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[ABOUT US](#) [LOCALS](#) [MEMBERS](#) [ORGANIZE](#) [BLOG](#) [WATCH](#) [CAMPAIGNS](#) [INDUSTRIES](#) [TAKE ACTION](#) [STORE](#) [MEDIA](#)

[Home](#)

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[Take Action](#)
[Blogwatch](#)

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[Top Issues](#)

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[Audio](#)
[Locals](#)

POPE ISSUES WAKE-UP CALL FOR BUSINESS COMMUNITY

July 8, 2009

The just-released third encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI yesterday called for a new global structure based on social responsibility, the dignity of workers and a respect for ethics. The pope's encyclical, which is the most authoritative document a pope can issue, also reinforced the stance of the Roman Catholic Church on trade unions.

"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, partly because Governments, for reasons of economic utility, often limit the freedom or the negotiating capacity of labour unions. Hence, traditional networks of solidarity have more and more obstacles to overcome. The repeated calls issued within the Church's social doctrine...for the promotion of workers' associations that can defend their rights must therefore be honoured today even more than in the past," the pope wrote.

In the document titled "Charity in Truth," the pope also denounced the drive to outsource work to the cheapest bidder, saying that endangers the rights of workers.

"American business leaders, no matter their religious beliefs, should take the time to read this document," said Jim Hoffa, Teamsters General President. "Treating all workers fairly should not be such a lofty goal, but because greed has been allowed to run rampant for so long, it will take time and effort for the business community to learn from their mistakes.

"This encyclical states, 'The economy needs ethics in order to function correctly—not any ethics, but an ethic which is people centered.' This is just one of the many values the Teamsters Union shares with the Catholic Church, including the Vatican's longstanding doctrine on caring for the poor," Hoffa said.

"The current economic crisis has laid bare the greed that got us to this point, and the pope's encyclical gives us a needed wake-up call on how to better the future of working people," said John Coli, International Vice President and President of Chicago's Joint Council 25, and also a board member with the Catholic Labor Network (CLN).

The Teamsters Union has a long history in joining forces with clergy and religious movements in the name of workers' rights and justice in the workplace. The CLN, in fact, has two Teamsters on its board: Coli is a board member and Tim Beaty, Teamsters Director of Global Strategies, is the CLN's vice president.