

Worker Justice Quiz

Labor Day weekend offers us the opportunity to question how our nation is treating workers throughout the country. As people of faith, we have a special concern for immigrant workers, those who toil in sweatshops, and those who work but still live in poverty. Take this quiz of the facts to look at the areas of challenge for our nation.

- How many adults work full-time but earn poverty-level wages?
a) one out of ten c) one out of four
b) one out of five d) one out of two
- How many Americans are without health insurance?
a) 22 million c) 44 million
b) 33 million c) 55 million
- What percentage of families go into bankruptcy because of health care costs?
a) 90 percent c) 30 percent
b) 50 percent d) 10 percent
- Do sweatshops exist in the U.S.?
a) No c) In ten major cities
b) In a few garment shops d) Throughout the nation
- Why do 42 million workers say they would join unions if they could?
a) Higher wages c) Respect on the job
b) Health care benefits d) All of the above
- What percentage of workers are in unions?
a) 50 percent c) 13 percent
b) 27 percent d) 5 percent



Quiz Answers

1. Full-time Workers Earning Poverty Wages: c) Poverty wages are those at minimum wage or just above. These low wages are not enough to lift a family out of poverty. In 2003, poverty wages were those that paid \$18,400-a-year or less. Even though \$18,400 is the official poverty line guideline for a family of four, most people believe the government poverty line figures are inadequate because they do not reflect the high costs of housing, child care and healthcare. Nonetheless, using this poverty line figure, one in four workers earn poverty wages.

2. Health insurance coverage: c) Approximately 44 million Americans, primarily low-wage workers and their children do not have health insurance. The numbers of people without health insurance coverage continues to increase each year.

3. Bankruptcy because of health care costs: b) Health care costs are a major cause of approximately 50 percent of family bankruptcies. In 1999, there were 1.1 million personal bankruptcies – 326,441 were directly caused by illness or injury to family members, while 267,575 had substantial medical bills as a contributing factor.

4. Do sweatshops exist: d) A sweatshop is a routine violator of labor laws. It is characterized by low wages, unsafe working conditions and disrespectful treatment of workers. Sweatshops often rely on immigrant workers who are viewed as more vulnerable and less likely to complain about working conditions. According to the Department of Labor there are large industries in the U.S. that are routine violators of labor laws and many are characterized by low wages, unsafe working conditions and disrespectful treatment of workers. Industries in the U.S. that often fit sweatshop definitions include farm labor, landscape work, poultry and meatpacking, many nursing homes, garment factories, and many restaurants. Sweatshops appear to be increasing, not declining.

5. Why workers want to be represented by unions: d) Workers represented by unions have higher wages, better benefits and an ongoing voice in what happens at work. Although studies vary somewhat, most show that union jobs pay roughly 20 percent more than nonunion jobs. The difference between union and non-union wages is even higher for African American, Latino and women workers. Collective bargaining also makes a huge difference in worker access to decent pensions and health insurance coverage. Union workers are 53 percent more likely than nonunion workers to get health insurance benefits through their jobs and are nearly five times more likely to have guaranteed, defined-benefit pension plan coverage.

6. Percent of Workers in Unions: c) Only about 13 percent of the total workforce is represented by unions – a higher percentage in public sector jobs and a lower percentage in private sector jobs. Unfortunately, many workers who would like better wages, benefits and a voice in the workplace are afraid to organize unions because of anti-union messages in the workplace. Unions are an essential element for a just democracy and an important mediating institution for many workers, especially low-wage and immigrant workers.