



The Power of a Coalition:

Collective Worker Organizing & How Faith Allies Lend Strength & Witness

Study Guide Session 3

Opening Prayer (slide 1 of 3)

Reader 1: We begin our session with a reading from *mujerista* theologian, Ada María Isasi-Díaz. Theologians and pastoral ministers coined the term, *mujerista*. It means “someone who makes a preferential option for Latina women” in their struggle for liberation, someone who is willing to stand with them in solidarity.

Isasi-Díaz writes: “Solidarity is not a matter of agreeing with, of supporting, liking, or being inspired by the cause of a group of people. Though all these might be part of solidarity, solidarity goes beyond all of them.”

Opening Prayer (slide 2 of 3)

Reader 2: "Solidarity has to do with understanding the interconnections that exist between oppression and privilege, between the rich and the poor, the oppressed and the oppressors. It also refers to the cohesiveness that needs to exist among communities of struggle.

From a Christian perspective the goal of solidarity is to participate in the ongoing process of liberation through which we Christians become a significantly positive force in the unfolding of the kin-dom of God."

Opening Prayer (slide 3 of 3)

All: God reminds us that new ways of being are possible.
Systems that reduce our dignity and exploit our labor
have been remade before,
And they can be remade again.
Help us to lift one another into that newness as we pray for:
(the people lift their prayers aloud)
Help solidarity bloom around us, O God.
Use our hands and feet and our whole selves
to the glory of your coming kin-dom. Amen.

(Source: Prayer from enfleshed and adapted by Rev. Larissa Romero, Interim
Pastor, Downtown Presbyterian Church, Nashville)

Introduction


As discussed in the readings for this session, we'll explore the topics of workers' rights and collective worker organizing.

We'll then focus on how faith allies, as part of a coalition of workers and labor allies, can live out their faith by contributing to worker organizing campaigns in myriad ways.



Learning Objectives

- To understand the protections individual workers have under the law.
- To understand what collective worker organizing is and why it is the best tool for making systemic change.
- To understand the crucial role faith allies play in collective worker organizing campaigns.



Protections for Individual Workers

Employment law protects individuals, which means...

The good

- There are many laws that protect workers' rights - see "[Know Your Rights](#)" handout on our website.
- All workers are protected by these laws irrespective of gender, race, immigration status, etc.
- There are government agencies dedicated to enforcing these laws.

The bad

- When a worker files a claim with a government agency, the process can take a long time.
- Even if an individual case is successful, it generally does not deter employers from repeating the violation in the future.
- An individual worker simply doesn't have the power to make significant systemic change.



Collective Worker Organizing

The Power of the Collective

In the labor movement, to organize means something specific. It means uniting with one's coworkers to identify shared issues and take collective action to demand improvements from the employer.



- Historically, organizing workers has dramatically improved the quality of life for hundreds of millions of people.
- Why?



The individual worker, who depends on the employer for their income, has little power to compel the employer to improve working conditions.




But the workers united, on whom the employer depends for their profit, have immense power to make positive changes in their workplace.

Organizing is about solidarity and power.



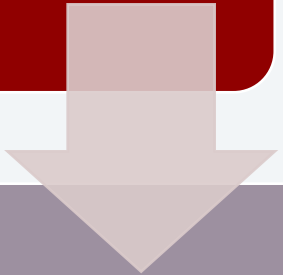
**Collective
Worker
Organizing
is Protected
by Law**



The National Labor Relations Act **protects the right of workers-even if they don't have a union-to discuss and organize to improve their wages, hours, and working conditions.** It is illegal for an employer to fire workers for discussing or working to improve wages, hours, and working conditions. **But this is key: concerted activity only extends to groups of workers-you need to be two or more.**

Who has the right to organize?

All workers—citizens, immigrants, and undocumented—have the right to organize.



The right to organize is the key to defending all other rights in the workplace.

Concerted activity also protects the right of immigrant workers to organize, regardless of their status.



Important Information About NLRB Investigations for Immigrant Workers



The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) protects most private-sector employees, regardless of their immigration status. The NLRA gives employees the right to:

- Form, join, or assist a union to negotiate concerning wages and other working conditions.
- Discuss wages and other working conditions with coworkers, a union, a worker center, a government agency, the media, or the public.
- Take collective action with coworkers to try to improve wages and other working conditions.
- Choose not to take part in any of these actions.

Below is important information for you to know about our confidential investigation process:

- Because immigration status is not relevant as to whether there has been a violation of the NLRA:
 - We will **NOT** ask you about your immigration status.
 - You **DO NOT** need to share any information with us about your immigration status.
 - You **DO NOT** need to share information about the status of your current/former coworkers.
- We only enforce the NLRA and have **NO** involvement with the enforcement of immigration laws.
- We will **NOT** share any information about you with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), or any other immigration authorities, unless you request that we share your information to assist you with seeking immigration relief, as described in the last bulleted point of this document.

The Benefits of Collective Worker Power

Simply put, we have more courage and power when we act together for justice in the workplace.

The more workers join the fight, the more likely the employer will have to listen and the less likely they will be able to retaliate.

Workers are protected by law when they act collectively.



Worker Justice Wisconsin (WJW) organized Clarion Hotel workers in Madison, WI (July-August 2022). Each full-time worker earned an increase of \$4,160 per year thanks to their organizing campaign.



The workers formed a workplace committee, wrote a petition with their demands, and delivered it to their supervisors.

After three hours of negotiations and a counter-offer from management, all workers received:

- 1) \$2/hour raise
- 2) Three more days of paid vacation
- 3) A limit of 12 rooms to clean per shift.

Construction Workers Recover 22K in Unpaid Wages! / ¡Trabajadores de la Construcción Recuperan \$22,000 en Salarios Adeudados!



A group of four workers were owed \$22,000 of unpaid wages and were caught in a chain of subcontractors who were unwilling to pay. Stevens Construction was the developer at the top of the chain, so the workers got together with WJW and pressured them to pay their stolen wages. Within two weeks, Steven paid them the full amount of \$22,000, but only because **they came together to exert pressure.**

Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha (CTUL) fought with janitors at large supermarkets like Target to improve their conditions in the Twin Cities (2010-17)




Using collective action, janitors:

- Put an end to wage theft at big-box supermarkets in the Twin Cities
- They doubled their salaries after a decade of decline.
- Pressured Target to adopt a code of conduct
- They unionized with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Worker Organizing Leads to Social Change

- Almost every single workplace issue can be solved by organizing. Low wages, unsafe conditions, unfair supervisors...organizing is a proven method of overcoming these issues.
- **When faith allies get involved, it gives workers a greater public voice and leads to social change.**



The background is a solid red color. A large white semi-circle is positioned on the right side of the frame. On the left side, there is a dark red circle. Above this circle, several short, dark red, curved lines are arranged in an arc, resembling a stylized sun or a decorative element.

The Role of Faith Allies in Worker Organizing Campaigns



Faith Leaders Give Moral Legitimacy to Worker Organizing Campaigns

As discussed in the readings for this session and in the video on the next slide, throughout history, faith leaders played pivotal roles in worker actions.

March 29, 1968 protest Photo by Richard Copley. Accessed from the [APWU website](#).




[1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike, Civil Rights: Stories to Inspire Change, Ben L. Hooks Institute, University of Memphis, 17 Mar 2020. \(2 minutes\)](#)



Faith in Focus: Kim Bobo's Call to Worker Justice

- Kim Bobo is the executive director of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP). Prior to joining VICPP 2016, Kim founded and served as executive director of Interfaith Worker Justice in Chicago, IL.
- Born in Cincinnati, Kim has a B.A. in religion from Barnard College and an M.A. in economics from the New School for Social Research. She also is a member of Wesley United Methodist Church in VA.
- [See video of her faith journey](#)

Photo credit: Interfaith Worker Justice, Flickr account, 2008. See video on the next slide.

The background of the slide is a close-up photograph of numerous colorful Easter eggs. The eggs are in various colors including pink, orange, yellow, blue, white, and grey, and are arranged in rows on a wooden surface. The lighting is bright, highlighting the textures and colors of the eggs.

“Faith communities have within their capacity many powerful values, traditions, rituals, and narratives that are sorely needed during this time--stories of redemption, compassion, and justice. We need to leverage the best of these traditions, and wrestle with those toxic elements that support the status quo. And, I would add, faith communities cannot do it with their customary tools and approaches alone. They need to engage in fruitful, collaborative, and long-haul relationships with strategic social movement partners committed to the work of justice. One key group...is the labor movement.”

**Rev. Francisco García,
Episcopal Priest, Ph.D. Student, and
Labor and Community Organizer**

General Discussion Questions

- What did you learn about the power an individual worker has to make change vs. what two or more workers can accomplish by organizing their workplace?
- From what you learned in this session, how do faith communities lend moral legitimacy to the struggle for worker justice? Why is this important?
- What troubled, surprised, or invigorated you most in this session? Did you sense any resistance within yourself? Can you name where that might be coming from?

Discussion Questions on the Readings

- According to the article by Rev. Cowser, how can “faith-based” organizing lead to social change?
- In his blog post, Rev. Francisco Garcia observes that he has encountered both working-class church members and members of affluent congregations, “who have never considered the question of how their faith and work relate to each other.” Why do you think this is the case? How might a deeper understanding of this connection, in Garcia’s words: “challenge and transform economic injustices”?



Faith in Action: Role-Play Activity

- Practice the one-on-one conversation with another member of your pilot group, a co-worker, a family member or friend.
- Then take a few minutes to reflect upon what it felt like to engage in this role-play. Why might this conversation be difficult for workers? What might be at risk for them?
- **NOTE:** *Facilitators may choose to use this activity as part of the session instead.*

Closing Prayer

All: O God, we thank you for the lives of great saints and prophets in the past, who have revealed to us that we can stand up amid the problems and difficulties and trials of life and not give in. We thank you for our foreparents, who've given us something in the midst of the darkness of exploitation and oppression to keep going. Grant that we will go on with the proper faith and the proper determination of will, so that we will be able to make a creative contribution to this world. In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Source: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., accessed from "The Prayers of Martin Luther King, Jr."