I commend the Chicago Federation of Labor and other people of good will in this regard, including business leaders who have advocated for a just reform of a terribly broken system which hurts immigrants, workers, our city and our nation.

Mayor Emanuel also deserves credit for helping to keep Chicago a welcoming place for immigrants and refugees seeking a better life. The horrifying picture of the little Aylan Kurdi, the small Syrian "boy on the beach," should call us to action in welcoming all those fleeing oppression, violence and despair.

We need to stand together...religion, Labor, business, government... in rejecting rhetoric or tactics which demonize and demean immigrants or blame them for problems they did not cause. This kind of angry posturing hurts our nation and diminishes all of us. It also fails to address the real problems which require wise policy, just principles and bi-partisan action.

I will also add my voice when it is prudent and helpful in egregious examples of injustice. The Church can't weigh in on every issue, on every dispute...it lacks the capacity or the competence. However, when the Church sees fundamental values being threatened or

undermined, the Church will speak up—to offer basic moral principles, to defend the weak and vulnerable and to promote the common good.

For example in view of present day attempts to enact so-called right-to-work laws the Church is duty bound to challenge such efforts by raising questions based on longstanding principles. We have to ask, “Do these measures undermine the capacity of unions to organize, to represent workers and to negotiate contracts? Do such laws protect the weak and vulnerable? Do they promote the dignity of work and the rights of workers? Do they promote a more just society and a more fair economy? Do they advance the common good?”

Lawmakers and others may see it differently, but history has shown that a society with a healthy, effective and responsible labor movement is a better place than one where other powerful economic interests have their way and the voices and rights of workers are diminished.

Let me also say that the Church’s search for the common good takes other forms as well. Friends can disagree and can see things in different ways. Admittedly, these differences can create tensions, but they should not break relationships. In times of tension, I ask you to keep in mind that the Church’s commitment to solidarity with workers is rooted in our commitment to solidarity with all.

The Church stands in solidarity with the undocumented. We stand in solidarity with the poor and homeless. We stand in solidarity with unborn children and their mothers. We stand in solidarity with the unemployed. We stand in solidarity with families and their children and their right to a good education. We stand in solidarity with the elderly and the sick.

Some of you will not share our commitments on one or more of these priorities. I ask that you respect that these commitments flow from the same, core belief in human life, human dignity and solidarity as our support for workers and their unions.

My hope is that people will see that the Church is calling for a consistent ethic of solidarity that aims at making sure no one, from the first moment of life to natural death, from the wealthiest community to our poorest neighborhoods, is excluded from the table of life.

We resist what Pope Francis calls the “throwaway culture,” that treats people as things and is tempted to discard the weak and the vulnerable, those without money or power or voice.

Elements within the labor movement, as in every institution - and the Church is certainly no exception - can fall short of its ideals and mission. All institutions can become insular, lack diversity, become too self-interested and self-referential, or can be used for partisan or ideological purposes that have little to do with their core missions. We know too well from our own experience within the Church that institutions and their leaders can be unaccountable, distant, and unresponsive and can violate trust.

All of your members and the nation deserve no less than the best from your leaders, for they hold in trust the legacy of the great contributions made by the broader labor movement. So many have sacrificed for justice and fairness, for a 40 hour week, for minimum wages, for Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, for family leave, for civil rights, for universal health care and the fight to organize itself. Accountability at all levels, especially the highest levels, is vital to keeping alive and honoring this rich legacy and the vision that the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

As an expression of solidarity, I would to ask your understanding on a matter that is frequently misunderstood. I refer to the Church's appeals for respect for religious freedom as we carry out our work to serve those in need in our city and our nation.

When we insist that government cannot define what is and is not a religious ministry, when we ask that government not require us to violate our moral principles, it is not just about a special pleading, but goes to the heart of our exercise of solidarity. For us, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, protecting the unborn, caring for the sick and welcoming immigrants are religious duties, not just service to society.

Our consistent ethic of solidarity, our teaching on human life and dignity requires the church to speak up on behalf of all the vulnerable, just as it requires us to raise our voice for the dignity and the rights of workers and in the pursuit of economic justice. These are not simple matters and they require accommodation and mutual respect. Ad I have to admit not every claim of religious freedom is valid and the law has to protect the basic rights of all. Like all of you, the Church believes that rights do not only belong to individuals and corporations, but also to groups such as unions and Churches. We do not insist that everyone believe what we believe, but we do maintain that our American traditions have allowed us in the past and should allow us in the future to preserve our religious identity and free exercise of religion as we carry out our ministry to the "least of these" and make our contributions to the common good.

Let me offer another example. One of the things I am most impressed with since I have come to Chicago is the outstanding work of our Catholic schools in some of the poorest and toughest parts of our city. I am also impressed by the service they give to the children of workers and the children of the unemployed. I admire the good work of all those, in public and non-public education alike, who offer their skills, knowledge and dedication in our inner city schools. But I am haunted and challenged by the powerful economic forces, social pressures and demographic trends that put inner city Catholic education at risk. I know that many of you share my view that the diminishment of inner city Catholic education would be a loss for lots of kids, for their families, their neighborhoods and the larger Chicago family. I am encouraged that many labor leaders are supporting the Illinois Kids Campaign's education tax credit initiative.

Many in the labor movement found in Catholic schools a way forward to a better future for their families and many of you send your children to our schools today. I don't want or expect anyone to turn away from the struggles to support and improve public education. Most kids, most Catholic kids, are in our public schools just as many kids in Catholic schools are not Catholic. But the way I look at it, we should come to an agreement that whether they are in public or private or parochial schools, they're all our kids and deserve the best education this country has to offer.

So, what I am offering is a hand of friendship, inviting all to work together to improve the education of all our kids and as a part of that, to work to keep alive the remarkable service of inner city Catholic schools that are beacons of hope in some of the poorest neighborhoods of Chicago. You can count on me to work with others to support public education, its funding and improvement. But, I also invite and need your help in avoiding the loss of valuable Catholic schools that provide help, hope and are an essential contribution to a better Chicago.

In the end, as partners in building the common good, we need to commit ourselves to learning from each other, staying together through it all, because the rights and dignity of workers and all God's children deserve our collaboration and mutual good will and respect. After all they are all our children and again, we owe it to each other to have a consistent ethic of solidarity.

### **Trying to Practice What We Preach**

As the Catholic Archbishop of Chicago and one of the largest employers in Cook and Lake Counties, I have come to depend on the advice and counsel of our very vibrant business

community. They have been generous in responding to my request for guidance on how best to manage such a complex organization. But I also need and am grateful for the advice of Labor. You know first-hand some of the best practices for employment and have experience and wisdom that needs to be tapped.

You created the week-end. You advanced the concept of universal health care. You stayed vigilant about job safety. You advocated family leave, and so much more. Your members are everywhere in the Archdiocese. Many of your members are also part of our family of faith. But, whether we are of the same faith or a different one, or none, we are all God's children. We serve together and we can learn from each other.

The Archdiocese of Chicago employs 15,000 full and part-time employees in its agencies, seminaries, schools and parishes. We strive to be a just employer. I have asked our Archdiocesan staff to review all of our human resource policies to ensure we are practicing what we preach about the dignity of work and the rights of workers. We will work earnestly to address any gaps. After all, like everyone we also need to be accountable.

Because the Archdiocese is an employer, some employees and some unions may want to organize in our workplaces. Some Archdiocesan employees are already organized and we work with their union to advance our mission and our mutual obligations to workers. Others are not. And that is because some "jobs" in the Church are really ministerial positions, and must answer to a higher law than those passed by legislatures, we may have differences in this area. But if we stay firm in our commitment to principled dialogue, we can resolve differences and move forward together. That is my hope. I ask President Ramirez and the Chicago Federation of Labor to collaborate with us in creating a workable mechanism for dialogue and to resolve conflict whenever it should arise.

As an employer, the Archdiocese today can affirm two important commitments:

1. For more than 30 years the Archdiocese has had a *Project Labor Agreement* with the Building Trades. Cardinal Bernardin initiated this agreement and Cardinal George continued it. Today, I affirm it as well. And, being new here, I expect the specifics of this agreement are probably due for a review and updating, and so I ask President Ramirez to meet with my delegate, Fr. Kiley, to create a vehicle to conduct this review. This has been a good policy. It is the right thing to do. And, besides, it will keep that Giant Rat off my porch.

2. A long-standing policy of the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference is to hold its meetings and events in union hotels, or in the absence of such, in hotels free of labor disputes. UNITE HERE has developed a program you may be aware of called the Fair Hotel program, something like a fair trade program. The Archdiocese and its agencies will also adopt this approach when scheduling our events. We will work together to find the words and means to honor this commitment.

### **A voice, an ally and a partner**

My final point is that I hope that you and your members will see in the Catholic Church a consistent ally for economic justice and a partner in promoting the common good. First, I will personally support workers' efforts to secure their rights and adequate conditions to accomplish their work. In a talk last June, Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington observed that growing up in southwest Pennsylvania he learned early on that "one visible way that solidarity was manifested, both within the movement and in the larger society, was respect for the picket line. He also talked about the new "picket lines" that should not be crossed, like demonizing immigrants, racial profiling and wage theft, to name just three. In solidarity with you, I want you to know that the Archdiocese of Chicago will honor your picket lines.

Secondly, I will continue to encourage priests of this Archdiocese to be involved in the labor movement. They will continue the legacy of great priests such as Msgr. John Hayes, Msgr. George Higgins, and Msgr. Jack Egan and Fr. Clete Kiley. I welcome and support the participation of priests in the labor movement, but we need to be clear. The presence of the Church in the labor movement is not primarily through the participation of clergy, but through the leadership of Catholic lay men and women in their unions and in the larger labor movement. The Catholics in this room and those who follow you are the Church in the labor movement. You put your faith into action. You are Catholic social teaching at work.

Thirdly, many union members are members of our parishes. Thank you for the leadership, service and investment of so many union members in their local communities of faith. Working with our Peace and Justice Office and our pastors, I would urge that we look for ways to encourage and promote conversations about work and worker rights at the parish level. I particularly hope we might focus on the experiences of immigrant workers who are very

vulnerable. Labor Day offers opportunities for celebration, education and advocacy on work and workers.

Fourthly, many years ago we had Labor Schools here in the Archdiocese. Today, let's explore how Catholic Labor Leaders, Catholic Business Leaders, and others can find new ways to share the message and educate the next generation of Catholics and workers, The Church is deeply concerned about how consumerism, materialism, excessive individualism, and extreme libertarianism and economics shape people's lives today. The Church is also a voice on behalf of workers facing dire circumstances in other countries. This, too, is part of the Catholic vision we share with the labor movement. We should be willing to do more in joining our hands in solidarity to support our brothers and sisters in other lands.

The Catholic vision and its moral framework offer a different way of thinking and a different way of acting in economic life. We need to share this vision more broadly and deeply, ever committed to a consistent ethic of solidarity.

I've laid out a lot here this morning. As I said, I want this to be the beginning of a conversation, not the end. I've tried to identify areas of ongoing collaboration, future challenges and opportunities for new work together. I ask President Ramirez to join with me to create a working group of representatives of the Chicago Federation of Labor and the Archdiocese to review the proposals I have offered this morning and others and to recommend ways we can work together, especially in the challenging situations we all face.

## **Conclusion**

Friends, 125 years ago Pope Leo wrote of "the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class." With the upcoming visit of Pope Francis next week, we can anticipate that he will, in his earlier words "address a strong appeal from my heart that the dignity and the safety of workers always be protected. (4/28/13, Regina Caeli)

The Catholic Church in Chicago and the workers of Chicago helped build the national labor movement. Great leaders in our Church and city years ago took up this mission with courage and commitment. Now it is our turn. I come today to offer my thanks and commitment, my faith and my hope that we can build on this proud legacy by working the Chicago way - with Labor, government and business - to promote the dignity of work, protect the rights of workers, act with greater solidarity and pursue the common good.

But we need to keep our eye on the ball as there is still much more for us to do together:

When it takes an executive order to get sick days for workers,

We have more to do together.

When 25 percent of new mothers return to their jobs 2 weeks after giving birth,

We have more to do together.

When the gulf between the highest income and lowest income Americans continues to grow wider by the day,

We have more to do together.

When women in our country still make substantially less than men at the same jobs – and this gap is worse for women of color,

We have a lot more to do together – in solidarity

On that note let me close by quoting one final time Pope Francis:

Serving means working beside the neediest of people, establishing with them first and foremost human relationships of closeness and bonds of solidarity. Solidarity, this is a word that frightens the developed world. People try to avoid saying it. Solidarity to them is almost a bad word. But it is **our word**. (Il Centro Astalli, Rome, 9/10/13)

Thank you.