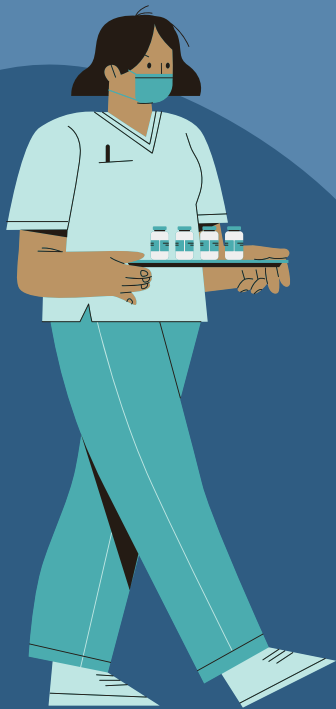


# CONGREGATIONAL TOOLKIT FOR LABOR DAY WEEKEND 2021

- HONORING THE DIGNITY OF WORK
- CELEBRATING ESSENTIAL WORKERS AND CAREGIVERS
- ADVOCATING JUST AND LIVING WAGES



## Toolkit Components

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Responsive prayer
- 3 Petitions
- 4 How you can help (bulletin insert)
- 5 Announcement (for email list)
- 6 Social media posts
- 7 Speakers & program ideas



## Introduction

The history of Labor Day in America highlights how deeply embedded workers are in the fabric of society's advancement. Labor Day was first celebrated in 1882 in New York City as part of plans with the Central Labor Union. Soon thereafter, states began adopting the holiday. By 1894, 23 states had adopted the holiday, and on June 28, 1894, President Grover Cleveland signed legislation into law proclaiming the first Monday in September of each year a national holiday. Today, Labor Day continues to be celebrated in honor of the dedication, resilience, and sacrifice of America's workers.

Records for "Labor Day Sundays" date back to at least 1902. Given how engaged faith communities have historically been on labor issues, it is likely that faith leaders were a part of the early movements to advocate Labor Day holidays. Catholic parishes had more than 100 Catholic labor schools across the nation. Synagogues supported and worked with Jewish Labor Lyceums. Protestants joined Catholics and Jews in efforts to reform child labor and mining laws. The U.S Catholic Bishops continue to issue annual Labor Day statements and many faith traditions encourage their congregations to center labor and workers over the course of Labor Day weekend.

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy has been a strong supporter for low-wage workers, advocating an increase in the minimum wage (passed in 2020), a paid sick day standard for all workers (partially passed in 2021 and more to do in 2022), the Emergency COVID-19 Health and Safety Standard (2020) and wage theft reforms (2018, 2019, 2020). We also have supported the development of Living Wage Certification programs in several cities in Virginia and developed a wage theft website to help workers who are victims of wage theft. Most families in poverty have at least one person working. Families cannot get out of poverty unless we can find ways to raise wages and the core benefits/supports for working. Advocating economic, racial and social justice requires us to address concerns of low-wage workers.

This Labor Day weekend is the perfect time for your church, synagogue, mosque or other house of worship to uplift these pillars of our communities. Let us highlight the dignity of work, and celebrate the essential workers who have always, but especially during the last few years, carried us through. Let us explore ways we can do more to support workers, especially those employed in jobs paying low wages.

This toolkit offers some resources to assist you in celebrating Labor Day in your congregation. Please share with us additional tools and resources you create so we can support additional congregations in future years. Happy Labor Day!

The VICPP Team

## Responsive Prayer for Workers

Leader: This Labor Day weekend, we recognize and honor workers in our families and communities.

**All: We give thanks for the dignity of work, both paid and unpaid.**

Leader: We give special thanks for Virginia's essential workers,

**All: Who supplied us with food, cared for our sick, and kept society moving during the pandemic.**

Leader: We know that Virginia has made strides to protect and improve conditions for its workers,

**All: From issuing standards for protecting workers against COVID-19 to raising the minimum wage this past May.**

Leader: These were important steps for the Commonwealth.

**All: We thank our leaders who have protected and honored Virginia's workers.**

Leader: But we know that many of Virginia's workers are still struggling.

**All: We ask Your support and encouragement for those who have lost their jobs and still not found meaningful employment.**

Leader: We know that some have taken part-time jobs when they really want and need full-time employment.

**All: Some have become so discouraged that they have given up looking for work.**

Leader: And some are still struggling to juggle work and childcare.

**All: We ask Your special blessing, O God, on the workers who care for our young children, teach our older children, and care for our seniors.**

Leader: These teaching and caring professions support all families and workers.

**All: Bless the hands that pick, process or serve our food.**

Leader: Bless the hands that build and repair our homes and businesses.

**All: Bless all those who labor this Labor Day weekend,**

Leader: That their work may be a blessing and they may share in the Commonwealth's prosperity.

**All: Amen**

## **Petitions/ Intercessions for your weekly service**

*(Feel free to change the response to make it more in line with your congregations' traditions.)*

On this Labor Day weekend, we pray for all who work, that they may recognize the God-given dignity of what they do.

We pray to the Lord.... **Lord hear our prayer**

We pray for victims of wage theft and other exploitative practices, that they may receive justice.

We pray to the Lord.... **Lord hear our prayer**

We pray for more than a million Virginians who cannot take a day off when they're sick, that they may not have to choose between providing for their families and taking care of their health.

We pray to the Lord.... **Lord hear our prayer**

We pray for farmworkers at risk of heat stress and all who work in hazardous conditions, that they may find safety.

We pray to the Lord.... **Lord hear our prayer**

We pray that the Commonwealth of Virginia recognize the dignity of work and protect workers with fair laws.

We pray to the Lord.... **Lord hear our prayer**

We pray that people of faith and goodwill treat workers with respect and stand up for the rights of workers in the public square.

We pray to the Lord.... **Lord hear our prayer**

## Five Ways You Can Help Workers

- 1) **Pray for all workers**, but especially essential workers who kept Virginia functioning during the pandemic and continue to support our functioning as a society.
- 2) **Tip generously and speak kindly.** Workers who earn their livelihood through tips and interactions with customers are not always treated well. Do your part to tip generously and speak kindly with workers who wait on or serve you. Do unto others....
- 3) **Be watchful against wage theft.** Wage theft, the illegal cheating of workers' wages, is common practice in many low-wage sectors, such as landscaping, restaurants, residential construction, retail, and others. If you, your congregation, or your place of businesses hire contracted services, make sure that workers are paid legally and fairly. Otherwise, you may inadvertently be contributing to wage theft. For more information, visit [www.wagetheftva.org](http://www.wagetheftva.org).
- 4) **Support businesses that pay living wages.** If you are in Richmond, Harrisonburg, Charlottesville, or Alexandria, be sure to check out and support the living wage businesses at [www.livingwagevirginia.org](http://www.livingwagevirginia.org). Apply to have your business be living wage certified.
- 5) **Advocate policies that will help workers in low-paying jobs.** The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) has led work in Virginia to support workers in low-paying jobs. Currently, VICPP is leading efforts to:
  - Establish a Paid Sick Days standard for all Virginia workers.
  - Remove the farmworker exemption from minimum wage so farmworkers can get paid fairly.You can support these advocacy efforts by joining VICPP's email advocacy list. Join at [www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org/get-involved/volunteer](http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org/get-involved/volunteer)

**Bulletin or Email newsletter announcement:**

This weekend, our country celebrates Labor Day! This holiday is the perfect opportunity for us to remember to treat all who work with respect and stand up for the rights of laborers. Join with the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) to advocate fair treatment of all workers. Together, we can create standards for paid sick days, fight wage theft, save people from heat illness, and fight for protections for some of the most vulnerable workers in Virginia. Check out our Five Things You Can Do one-page handout at [tinyurl.com/vicpp-help-workers](https://tinyurl.com/vicpp-help-workers) or reach out to VICPP staff at [office@virginiainterfaithcenter.org](mailto:office@virginiainterfaithcenter.org) for more information.

**Social Media post**

On this Labor Day, we recognize that many workers are not respected for their hard labor. Join our congregation and @VAInterfaith to prevent wage theft, support paid sick days, and advocate worker protections. Together we can stand up for the dignity of all workers.

*[This picture can be used for either or both posts. Also, we encourage you to share any of the posts that VICPP posts on our own social media. We will post some messaging specific to each of our issue areas. We are on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Youtube as @VAinterfaith*



## Speakers and Program Ideas

Many congregations organize special speakers and programs on labor/worker issues over Labor Day weekend. Here are a few speaker and program ideas to consider.

**Speakers.** Many congregations host adult educational forums over Labor Day weekend. Others have special speakers who deliver the sermon. Every congregation will need to assess what is most appropriate for its settings, but consider some of the following for speakers:

- **Living Wage Certification organizers in Harrisonburg, Charlottesville, Richmond, or Alexandria.** These organizers would love to tell you about their Living Wage Certification programs and how your congregation can support and honor living wage employers.
- **Labor Employment Lawyers.** Labor employment lawyers are some of the best resources on the issue of wage theft, because they have represented clients who have been victims of wage theft. To view a list of attorneys that handle wage theft cases, visit [www.wagetheftva.org/get-help](http://www.wagetheftva.org/get-help).
- **Union Leaders.** Virginia has some great union leaders who can talk about the shared values between the faith community and unions.
- **Labor enforcement staff.** Virginia has dedicated staff who work for the Department of Labor and Industries (DOLI). Northern Virginia is home to many staff who work for the federal Department of Labor. These enforcement staff can be great speakers on labor issues.
- **United Way “ALICE” leaders and advisors.** United Ways in Virginia have partnered on reports looking at families who are “Asset Limited, Income Challenged, Employed.” Basically, these are families who have working members, but they are still poor. The “working poor” is a growing category in Virginia and around the country. United Ways are increasingly seeking ways to make the link with good paying jobs and the elimination of poverty. Learn more about ALICE and download the 2020 report here: [www.unitedforalice.org/virginia](http://www.unitedforalice.org/virginia). Not everyone at United Way will be able to speak on these issues, but many can.

**Programs.** Consider offering a program on:

- **Living Wage Certification programs.** This program could be organized in Harrisonburg, Charlottesville, Richmond, or Alexandria. You could invite an organizer from the program and some business leaders who participate.
- **Wage Theft Programs.** Organize a program about wage theft by having a knowledgeable speaker (attorney or enforcement staff) and some workers who have been victims of wage theft who are willing to share their stories.
- **Labor History.** Invite a labor union leader or a labor historian from a local university. You can also ask people to share their own families’ labor histories.

- **Your Faith Tradition and Labor/Work.** Most faith traditions have documents or sacred texts on labor. Host a study to review those documents/texts (e.g. Rerum Novarum).
- **Watch a film.** There are some great labor films, such as:
  - Norma Rae
  - Grapes of Wrath
  - Gung Ho
  - Salt of the Earth
  - In the Pit
  - 9 to 5
  - 9to5: The Story of a Movement
  - At the River I Stand
  - Harlan County USA

**Prayer Services.** Your regular weekend worship service could focus on protections for workers, or you could offer a special opportunity for prayer to your congregation on Labor Day. Use our responsive prayer, draw from your own tradition, and offer a space for reflection.