



# Catholic Social Teaching *for Everyone*

SESSION FIVE:

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

# Opening Prayer:

## “Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers”

LORD GOD, MASTER OF THE VINEYARD,  
How wonderful that you have invited us who labor by the sweat of our brow to be workers in the vineyard and assist your work to shape the world around us.

As we seek to respond to this call, make us attentive to those who seek work but cannot find it.

Help us listen to the struggles of those who work hard to provide for their families but still have trouble making ends meet.

# Opening Prayer *cont'd*:

Open our eyes to the struggles of those exploited and help us speak for just wages and safe conditions, the freedom to organize, and time for renewal.

For work was made for humankind and not humankind for work. Let it not be a vehicle for exploitation but a radiant expression of our human dignity.

Give all who labor listening hearts that we may pause from our work to receive your gift of rest.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit that you might work through us to let your justice reign. Amen.

(Source: USCCB)

# Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

## The Dignity of Work and the Rights of the Worker

*“The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God’s creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of the worker must be respected.”*

(USCCB)

Dignity  WORK



Art by Bro. Mickey McGrath, OSFS

# CST 101

## The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers



# Basic Rights and Value of Workers

“All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions as well as to organize and join unions or other associations.”

(USCCB)



# Basic Rights and Value of Workers



“I would like to remind everyone, especially governments engaged in boosting the world’s economic and social assets, that the primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity: ‘Man is the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life.’”

*(Caritas in Veritate 25)*

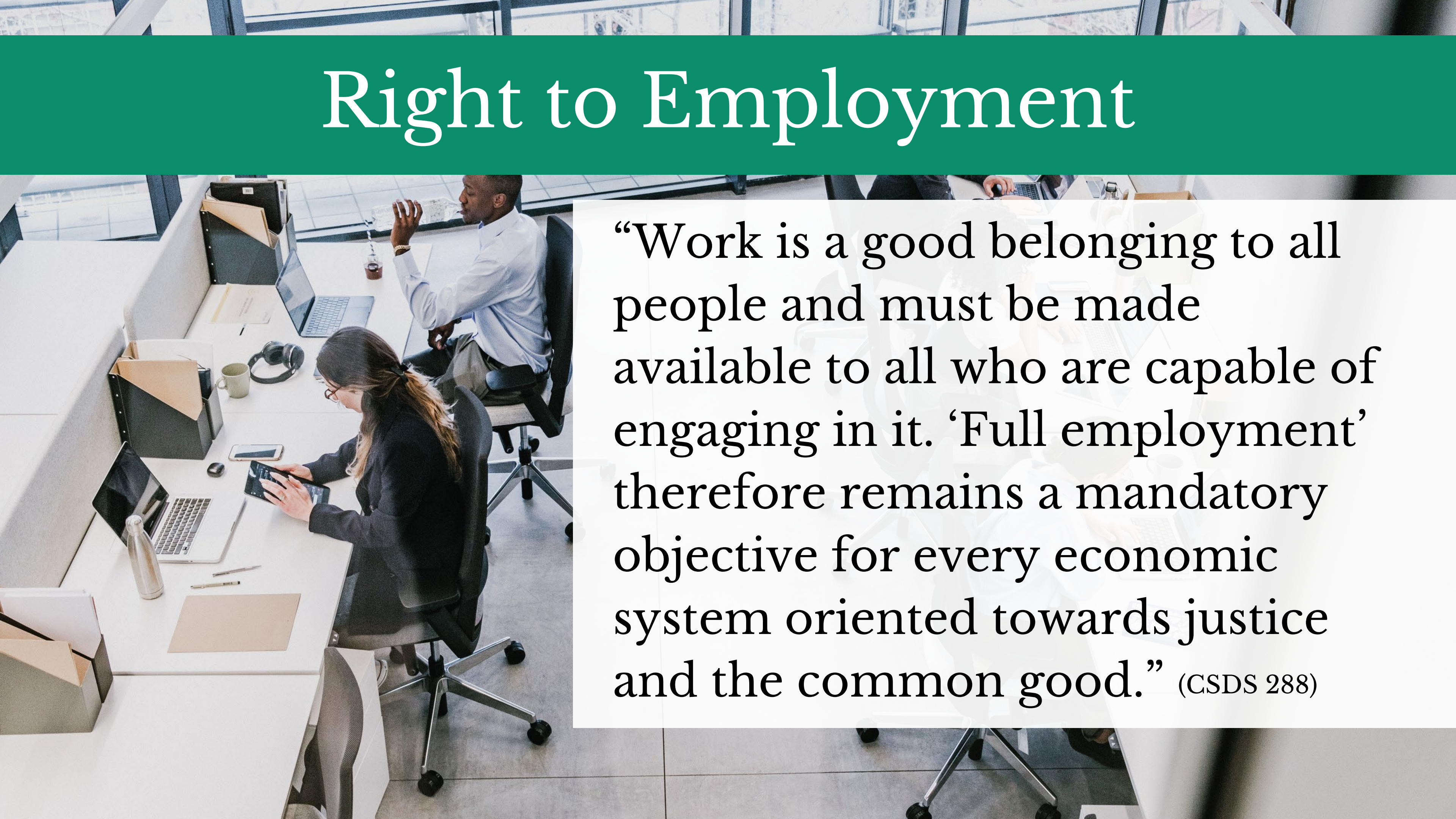
# Basic Rights and Value of Workers

“Labor also makes possible the development of society and provides for the sustenance, stability and fruitfulness of one’s family . . . .”

*(Amoris Laetitia 24)*



# Right to Employment



“Work is a good belonging to all people and must be made available to all who are capable of engaging in it. ‘Full employment’ therefore remains a mandatory objective for every economic system oriented towards justice and the common good.” (CSDS 288)

# Right to Employment

“Access to employment and to professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination: men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants. For its part society should, according to circumstances, help citizens find work and employment.”

(CCC 2433)



# A Just Wage

- “A just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice.
- “In determining fair pay both the needs and the contributions of each person must be taken into account. ‘Remuneration for work should guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level, taking into account the role and the productivity of each, the state of the business, and the common good.’
- “Agreement between the parties is not sufficient to justify morally the amount to be received in wages.” (CCC 2434)

# Social Benefits Due to Workers

Other rights of workers include “the right to appropriate subsidies that are necessary for the subsistence of unemployed workers and their families;



the right to a pension and to insurance for old age, sickness, and in case of work-related accidents; [and] the right to social security connected with maternity . . . .”

(CSDC 301)

# Social Benefits Due to Workers

“Rest from work is a right. As God ‘rested on the seventh day from all the work which he had done’ (Gen 2:2), so too men and women, created in his image, are to enjoy sufficient rest and free time that will allow them to tend to their family, cultural, social and religious life.” (CSDC 284)





# Unions


“The Magisterium recognizes the fundamental role played by labor unions, whose existence is connected with the right to form associations or unions to defend the vital interests of workers employed in the various professions. . . . Such organizations, while pursuing their specific purpose with regard to the common good, are a positive influence for social order and solidarity, and are therefore an indispensable element of social life.”

(CSDC 305)

# Unions

“There must exist between work and capital a relationship of complementarities . . . . ‘Capital cannot stand without labor, nor labor without capital.’”

(CSDC 277)

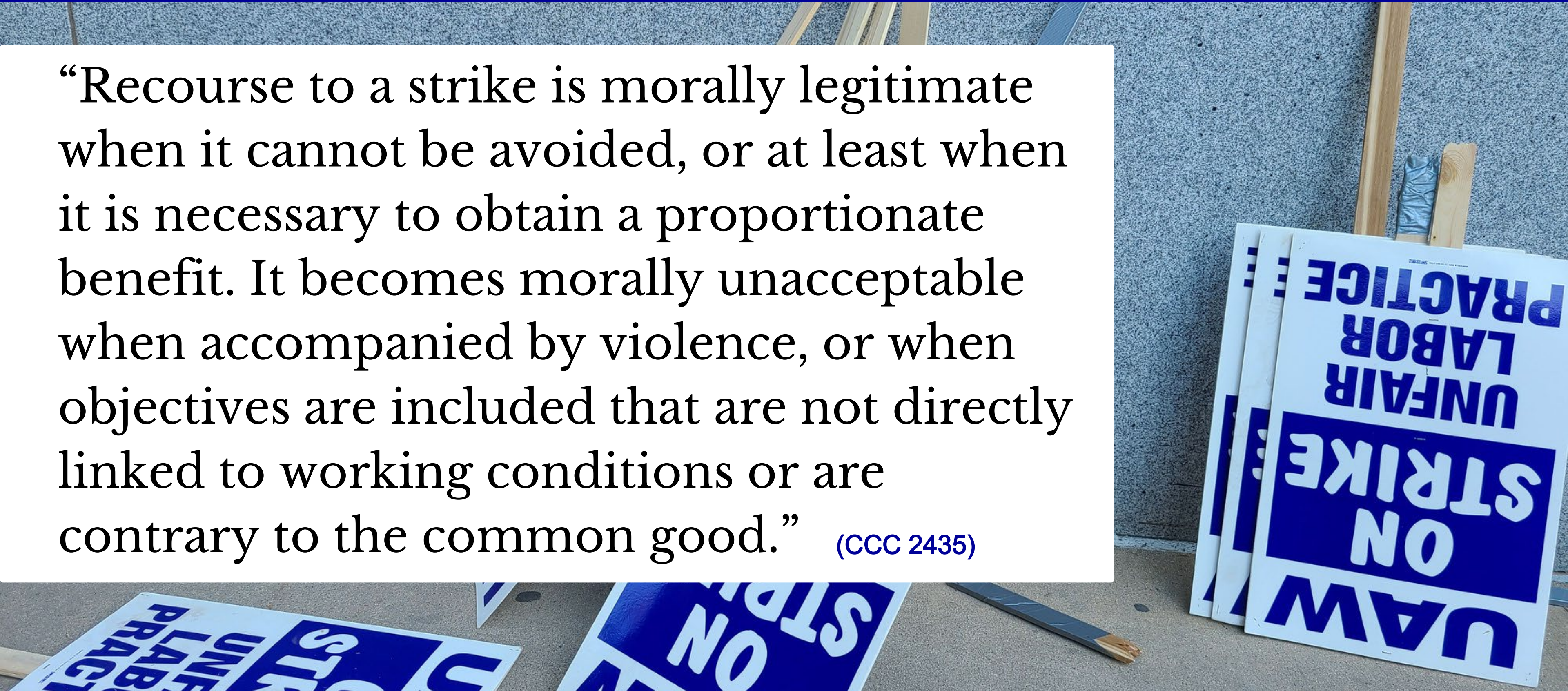


“Relations within the world of work must be marked by cooperation . . . because in every social system both ‘labor’ and ‘capital’ represent indispensable components of the process of production.”

(CSDC 306)

# Unions

“Recourse to a strike is morally legitimate when it cannot be avoided, or at least when it is necessary to obtain a proportionate benefit. It becomes morally unacceptable when accompanied by violence, or when objectives are included that are not directly linked to working conditions or are contrary to the common good.” [\(CCC 2435\)](#)



# Societal Challenges

“There is no worse material poverty than the poverty which does not allow people to earn their bread, which deprives them of the dignity of work. . . . These are the result of an underlying social choice in favor of an economic system that puts profit above man. If economic profit takes precedence over the individual and over humanity, we find a throw-away culture at work that considers humanity in itself, human beings, as a consumer good, which can be used and then thrown away.”



Pope Francis

# Societal Challenges

“Work is a fundamental right and a good for mankind . . . .  
Work is needed to form and maintain a family, to have a right to property, to contribute to the common good of the human family.”

(CSDC 287)

# Artificial Intelligence

“AI requires ‘responsibility and discernment in order to ensure it can be used for the good of all, so that it can benefit all of humanity.’”

- “AI is a tool that, when informed by sound moral principles, can help overcome many of life’s obstacles and improve the human condition.”
- “AI will only serve all when it works to assist our poorest and most vulnerable sisters and brothers . . . .”

*Continued*

# Artificial Intelligence

“AI has many labor-saving advantages, but these should not deprive a person of the dignity of work and contributing to the greater society. We are particularly concerned about job displacement, inequality, and exploitation. Policies and regulations should ensure protections for workers, promote education and job training, require public accountability for government use of AI, and require human oversight in AI-driven employment decisions.” (USCCB)

# Questions for Reflection *and Discussion*

# Work and Economic Policies

“The obligation to earn one’s bread by the sweat of one’s brow also presumes the right to do so. A society in which this right is systematically denied, in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment, cannot be justified from an ethical point of view, nor can that society attain social peace.”

St. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 43

*Where do you see the dignity of work or the rights of workers violated or protected, both in your own community and around the world?*

# Violation of Workers' Rights Leads to Poverty

“In many cases, poverty results from a violation of the dignity of human work, either because work opportunities are limited (through unemployment or underemployment), or ‘because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.’”

Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* 63

*How can our purchasing choices impact whether others' rights are violated or protected? Can peaceful protesting be a way to show that poverty that “results from a violation of the dignity of human work” is unacceptable?*

# Panel Discussion on *Importance of Work*

Through the eyes of an Afghan Immigrant

- Aziz, father
- Kramat, father's brother
- Joe Duffy, Welcome the Stranger ministry lead
- Chris Offen



# Take Action



# Examination of Conscience

(USCCB)

- As a worker, do I give my employer a fair day's work for my wages. As an owner, do I treat workers fairly?
- Do I treat all workers with whom I interact with respect, no matter their position or class?
- Do I support the rights of all workers to adequate wages, health insurance, vacation and sick leave? Do I affirm their right to form or join unions or workers associations?
- Do my purchasing choices take into account the hands involved in the production of what I buy? When possible, do I buy products by workers whose rights and dignity were respected?



# Taking Action — Welcome the Stranger

## Current / Ongoing

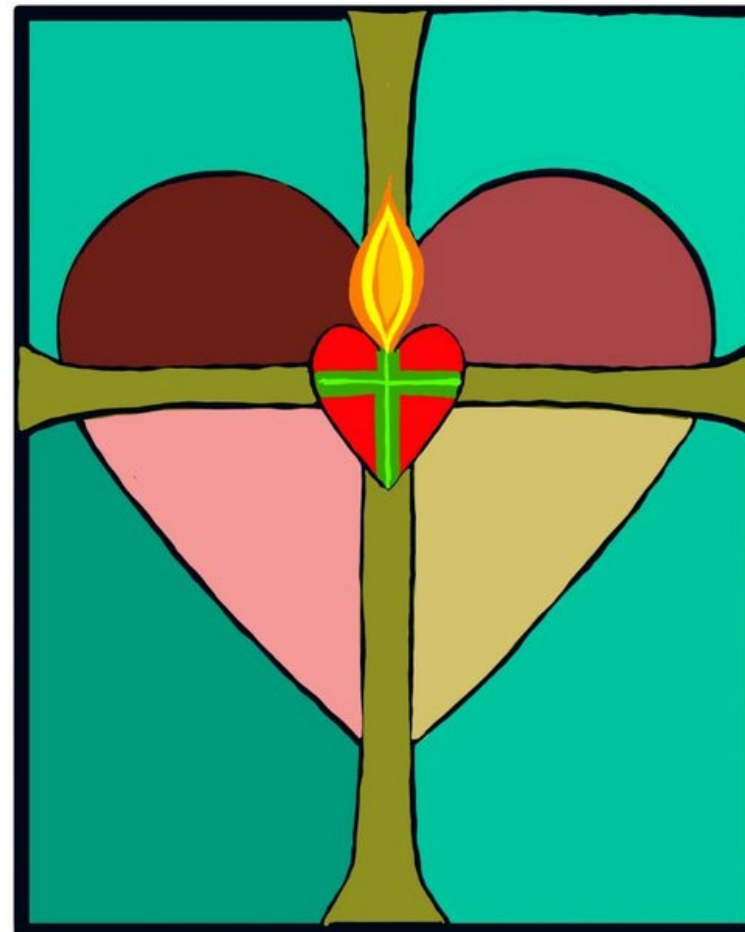
- Through Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington (CCDA), sponsored an Afghan family since April 2025 through monthly meetings, rent subsidies, job coaching, apartment furnishings, provision of tools for work, and community integration
- Preparing to do same for another refugee family beginning in May 2026
- Connected several SJN parishioners with Catholic Charities - Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) to donate furniture
- Currently the greatest need with MRS is in finding housing for arriving families and job mentoring and coaching for clients (individual volunteers)
- Other special opportunities (diaper deliveries, workshops)
- Make group aware of various opportunities throughout parish and diocese

## Prior

- With CCDA / MRS, furnished apartment for newly arrived family
- Political action with Congregation Action Network to advocate for a pathway to citizenship for all immigrants (Dreamers, TPS holders, Essential Workers)
- Fast for freedom, communication with members of Congress, demonstrations
- Opportunities to accompany immigrants through Centreville Immigration Forum
- Vaccination appointments, medical appointments, and school registrations

# Taking Action — Racial Justice Ministry

- Racism is that structure or system of discrimination based on prejudice.
  - GI Bill after WWII
  - Schools in communities of color
- Racism does not go away. It adapts.
- “The primary goal for white people working to understand racism is NOT to learn how racism impacts people of color. The primary goal [for many of us white folks] is to recognize how the system of racism shapes OUR lives, how we uphold that system, and how we might interrupt it.” (Robin DiAngelo)



**Racial Justice Ministry**  
**St. John Neumann Church**

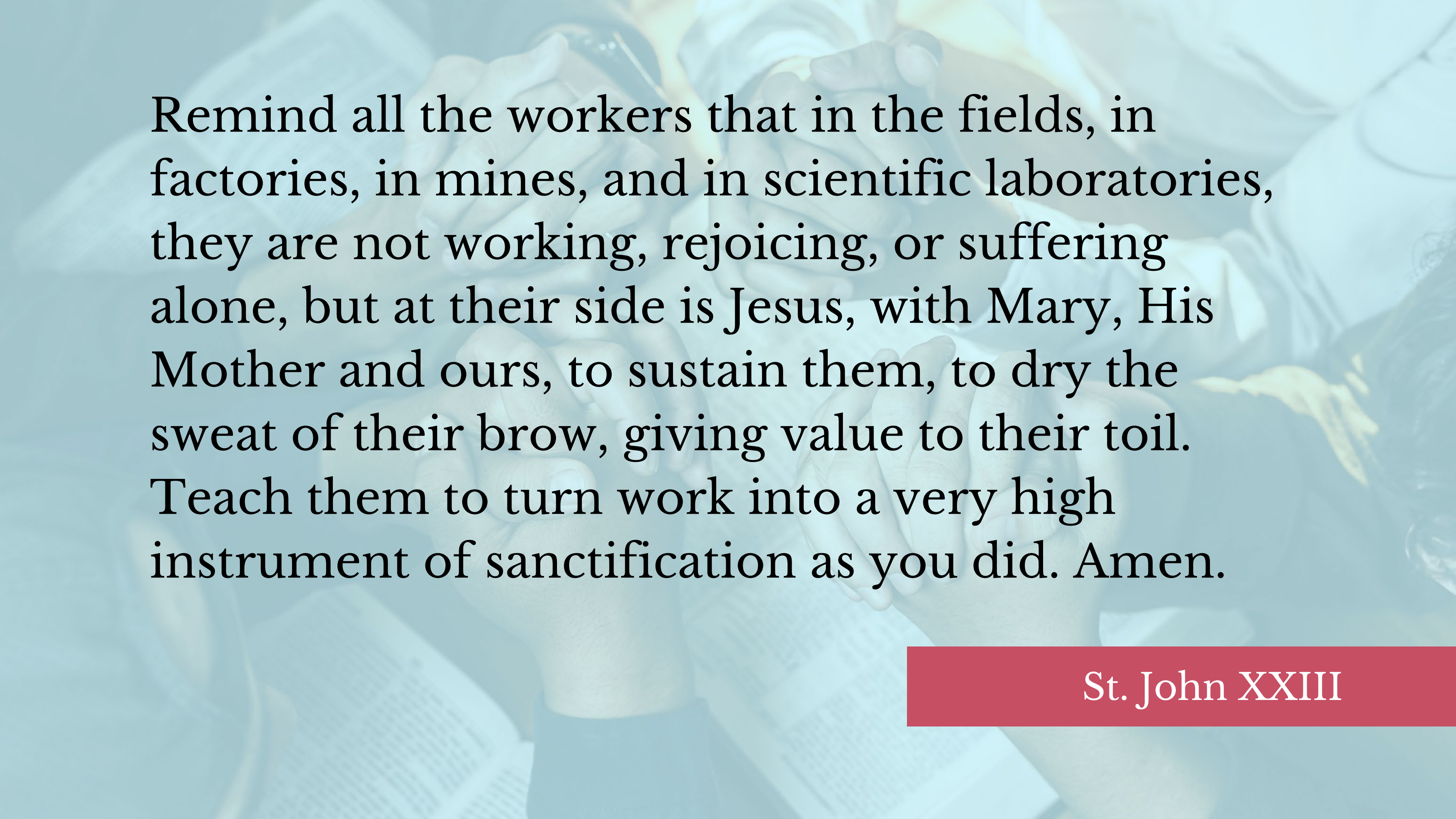
- RJM goals are to educate people about racial inequalities in our society and Church, advocate for public policies that uphold the dignity of all persons and foster a more inclusive parish community.
  - Films, talks, discussions
  - Prayer vigils
  - Multi-week JustFaith programs
  - Involvement in diocesan Peace and Justice initiatives
  - Juneteenth Celebrations of Freedom since 2023

# Closing Prayer:

## *A Prayer for Workers*

O GLORIOUS JOSEPH! Who concealed your incomparable and regal dignity of custodian of Jesus and of the Virgin Mary under the humble appearance of a craftsman and provided for them with your work, protect with loving power your sons and daughters, especially entrusted to you.

You know their anxieties and sufferings, because you yourself experienced them at the side of Jesus and of His Mother. Do not allow them, oppressed by so many worries, to forget the purpose for which they were created by God. Do not allow the seeds of distrust to take hold of their immortal souls.



Remind all the workers that in the fields, in factories, in mines, and in scientific laboratories, they are not working, rejoicing, or suffering alone, but at their side is Jesus, with Mary, His Mother and ours, to sustain them, to dry the sweat of their brow, giving value to their toil. Teach them to turn work into a very high instrument of sanctification as you did. Amen.

St. John XXIII

*Thank you for your time tonight.*

*We look forward to seeing you next Wednesday!*

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