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# LABOR SUNDAY MESSAGE 1929

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(This Message is for press release July 27, 1929.)

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*Requested to be read in the churches on Labor Sunday, September*

## LABOR SUNDAY MESSAGE, 1929

*(Prepared by the Commission on the Church and Social Service  
of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America.)*

For two decades the churches of this country have been urging their members engaged in industry, employers and employees alike, to apply the spirit and principles of Christ in business relationships.

They have not only emphasized the need of cooperative effort, the sacredness of human life, the power of unselfish action, the social stewardship of property, and the subordination of the profit motive to the spirit of service, but time and again the churches have called attention to specific evils which are sacrificing human life. They have protested against the inhumanity and wastefulness of child labor, the unfair exploitation of the labor of women, unnecessary Sunday work and night work, an overlong work day not only in Southern mills but in other parts of the country; and they have protested that these hardships on the workers persist in the face of over-production. While recognizing the general prosperity of the country, they have called attention to persistent and serious unemployment, to the economic insecurity of old age among the workers, and to low standards of income and therefore of living in large sections of the population. They have pointed out that all are involved in responsibility for these evils and that so long as a single worker suffers, all share the guilt. They have felt obliged, in loyalty to the Gospel, to point out glaring and unjust inequalities in the distribution of national wealth and income, and that there is not as yet the dedication of industrial leadership and capital to human welfare which the law of God demands. They have persistently taught labor's right to organization, and the social importance of such organization in order to secure to labor a proper influence not only in industry but in national life.

Now the time has come for insistence upon practice and actual experimentation in brotherly relations in business establishments. Discipleship to Christ in business must take this form. A new evangelism must come into being, an evangelism which impels men holding positions of influence or possessing great economic power to devote themselves and their resources to human welfare, as a part of the Christian program.

In this Labor Sunday Message we therefore turn from pronouncements to suggestions for action, to the end that Christian people shall be challenged to specific and practical undertakings.

First of all, every local church and organization of churches needs to examine its own practice as employer with reference to staff workers and caretakers, employees in denominational offices and publishing houses, and practices in building and letting of contracts for printing, repairs, equipment and all other enterprises. The churches must not compromise their own teaching out of a desire for economy. They cannot afford to contribute to the lowering of living standards, nor to the disorganization of labor. Rather the churches should take the lead in raising standards.

Each local church should address itself to industrial conditions in its own community with renewed energy. We suggest, in cooperation if possible with social agencies, that studies be made of the local industrial situation in one or more of its aspects in order to secure a working knowledge of facts. What are the local conditions as to length of the work day, safety and health? How do wages compare with the cost of living? How many mothers must work outside the home to supplement the family income? What is the effect on the

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September 1, 1929, or on the first available Sunday thereafter

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family? What are the handicaps of women in factory, store and office? Are domestic workers employed on a schedule of reasonable hours and adequate wages? Do they have regular times off each week and are they furnished pleasant rooms? What are the labor policies of local stores and factories? Are the workers allowed organization, and are they dealt with collectively? Who are the employers and labor officials who are manifestly seeking to follow Christ in daily practice? Do pastors have contacts with labor as they have long been accustomed to have with the Chamber of Commerce? Are industries being encouraged to take forward steps such as providing unemployment insurance, vacations with pay and labor representation?

The gospel is for all mankind, for employed and employers alike. Labor leaders and the rank and file are as obligated to the principles of service, public spirit, earnest and skillful work and cooperative effort as are the leaders of capital. Labor also needs unselfish leadership. The true labor movement has a religious motive, in that it is inspired by a passion for human life and for social justice.

Christian people through the appropriate agencies should be interested in and promote social legislation. Has your state enacted laws forbidding child labor, night work and long hours for women, and providing adequate old age pensions and workmen's accident compensations? Is rock dusting in the bituminous coal mines required by law in order to prevent catastrophes from explosions? These are illustrations of what needs to be done in the field of social legislation.

We recommend most earnestly that pastors shall make more use of their buildings and property for these great and appealing human causes. An industrial relations dinner might be given during the year, inviting labor leaders and employers. It is well to bring in experts, men who have thought deeply or who have notable accomplishments to their credit, to discuss these social and industrial problems.

Church people should study the history of the labor movement so as to appreciate its significance in the struggle for better standards of life. Pastors and some members of each church should have personal acquaintance with the leaders of the labor unions in their community. There should be friendly exchange of visits with individual unions and central labor councils. In many cases church members who are also trade unionists will furnish a natural point of contact. It is neither partisan nor inappropriate to invite a labor representative to speak in the church on the ideals of the labor movement and the achievements of labor organization for the better life of the work people. Churches have a real opportunity to help in workers' education through assisting trades councils to obtain speakers when desired, possibly organizing classes or obtaining teachers, or offering the facilities of the church plant for such work. The churches should exert their influence to maintain the constitutional rights to freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of assemblage in their own communities even in times of strike.

All Christians should become conscious of the basic social and ethical problems of our industrial civilization. They are human problems. They lie in the church's field of teaching and social effort. The responsibility of leadership lies with the pastor. The churches must be more aggressive, more informed, more willing to take hazards for righteousness, more swift to come to the help of the oppressed, if they are to fulfill the mission of Christ, and are to make that contribution to social welfare which can be rightfully expected of them.

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