

**LABOR**  
*in the* Pulpits  
*on the* Bimah  
*in the* Minbar

**ORGANIZING GUIDE**

A joint project of

**Interfaith Worker Justice**

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## **LABOR IN THE PULPITS IS AN EXCHANGE OF VALUES**

Labor Day weekend affords a unique opportunity to educate the religious community about unions and provides union members with a deeper appreciation of the close tie between religion and labor. Each Labor Day, in cities across the country, interfaith and ecumenical organizations, local religious leaders, and central labor councils work together to recruit union leaders and congregations to participate in Labor in the Pulpits. The program places union leaders as guest speakers in congregations to speak out about their faith, their work, and the union movement.

The goals of Labor in the Pulpits are to educate congregations about connections between faith and work, inspire new friendships between people in religious communities and unions, present congregations with opportunities for acting on the social teachings of their faith groups, and give union members a deeper experience of their faith in action.

## **WORKING TOGETHER, BUILDING AN ETHIC OF COOPERATION**

Labor in the Pulpits demonstrates the way religious communities and unions can work together to achieve social and economic justice in their community and emphasizes the common values they share. The program brings together members of the religious community and leaders of the central labor council, the federation of AFL-CIO unions in a local community, to discuss and plan Labor in the Pulpits. It serves as an important bridge between congregations and unions.

If local religious leaders and the central labor councils are unable to start a Labor in the Pulpits program this year, congregations and clergy can use sample bulletin inserts, sermon notes, songs, and special prayers available from Interfaith Worker Justice at [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org). Local clergy might focus Labor Day weekend worship services or religious education classes on workplace justice concerns, and invite representatives of the central labor council to attend local congregations.

A central labor council can initiate a Labor in the Pulpits program by identifying union leaders who are members of local congregations and asking them to approach their congregations with information about the program. (Unions could survey their membership about what congregations, if any, they belong to.) A meeting with interested clergy members then can be arranged and the program discussed. If the central labor council is planning a Labor Day event, representatives of the religious community could be invited to participate, address the gathering, or offer an invocation or closing prayer.

### **Start Organizing Now!**

Congregations often plan ahead, especially for holiday services. Optimally, organizers would start planning six months ahead for a Labor in the Pulpits program in a local community. (Please see the suggested timeline on page 3.) But to begin with a more limited program this year, a shorter timeline is possible. Expansion will be easier if a first-year effort is successful. Resources to support planning efforts are available. The time to start is now!

## **TIMELINE FOR ORGANIZING A LABOR IN THE PULPITS PROGRAM IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

### **FEBRUARY/MARCH**

#### **Make the Decision and Set the Goals**

The central labor council has the ability to recruit speakers, assign someone to work with religious leaders on matching speakers to congregations, and arrange a training program. Get a commitment for the central labor council to offer leadership in this way.

A local interfaith committee for worker justice is in a good position to recruit congregations. Get a commitment from this group to offer leadership in this aspect of the program. If a committee does not exist in your area, contact a broad-based religious organization or a local ministerial association that includes leaders from diverse religious traditions. Also consider contacting individuals such as the Catholic Diocese social action directors, Jewish Community Council social action leaders, United Methodist Conference church and society chairs, or presidents of local chapters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference or interdenominational alliances.

Set a manageable goal of placing speakers in one, five, ten, or twenty congregations. Be realistic, while simultaneously accepting a challenge.

### **APRIL/MAY**

#### **Recruit Congregations**

Recruiting congregations to participate is like organizing: It is most effective when done personally and individually.

The central labor council and/or interfaith group can send out recruitment letters to clergy persons, but most congregations will decide to participate because someone personally talked with a member of the clergy or a leader within a congregational committee (worship or social action).

Convene religious leaders – social action directors, clergy, professional staff with religious organizations – to discuss what Labor in the Pulpits might mean for their community. If possible, be certain the religious leaders invited represent a variety of faith bodies: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, and other groups that are significant in your community. At the planning meeting, review the basic outline of the program and ask everyone present to commit to recruiting a specific number of congregations. Accountable personal recruitment is most effective.

A survey of where union leaders and central labor council delegates are members of congregations can be conducted; this can be a basis for beginning outreach to congregations. A congregation is most apt to become involved when its leaders are aware that there are congregational members who have a stake in the discussion. Letters with strong follow up can add numbers of congregations to this effort.

## JUNE/JULY

### Recruit Speakers

Recruitment of speakers is most effective when labor leaders who have participated before can relate their experience to other potential speakers. A recruitment tool with quotations from experienced speakers can be helpful. Planning a Speakers Training will give confidence to those who are considering participation; attendance should be expected, especially for first-time speakers.

Labor leaders who spoke at services in previous years have had almost universally good experiences with positive feedback. Many were nervous ahead of time but found the experience rewarding. Generally those who speak once will speak again.

The recruiter can ask each participating union to commit to a specific number of speakers. Like with congregations, the most effective recruitment is done personally. (Letters of invitation generally yield a limited number of responses.) Once speakers have been identified, they should be invited to a speakers training.

## EARLY AUGUST

### Match Congregations and Speakers

Don't wait until the last minute. Begin matching speakers to congregations as soon as possible to be sure you have an appropriate number. You would not want to deny any congregations a speaker because you hadn't recruited enough, nor would you want to recruit more speakers than needed. However, a number of speakers should be recruited as alternates in case a speaker gets ill or a congregation requests one at the last minute.

Because some congregations have more than one service, you will need to decide whether one person will speak at all of the services or different people will speak. If you have enough speakers, it is better to involve more people in order to expand the number of persons involved in the program.

Some of the factors to consider for matching union speakers and congregations are:

- Languages other than English: What language is needed for the service and which speaker is fluent in that language? If a speaker is not fluent in the dominant language of the congregation, can an interpreter be found?
- Faith tradition: Union leaders tend to be most comfortable speaking in congregations with which they are familiar. Whenever possible, match a speaker with his or her own congregation. Do the best you can to place Catholics in Catholic congregations, United Methodists in United Methodist congregations, etc.
- Geography: Avoid asking people to drive long distances unnecessarily.

## MID-AUGUST

### **Conduct a Speakers Training**

Many speakers will be unsure about what to say in their presentation. Host a training session for speakers led by the religious leaders who helped recruit congregations and the central labor council. Set an expectation that every speaker will participate in the training. Ask religious leaders to plan the training session. They may consider meeting in small groups divided by faith background. For example, a rabbi might meet with all speaker assigned to synagogues.

Encourage the speakers to contact the pastor, imam, rabbi, or priest more than a week before the speaking opportunity. Such contact will usually lighten the nervousness of the guest speaker (and the congregational leaders), and will clear any questions about sound systems, suggested dress, etc.

## LATE AUGUST

### **Promoting the Program to the Media**

One of the goals of Labor in the Pulpits is to reach a wider audience with a message of the crises facing working people and the concern of the religious community. Send a Media Alert to the local press (and remember to send it to the Associated Press calendar as well) about a week before the event. Follow up with phone calls to specific press people three days before the event. Suggest specific congregations the press could visit. (Be sure to have cleared this with the congregation beforehand.) To demonstrate the breadth of participation, suggest two or three congregations from different traditions. In the contact, stress the diversity of participants, the value of bringing together these communities, and the number of participants both locally and nationally.

### **Promoting the Program Within Congregations**

Ask religious leaders to use bulletin inserts or prayers several weeks before Labor Day. Also, information about local labor issues could be included in the congregational newsletters or on websites earlier in the month.

### **Promoting the Program Within the Central Labor Council**

The central labor council should do a mailing to its delegates, including a list of union speakers and congregations that are participating. The mailing should include the list of congregations with addresses and times of the presentations. Union members should be urged to attend these services in this mailing and in the labor council newspaper.

“As a rabbi, when I speak at synagogues on Labor Day weekend, our congregations light up when they hear that the first mandates regarding worker justice come right from the book of Deuteronomy, our Torah. And as a rabbi, when I am invited to share the pulpits of my Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Unitarian colleagues, I am touched by how receptive the congregations are to a message of worker justice and how grateful they are to be reminded of our collective responsibility toward those who labor.”

– Rabbi Laurie Coskey;  
Director, Interfaith Committee  
for Worker Justice in San Diego

## SEPTEMBER

### Evaluation and Follow Up

Participating in Labor in the Pulpits can initiate new, long-term relationships and a stronger commitment to improving the lives of workers.

Evaluate what was positive and what didn't work as well. Keep track of the suggestions in order to improve the program for next year. Seek suggestions and comments from all speakers and all religious leaders whose congregations participated in the program. A standard evaluation will illicit responses from most participants. Follow up calls will be even more effective.

Each speaker and each congregation should receive a letter of thanks for participating. The religious and labor leaders who recruited the speakers should sign the letters.

Send a press release to the media with the results of the program, including the hard numbers of participants and some of the information gained from the evaluation. This contact may increase interest in next year's efforts.

Gain a commitment from the participants to come together again next year. Set a date and establish an outreach list so that contact can be made before the first meeting next year.

Add congregations that participate in Labor in the Pulpits to the mailing list of the interfaith group. If the labor council publishes a newspaper regularly, add the congregations to this mailing list as well.

### TIMELINE AT A GLANCE

<b>February</b>	Commit to outreach
<b>March</b>	Set the goals
<b>April</b>	Recruit congregations
<b>May</b>	Seek congregational commitments
<b>June</b>	Recruit speakers
<b>July</b>	Promote within congregations/unions
<b>August</b>	Match congregations Train speakers Alert media

## SAMPLE AGENDA FOR SPEAKERS TRAINING:

Labor in the Pulpits Training  
Aug. 4/ Aug. 10

Welcome

- 5:35 Grace/Prayer <sup>1</sup>
- 5:36 Share Food Together
- 5:50 Distribution of packets <sup>2</sup>  
(Explanation of packet contents)
- 6:00 Introductions (name, organization, LIP experience)
- 6:05 Pass out sign-up sheets <sup>3</sup>
- 6:06 Brochure <sup>4</sup> (take questions, suggestions)
- 6:35 Read all three lectionary readings (out loud) <sup>5</sup>
- 6:45 Discussion of texts as preparation to speak (led by clergy)
- 7:05 Further discussion/questions
- 7:15 Match with churches <sup>6</sup>

Adjourn

- <sup>1</sup> *A prayer appropriate for an interfaith gathering is important. Have it written down: extemporaneous prayer often turns into sectarian prayer.*
- <sup>2</sup> *A limited amount of information gives people confidence that they can prepare; too much information makes them feel overwhelmed. Include a cover sheet that explains each page of the handout.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Gather the best means for communicating quickly with the speakers in case you need to contact them after the training and before the speaking event. (Suggest they check email the night before the presentation in case any information has changed.)*
- <sup>4</sup> *See IWJ's Speaker Training Guide for tips on preparing for speaking.*
- <sup>5</sup> *The Lectionary Readings are the assigned texts in most mainline Protestant and Catholic Christian denominations. (The Parshiot is the equivalent for readings within the synagogue.) If your training is interfaith, or if working with Evangelical Christians who don't use the Common Lectionary, the group could be separated into faith traditions at this point. Have someone prepared to talk about possible texts in each tradition.*
- <sup>6</sup> *The staff person responsible for assigning speakers can be matching individual speakers to particular congregations as the agenda is followed. It is not essential for individuals to know their assignment by the time they leave, but it is helpful. If someone from that congregation is present at the training, take advantage of the opportunity to introduce the speaker and congregational representative.*

## ENGAGING CONGREGATIONS AFTER LABOR DAY

- Send a thank you letter to the clergy or the appropriate committee. Include a brochure about the group, if one exists. Invite someone from the congregation to participate in upcoming activities of your religion and labor group. If no group exists, ask the person if they would like to be added to the IWJ mailing list in order to receive *Faith Works*.
- Send a letter to each person whose name you collected at the worship service. If you are well prepared before Labor Day weekend, you could have the letter already written so that volunteers could easily put a mailing out immediately after the holiday.
- Invite them to support your work financially and tell them how.
- Include a P.S. on the letter. Research shows that people read the beginning of a letter and the P.S. first.
- Include a return-addressed reply device that lets them tell you how they want to become active in your group and also provides a way for them to send financial support.
- In November or December, send a fundraising letter reminding them of your work and asking them for support.
- Always watch for individuals you may want to invite onto your board, if that is appropriate.
- Start planning to participate again next year!

Labor in the Pulpits is a joint effort of Interfaith Worker Justice and the AFL-CIO. For most Christian and Unitarian Universalist congregations, Labor in the Pulpits is the appropriate title for the program. The parallel program for synagogues is Labor on the Bimah, and for the Muslim community it is Labor in the Minbar.

Interfaith Worker Justice has been building a library of resources to support the Labor in the Pulpits programs, including educational materials for Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Within the Christian community, special resources are available for United Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Catholics. Reflections on the Common Lectionary (for Christians) and worship/educational materials on specific worker justice issues and campaigns are also available on the website.

For more information, contact Kristi Sanford, 773-728-8400 ext. 45, or visit the IWJ website [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)

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