

Chicago Teamsters Council

Pope Uses Social Encyclical to Reaffirm Role of Labor Unions
Union, Worker Rights Must Be Defended, Says Pope Benedict XVI

The rights of labor unions and worker associations need to be defended more than ever, according to Pope Benedict XVI in a Social Encyclical released yesterday.

"Through the combination of social and economic change, trade union organizations experience greater difficulty in carrying out their task of representing the interests of workers," the pope said in his third encyclical, entitled "Charity in Truth."

"Workers' associations that can defend their rights must be honored as a prompt and far-sighted response to the urgent need for new reforms."

Dedicating the encyclical to labor and the economy, the pope signed the statement on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul on June 29, releasing it publicly this week.

"Violation of the dignity of human work exists when a low value is put upon labor and the rights that flow from it," said John T. Coli, President of Teamsters Joint Council 25. "These realities are rooted in Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical and must be understood to better safeguard the rights of all workers."

The Catholic Labor Network, a religious group active in Catholic labor issues, welcomed the encyclical as a chance to reflect on the debate over the Employee Free Choice Act.

"We as Americans live in a nation where workers face increasing harassment when they seek to form a union," according to the Catholic Labor Network. "In today's contentious debate over the Employee Free Choice Act, consider how we can best reconcile our attitudes towards American trade unionism with those expressed by the Holy Father."

"Charity in Truth" is the first social encyclical since 1991, when Pope John Paul II described labor unions as indispensable elements of social life in modern societies.

The Catholic Labor Network is an affiliate of the World Movement of Christian Workers and upholds the Catholic Church's social teachings surrounding the economy and labor.

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