



# The Rank and File Catholic

(Connecting the teaching of the Church with the struggles of Labor)

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## Meet Fr. Mark Buckner: USW LU 633, St. Pius X

My name is Rev. Mark Buckner, I am the Pastor of Saint Pius the Tenth Parish in Calvert City, and I minister to the Kentucky State Prison System. My hometown is Owensboro, KY and in the past I was employed by local six–thirty-three plumbers and pipe-fitters. I worked in the piping industry, and during that time, due to the lack of work in the Owensboro area, I traveled to several states and met many people over the course of twelve years. Talking with them and sharing their life stories enabled me to see that I could not stay in the profession for a life time. In addition, during this time I felt called to change my lifestyle one hundred and eighty degrees. At first I wanted to be a social worker, but during this time of discernment, the call to the priesthood engulfed my heart, mind and soul. After returning to school and discerning my call to work with people allowed me to see that the time spent in the piping industry helped shape my mind in understanding the ups and downs that people endure in everyday life. Thus, as my ordination approached, I felt prepared to work with people in various levels in understanding “where” they were coming from when relating their life stories to me. In closing, as I look back on the years spent in the union, it had its ups and downs; it was that staging ground that leads me to my present position in life.

## Church & Union meet in Washington D.C. February 2005

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How refreshing, a meeting of Catholic priests, parishioners, and businessmen meeting to discuss ways as Catholics we can improve the lives of underpaid and underprivileged workers.

Respect for life is imperative if we are truly Catholic. We as a country are quite inadequate on the topic of respect for life, we as Catholics should attempt to change that. It involves so much more

than battling the highly emotional, moral and political issue of abortion. Certainly, it is appalling to fathom the number of innocent lives lost to this brutal procedure. But the lives of workers trying to feed their families and put a roof over their children’s heads are no less precious in the eyes of God. Food and shelter are basic necessities for survival. Workers should not have to choose between taking their sick child to the doctor and feeding their family for the rest of the month because they have no health insurance. The lives of Iraqi civilians, children and U.S. military being killed daily while we are at war, are also just as precious. Why then do we as Catholics focus on one issue? Should we not rally to demand respect for life in the work place? Should we as Catholics and citizens demand more questions be answered regarding our reasons for being at war and when we should withdraw? I came away from this meeting hearing a resounding “YES!”

The word union makes so many cringe. They think of mobsters, big money, dishonesty and politics. In reality, a union is an organized group that bargains with employers for fair wages and benefits in exchange for skilled labor, nothing more, and nothing less. Obviously, a company does not have to employ “union” workers to be a respectable company and provide their employees a living wage. A living wage has been mistaken for minimum wage in recent years. Minimum wage does not afford a person, much less a family, a means of survival.

How can we as Catholics embark on solving this national crisis? As we talked in this meeting it was apparent, we need to look at ourselves in the mirror. When it comes time to expand our churches, remodel our buildings and schools and conduct business with merchants, we don’t always patronize those companies that pay their employees a living wage. Many times we encourage employers who offer poor wages by simply conducting business with them. We as Catholics are an organized group. We have bargaining power with unfair employers. We as parishioners should encourage our pastors to conduct business with companies who afford their employees a living wage. One small step for the Catholic Church, one giant step for respect for life.

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The Catholic – Labor Network; <http://www.catholiclabor.org>  
Catholic Social Teaching; <http://www.osjspm.org>

**"Practicing What We Preach" Catholic Bishop's  
Statement on Unions. Mike Roby  
IBEW LU 1701, Blessed Mother**

Over one hundred years ago, Pope Leo XIII put the Church firmly on the side of the workingman in support of their rights to organize and join unions in his encyclical "Rerum Novarum" Every Pope since Leo XIII has reaffirmed the rights of workers and supported the causes of unions. Most recently John Paul II has supported even more emphatically the cause of workers and their unions. In "Laborem Exercens" John Paul II writes, "The experience of history teaches that organizations of this type are an indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrialized societies. Obviously this does not mean that only industrial workers can set up associations of this type."

Catholic Social Teaching insists Unions are significant for their critical economic role in securing just wages and adequate working conditions. A strong labor movement is still needed to protect the dignity and rights of workers, and to contribute to the overall freedom and justice of society. Both the Universal Church and the Bishops of the United States have consistently linked the dignity of work and the rights of workers to active and healthy trade unions. The Church supports unions not simply because they enable workers to have more, but because they enable workers to be more.

**The Chaplain's Corner:  
Fr. Anthony Shonis  
St. Francis deSales**

Today the nation celebrates Labor Day and we remember that this wonderful country was built on the backs of working men and women.

In 1940 political criminals came to power in Germany, Italy, and Japan but because millions of ordinary people just like you said "NO" to them they were stopped and Nazism defeated.

In this century millions of ordinary working people just like you said, "NO", to the 12 hour work day, "NO", to child labor, "NO", to unsafe working conditions.

The world today is a better place because millions of ordinary people just like yourselves in WWII and in the labor movement stood up to injustice and said "NO"!

**Pope John Paul II**

"It must be said over and over again that work is for man, not man for work... The worker is always more important than profits and machines"

Talk in Sydney, Australia, November 1986