

Ten Things You Can Do To Build Religion-Labor Partnerships

**By Kim Bobo, Director
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Partnerships between the religious community and labor community are growing at an unprecedented pace. An emerging network of labor coalitions around the country is systematically reaching out to people of faith in support of critical labor issues. Hundreds of cities participate in the Labor in the Pulpits program every Labor Day. The national AFL-CIO leadership has consistently met and worked with national religious leadership and has urged its regional staff and affiliates across the nation to build partnerships. Despite these important directions and steps forward nationally, the most important long-term partnerships will be created by you and other local labor union members and leaders.

Consider ways you can help build lasting partnerships with the religious community and other important allies. You can:

- 1.** Come "out of the closet" in your own faith community. Let people know you are a union member or a union leader. Talking about your union and the role it plays in creating a just workplace will help educate people in the religious community about unions. Order copies of "Why Unions Matter" from the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice if you need help explaining how important unions are.
- 2.** Acquaint yourself with your faith body's teachings on the dignity of labor and the role of labor unions in society so you are equipped to talk with people in your congregation.
- 3.** Join the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, the leading national organization building religious support for low-wage worker struggles, and work with one of its affiliate local alliances around the nation. The NICWJ regular newsletter offers examples of ways the religious community is supporting and working with labor.
- 4.** Include "Worker Rights Inserts" in your congregation's bulletins. Jointly produced by the National Interfaith Committee and the U.S. Department of Labor, this series of six bulletin inserts helps workers understand their rights and how to file complaints. Available in English, Spanish and six other languages. Call 773-728-8400 for one free copy to be duplicated.
- 5.** Pray for low-wage workers, especially farm workers who harvest and process our food, child care workers who nurture our youth and nursing home workers who care for our sick and elderly family members.
- 6.** Offer to speak in your congregation (during or after service, depending on what's appropriate) about the shared values between religion and labor. Plug into a local Labor in the Pulpits service or conduct one in your own congregation. For information about

local Labor in the Pulpits programs, call the National Interfaith Committee at 773-728-8400 or Esther Lopez at the AFL-CIO at 202-637-5190.

- 7.** Invite your congregation's religious leaders to join you in labor support actions throughout the year. Very few religious leaders have been at a labor rally or joined a picket line. Doing so will help them understand the issues and gain a greater appreciation for unions.
- 8.** Talk with your union's organizers. Find out how they are building partnerships with the religious community in organizing drives and contract campaigns. Offer to help make contacts with leaders in your congregation or denomination.
- 9.** Invite someone from the Department of Labor to talk with your congregation about ways to partner to reach out to workers about their rights in the workplace. Several cities across the country are developing partnerships that train leaders in congregations on workers' rights and how to assist workers in filing complaints about illegal activities.
- 10.** Establish an Employment Ministry in your congregation that assists members of the congregation to find jobs and practice their faith and values in the workplace. Consider how your congregation is as an employer. Does the janitor or church secretary receive a living wage and family benefits? If not, can you work with the budget committee to move toward more just wages and benefits?