



Capitol Comments: Labor Day Reflections

By Jennifer Allmon, Associate Director, Texas Catholic Conference

Happy Labor Day! No, you are not in an episode of Flash Forward and you didn't just sleep through the hot Texas summer, I'm referring to May 1, which is Labor Day in many parts of the world. In 1955, Pope Pius XII established the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker on May 1 to remind Catholics of the Christian dignity of labor. It's a good time to reflect on those whose work is physically demanding, like St. Joseph's carpentry, but it's also important to remember the dignity of work and the rights of *all* workers, a key theme in Catholic social teaching.

This theme reminds me of my grandfather working in an oil refinery. I think of the toil of his work on his body and of his commitment to his union. I don't usually think of health care workers. But, as our nation implements the new health care reform bill, the USCCB has reminded us that the legislation does not have adequate conscience protections for health care providers, and that many immigrant workers and their families could be left worse off as they will not be allowed to purchase health coverage in the new exchanges to be created, even if they use their own money. At the federal level USCCB will be vigilant in advocating for continued improvements in conscience protections, and at the state level the Texas Catholic Conference will continue to seek these protections for pharmacists who object to dispensing emergency contraception.

Then there's the work of the family. One of my co-workers at Catholic Charities in Houston was dashing out one day at 5:00 and she turned to me saying, "See you tomorrow, I'm off to my other job." I asked her what her other job was and I'll always remember the gleam in her eye as she smiled and said, "I'm a full time mom!" As we celebrate Mother's day this month we recognize that whether working outside the home or staying at home, being a mom is full-time work.

Reflecting on labor also allows us to reflect on our own work. Some of us are blessed to sit in nice air-conditioned offices all day. Do we recognize the importance of our work and treat it with dignity? In this internet era it is much easier for workers to become lazy and spend time surfing the net rather than focused on their work. This Labor Day, may we make a new commitment to treat all workers and our work with dignity and respect.

Prayer for Fidelity to Work

Glorious St. Joseph, model of all who are devoted to labor, obtain for me the grace to work conscientiously, putting the call of duty above my natural inclinations; to work with gratitude and joy, considering it an honor to employ and develop, by means of labor, the gifts received from God, disregarding difficulties and weariness; to work, above all, with purity of intention and with detachment from self, having always before my eyes death, and the account which I must render of time lost, of talents wasted, of good omitted, of vain complacency in success, so fatal to the work of God. All for Jesus, all for Mary, all after your example, patriarch Joseph. This will be my watchword in life and in death. Amen.