

**There is Power in Union:  
A Unitarian Universalist Guide to Supporting Worker Justice**



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## **Introduction**

This is intended to be a simple, introductory guide for Unitarian Universalists who want to support Worker's Rights. By Worker's Rights, I mean the freedom of working people to be treated with respect and dignity, to have a voice in their working lives, equitable pay and benefits, safe working conditions, and the freedom to speak and act collectively without interference or fear of reprisal.

Before becoming a Unitarian Universalist Minister, I worked as a union organizer, educator and advocate. When I was organizing, I always hoped for more active support from clergy and congregations – and sometimes I got it! Support from Priests, ministers congregations and other religious people played a major role in many of our “victories” and comfort in our “losses.”

Before I left the union to go to theological school, I promised myself and my sisters and brothers in the labor movement that I would do my best to be the kind of minister struggling workers and organizers hope for. This guide is one small way I hope to keep my promise, giving Unitarian Universalists a new set of tools to use in our struggle for justice.

Throughout this paper, I use the word “union.” In part, this is because my background is in the “organized” labor movement. There are many, many, working people who are also fighting for justice outside of the labor movement, and this guide is not intended to exclude them.

I choose to use the word, “union”, because it best describes what happens when groups of individuals come together in a spirit of mutual support, respect and love. In this sense, the concept of union is one of the most beautiful and important “spiritual” words in my vocabulary. Whether people are organizing through the “official” mechanisms of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) or through “unsanctioned” means – they are nonetheless organizing themselves into a relationship of “union” with one another, where “an injury to one, is an injury to all.”

Although there are many legal and technical differences between how “NLRB” and “non-NLRB” organizing works, the roles religious communities can play are largely the same.

## **Why Unitarian-Universalists Support Worker Justice**

Although a Unitarian Universalist basis for supporting justice for working people may seem self-evident, it is nonetheless important to be clear about the moral and theological foundation of our justice-making. This section will briefly examine some of the threads in our religious tradition and in our shared contemporary theologies which call us to support worker justice.

## Tradition

Unitarians and Universalists have been actively supporting justice for working people since the birth of our movement in America. As early as 1838, William Ellery Channing, one of the chief architects of Unitarianism, added his substantial public support to the “Workingman’s Associations” that were forbears to our present day labor unions.<sup>1</sup> He believed that working people were the children of God, and had the same tremendous potential as any human being, but that they could not truly manifest that potential until the gross economic and social exploitation of the day were overcome.

Not long after Channing, Theodore Parker began speaking out about economic exploitation (See his sermon, “Poverty”, for example), and was keenly supportive of the work and vision of Brook Farm, an utopian community founded by Unitarian ministers. The Brook Farmers were deeply involved the workingmen’s movement and had abolished all work and pay inequality within their own community.<sup>2</sup>

Following in this vein, the great Unitarian minister John Haynes Holmes argued that individual salvation was impossible without social salvation, the liberation of all people from whatever shackles them. He described poverty and the attendant injustice that perpetuates it, as a “social crime”, writing that,

*“Poverty, in this age as in every age, in our country as in every country, is primarily due to the fact of social injustice – that employment cannot be had by those who are ready to work; that employment even when regular is not paid enough to enable the faithful and efficient workman to guard against illness, to protect his widow from dependence, or to provide for his own old age; that insufficient wages force thousands of families to crowd into unhealthy tenements, to eat insufficient food, and to wear insufficient clothing, thus paving the way for physical weakness and disability; that accidents rob the wage earners without compensation from society; that taxes are inequitable, throwing the chief burden upon the poor instead of upon the rich; that natural resources, which are the basis of all wealth, are in the hands of a few instead of under the control of society at large, and are thus exploited for the benefit of the few and not for the sake of the common welfare; that the distribution of wealth is grossly unfair and disproportionate – in the final analysis, that society is organized upon a basis of injustice and not of justice, and is permeated by the spirit of selfishness and not of love.”<sup>3</sup>*

Holmes wrote these words at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and although almost a hundred years have passed since then, not much has changed. But Unitarian Universalists remain faithful to the vision of our tradition as passed down to us by all who have gone before.

Our fidelity to that commitment has been recently articulated by the General Assembly of Unitarian Universalist Congregations, which resolved, in 1997, that:

*“The Unitarian Universalist Association urges its member congregations and individual Unitarian Universalists in the United States...to work specifically in favor of mechanisms such as: reform of labor legislation and employment standards to provide greater protection of workers, including the right to organize and bargain collectively, protection from unsafe working conditions and protection from unjust dismissal.”<sup>4</sup>*

## **Our Principles and Purposes**

Aside from our long tradition of supporting justice for working and poor people, we can also reflect upon our seven principles. Unitarian Universalists do not adhere to any one creed or statement of belief, but our Principles and Purposes do serve as a touch point of common moral and ethical common ground for most of us. This section will focus on those of our Principles that are most directly relevant to issues of worker justice.

*We covenant to affirm and promote*

### **The inherent worth and dignity of every person:**

Being told that one has “inherent worth and dignity” is a meaningless and hollow statement unless that person has the ability to live their day to day lives accordingly. People know that they are worthy of respect when they are treated with respect; people know that they matter when they are treated like they matter. When people have no voice on the job, and have to struggle from month to month just to survive (much less face inevitable emergencies like serious illness, injury or other event), their very “humanness” can feel reduced to the state of “non-person”, or serfdom. Without the ability to speak up and act up; to advocate for themselves and their co-workers, not only is the inherent dignity of workers denied, but even the expression or assertion of that dignity can result in discipline, demotion or termination.

People often assume that workers form unions primarily to fight for higher wages or better health insurance. This is true, to a point, but my own experience as a union organizer has shown me something quite different.

In almost every case, workers I helped organize were prepared to risk everything – job, house, security, healthcare. They knew they were likely to be disciplined or fired for supporting the union, but they kept on anyway. They didn’t risk everything for a 50 cent raise. Ultimately, the driving force behind any successful organizing campaign I have ever been part of is the need to be treated with respect and dignity, the need to have a voice in one’s own working life. That is something people are willing to risk everything for.

Therefore, if we want to support and affirm the inherent worth and dignity of working people, we have to actively challenge the economic, legal and social systems that undermine or block the expression of that worth and dignity.

### **Justice, equity and compassion in human relations:**

As Unitarian Universalists, this Principle calls us to work for a world with a level playing field. This is challenging in a society that, as John Haynes Holmes put it at the start of this guide, “is organized upon a basis of injustice and not of justice, and is permeated by the spirit of selfishness and not of love.” But challenging as the first part of the equation is, we cannot stop there. This Principle calls us even deeper, far beyond a level playing field – to compassion and empathy. This is one of the most difficult things for many of us to do, for to practice real empathy is to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, to understand and accept that it is only by accident (of birth, skin tone, gender etc) that we are who we are. It means accepting that there is nothing more “special” or more “deserving” about us than about anyone else. This Principle requires us to not only fight for fairness, justice and equity – but also to recognize and challenge our own privilege.

This Principle reminds us that in our fight for justice and equity, we can never work from a self-perception of superiority, benevolence or pity. We can only do this work from a position of solidarity and love, recognizing that just as poor and working people cannot be blamed for their condition, neither should we be lauded for ours.

### **The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large:**

If there is any one characteristic that defines Unitarian Universalists, it is our fidelity to the free democratic process. This has been the case from the very beginnings of our roots in congregationalism. For most UUs, there are few rights as cherished as the right to make choices, to hold beliefs and to live accordingly.

Yet working people who try to form unions do so in a profoundly undemocratic context. For example:

- One out of every five workers who actively support a union are fired during an organizing campaign.
- 92% of employers force employees to attend mandatory anti-union meetings, while it is illegal for pro-union workers to respond.
- Over 50% of all employers threaten to close the plant if the union wins, although less than 1% actually do close after election day.
- And to add insult to injury, 34% of employers refuse to negotiate a contract with workers even AFTER the workers have formed a union through the National Labor Relations Board! This is exactly the same tactic tyrants around the world use when elections don’t go their way – they just ignore the results.

It does not take much imagination to transpose these statistics to other democratic election processes. What kind of country would we be if this is the way the “government” behaved?

As University of Oregon Professor Gordon Lafer writes,

*“At every step of the way, from the beginning to the end of a union election, NLRB procedures fail to live up to the standards of U.S. democracy. Apart from the use of secret ballots, there is not a single aspect of the NLRB process that does not violate the norms we hold sacred for political elections. The unequal access to voter lists; the absence of financial controls; monopoly control of both media and campaigning within the workplace; the use of economic power to force participation in political meetings; the tolerance of thinly disguised threats; the location of voting booths on partisan grounds; open-ended delays in implementing the results of an election; and the absence of meaningful enforcement measures – every one of these constitutes a profound departure from the norms that have governed U.S. democracy since its inception.”<sup>5</sup>*

Lafer goes on to examine the election procedures used in countries that the United States and the United Nations routinely criticizes for their abuses of democracy, like the Ukraine and Armenia. He points out that the union election process is even LESS “free and fair” than the ones in some far-away “totalitarian states” that our government so piously criticizes.

The numbers speak for themselves. Over 60 million non-union workers polled say they want a union in their workplace, but only 15.4 million actually have one!<sup>6</sup> Does that sound like democracy to you?

This Principle, the right of conscience and support for democracy, calls us to demand meaningful reform of existing undemocratic labor laws and practices, regardless of whether we support unions or not. Unitarian Universalists believe that everyone should have the right to speak and act according to her/his conscience and to be able to express themselves, free of coercion, within the democratic process.

### **The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all:**

Nelson Mandela’s famous proclamation that, “none are free until all are free” resonates deeply within the hearts of most Unitarian Universalists. Indeed, it is the spirit behind this Principle. We cannot be free at the expense of others. We cannot have any kind of “beloved community”, much less a beloved “world community” without peace, freedom and justice for all people.

We can delude ourselves into thinking that it is so, that “our” communities are fair and free and just, but closing our eyes to the reality of life as experienced by others does not make them go away.

As long as coal miners die young and in agony so that we can have cheap electricity; so long as farm workers and their children become desperately ill (with no access to health care) because of exposure to deadly chemicals that help make our food cheaper; as long as workers at our favorite “big box” store can be forced to work overtime without pay

and to skip lunch breaks so that we can consume cheap consumer goods, goods which are manufactured by people whose working conditions are even more horrible – we are complicit, whether actively or passively. As Abraham Heschel, the great Jewish thinker and scholar observed, we live in a world where “few are guilty, but all are responsible.”<sup>7</sup> This Principle reminds us that I am not free until you are free; and that an injury to one really is an injury to all. This is what “community” really means.

### **Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part:**

We are all connected. We are all interdependent. This Principle is the embodiment of the old West African proverb, “We are. Therefore I am.” Christian Liberation theologian Nancy Eiesland sums this principle up very well, and with few words. “Interdependence”, she writes, “is not a possibility to be wished for from a position of power, but a necessary condition for life. This interdependence is the **fact** of both justice and survival. We can *embody* practical interdependence, not simply *willing* to be interrelated from a position of power, but *depending* on it from a position of need.”<sup>8</sup>

We are fundamentally interrelated, and this Principle challenges us to support and nurture the whole web of life, not just our little strands. The relative health and well-being of workers in this country and abroad relates very directly to our own health and well being: physical, social and spiritual.

### **The Toolbox: or What Can We Do?**

The first thing we need to be clear on here is our role. What role(s) is most appropriate? Where do we fit in?

Although every congregation will answer these questions somewhat differently, there are a few main themes in common. Our primary role will, in most cases, be that of Ally, not Organizer. Workers who want our support will generally already have their own leaders and basic strategy, and often the support of trained organizers from labor unions or other kinds of organizations.

What religious communities can offer that many groups of workers may lack are: our moral authority, our financial and institutional resources, our community leadership and connections – and, most of all, the willing hands and hearts of many of our congregants.

Our primary task, then, is to be the best ally we can be, always remembering that this is their struggle, not ours; and that we are here to offer support, not leadership or direction.

### **The BIG Picture**

There are two primary arenas where our efforts to support worker justice can take place. The first is in the arena of “big issues.” This is the macro level of education and involvement, the arena of discussion and theory statistics.

There are some valuable things to be done and gained here, but it is all too easy to fall into a “discuss instead of do” trap on this level. When we deal with “issues” on a macro level we can easily lose sight of the very real, breathing, loving struggling people for whom none of this is theoretical. When we “issue-ize” we can get stuck on an intellectual plane that rarely results in concrete actions that impact people’s lives. That said, it is important to have a basic understanding of the issues, just so long as that educative/discussion process does not become a mere proxy for action not taken.

And there are things going on at the National level, for example, where Unitarian Universalist congregations can really make a difference. As I write this the Senate has just voted to pass the “Employee Free Choice Act” (H.R. 800, S. 1041). It is supported by a bipartisan coalition in Congress, and would level the playing field for workers and employers and help rebuild America’s middle class. It would restore workers’ freedom to choose a union by:

- Establishing stronger penalties for violation of employee rights when workers seek to form a union and during first-contract negotiations.
- Providing mediation and arbitration for first-contract disputes.
- Allowing employees to form unions by signing cards authorizing union representation.

But although the Senate voted to pass it, they have been unable to garner enough votes to overcome a Republican filibuster and Presidential Veto threat. This is an excellent thing for UU congregations to get involved in on a National level. By calling, writing and even visiting our Senators and Congresspeople across the country we can send a strong message about where our UU values lie and make the successful passage of this legislation that much more likely.

The Employee Free Choice Act is just one example of the kinds of opportunities for action there are for us at a State or National level. These kinds of struggles are happening all the time, and are just waiting for us to get involved!

## **Organize Locally!**

Although all that National stuff can be exciting, and certainly appeals to that part of us that wants to see sweeping and systemic change, the real victories for working people are waiting for us at the local level. That is where we can best leverage our power, build relationships and influence our communities.

Remember, from a congregational point of view, the question is not whether unions are good or bad, or whether this particular workplace needs a union or not – that is not really our business. The place we need to start from on a congregational level is at the most basic level: we want to support the democratic process, we want to support the fundamental rights of workers to speak and organize freely, and we categorically oppose all attempts to limit free speech and democracy through coercion or intimidation.

Different congregations will feel differently about worker's rights issues, as will all the individuals in all of those congregations. While congregants may not be able to come to collective decisions about any particular organizing drive, most (if not all) will agree with the values expressed in the previous paragraph. This, then, is our starting point.

## **Put Yourself on the Map**

Once you have a group of people who want to support worker justice, you have to put yourselves on the map. Worker struggles are shrouded in secrecy most of the time, as workers are afraid of management retribution if they are found out (remember: 1 out of every 5 union supporters will be fired). Because of this, it is hard for any congregation, even with the best of intentions, to know who might welcome their support!

So open up the Yellow Pages or warm up your fingers and start "Googling." Make sure that if there is a local "Jobs with Justice" group they know who you are and that you want to support workers. You can also contact local unions, especially "service" unions. These are unions like the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), UNITE HERE, the United Farmworkers of America and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). These are all unions that often work with the most vulnerable workers, like janitors, retail workers, Farmworkers and other service workers. These are typically low-wage workers who are especially likely to face vicious and illegal anti-union campaigns if they try to improve their working conditions.

To contact a local union, someone from the group can send a letter or (better yet) just call and ask to speak with the Executive Director or Organizing Director. Explain who you are and what kinds of support you are prepared to offer, both as a group and as a congregation. That way, when a group of workers really needs some allies, the union will know who to call.

Part of putting your congregation on the map includes contacting other community groups and non-profits with similar interests. Examples of these kinds of groups include the American Friends Service Committee and ACORN, as well as other liberal churches and temples.

## **How Can We Help?**

What do you do on that fateful day when your phone rings and there is a group of scared nursing home employees on the other end?

First and foremost – **listen!** Don't assume that you know how to help or what is needed. Don't assume that you know how they feel, what they are experiencing or what they hope for. Just listen. Let them tell you what it is they need. Just listening deeply, intently and responsively accomplishes a lot all by itself – listening is one of the best ways in the world to show someone how much you respect them.

## **The Practical**

Much of the time, the kinds of things that will be most immediately helpful to workers are extremely practical in nature. A safe place to meet, for example. Remember, employees who get caught trying to form a union are likely to be fired or otherwise retaliated against. Over 75% of all employers hire private “Union-busting” companies to help them crush the union drive. One of the primary ways they do this is by spying on employees, both on and off the worksite. In order to deal with this, workers need a safe and discreet place to meet, away from the real or imagined eyes of their employer.

Thus, offering workers a room at the church to meet in is one of the most valuable offerings anyone can make. This not only serves on a practical level, but is psychologically powerful as well. Years ago, when I was organizing a country hospital in a small town, a local Episcopal church offered to let us meet in their community room. It was just what the doctor ordered! Not only did the workers have a safe place to meet and talk, but they also felt the church’s moral authority supporting them. They knew that the church was standing with them, and that what they were doing was “good.” It is impossible to quantify the effect that this kind of indirect religious support can have on workers who are scared and anxious and uncertain. This is something most of our congregations should be able to do easily.

Another invaluable contribution many congregations can make is the use of office equipment. Workers often do not have the resources to pay for all the flyers and letters they need to produce to let their co-workers know what the union is doing. Employers, on the other hand, are always vastly better-resourced, and take full advantage of this fact. By offering use of photocopiers, computers and other basic office equipment, we can help workers get their message out much more effectively – even though the deck will probably always be stacked against them in this regard.

Another practical yet essential offering a congregation can make is to support picketing or striking workers with basic supplies, like food and water. Employers often know that they can just “wait it out” and that when the workers get hungry enough or cold enough, they will give up. The gift of food and water then, is another way to help workers overcome the “resource gap” between them and their employers, making it possible to keep on keeping on, no matter how cold it gets.

Much like offering a meeting space, offering food and other supplies is an ancient and powerful spiritual offering. It tells the workers that you support them, that they are not alone, and that you will stand with them in their struggle. Such a gift, especially from a church, nourishes the spirit. Picketing is exhausting work, and can often feel futile. Eating a bowl of hot chili that a stranger has brought you on a cold fall day can recharge batteries and restore hope like almost nothing else.

## **The Political**

I have already introduced the “moral authority” benefit of religious groups supporting workers, even on the most basic of levels. Congregations, ministers and other groups can also wield the power of their moral authority much more directly. Again, not all congregations and individuals will be comfortable supporting workers in this way. It may be that this level of involvement is one that needs to be approached patiently, after starting with the practical “baby steps” outlined above.

Another consideration is that while the “voice” of the whole congregation may be more powerful in the community, individual groups within the congregation can often speak out effectively, even if they do not claim to speak for the whole congregation. For example, the “Interfaith Worker Justice” group can speak and act in its own right in many cases, although this will vary from congregation to congregation and should be considered very carefully.

One very effective political tactic is to contact local politicians to voice your feelings about what any given group of workers are experiencing. The Catholic church has often done a very good job of this, with local Priests pressuring politicians to intercede when workers or other community members are being oppressed.

For Unitarian Universalists, ending oppression is a foundational religious value, and it is therefore totally appropriate for us to work with politicians to overcome that oppression. In my experience, local politicians (City Councilors, State Legislators and even Congresspeople) will respond very positively when put on the spot! Workers often feel afraid, so the public intervention of a politician makes them feel less vulnerable and more confident, even as it simultaneously puts management on notice that they are being watched – carefully – and they need to play by the rules.

Politicians of all descriptions rarely have much first-hand contact with citizens, so when ordinary constituents call them on the phone or stop by their offices, they sit up and take notice. Many politicians are especially sensitive to the voices of religious people and communities. While the Christian Right has done an exceptional job of leveraging their religious voices in the political sphere, religious liberals have not. To remain silent in the public sphere does not ultimately help protect the division of church and state or anything else. All it does is to allow oppression to continue unchecked – and thus our silence becomes our complicity.

If we are to play a transformative role in our society and our world, we must begin to let our faith speak publicly. When we speak up in solidarity with workers, we will be heard!

A few years ago I was working with a group of workers at an Assisted Living facility. Most of the workers were immigrant women from Central America, Mexico, Africa and Eastern Europe. Their employer told them that if they supported the union they could not only be fired, but deported from the country! No amount of my explaining could allay

their fears. So I contacted the Mayor of the city, the City Council, two State Legislators and a United States Congressperson – all of whom were happy to write open letters to the employees and the employer, letting the workers know that they would not be deported and that they would continue monitoring the union drive from there on out.

The Congressperson (in the form of a staff person) and the two State Legislators agreed to meet with the workers at a Denny's one Saturday morning. Over coffee and cheap breakfasts, they listened to the workers complaints and reassured them of their rights. It had an incredible impact on both the workers and on management, who were much more careful and ethical than they had been! Ministers, congregants and workers can all meet together with politicians, and these meetings can be extremely effective.

Again, it is not for us to lead or organize these meetings. That responsibility lies with the workers themselves. Our role is to be willing to stand with workers. If a group of workers ask us to go with them for a meeting with “the Boss”, then we should do so as allies and supporters – nothing more.

Congregations can also write joint letters with other congregations and community groups. These joint efforts can be directed at politicians or at employers. Letting a misbehaving employer know that the congregation is encouraging its members to boycott until they adjust their behavior, for example, can be incredibly effective.

Another powerful tactic is for a Minister or congregational task force to offer to meet with employees and management, so that the employer knows the congregation is watching closely and will publicly “cry foul” if necessary. The single most effective tool to protect workers is to keep a bright light shining throughout the process. The kinds of union-busting tactics workers are punished with are not only immoral, but often illegal. Employers never want to be seen as a bad citizen by the community, and they especially want to avoid being singled out by the religious community. So they are much more likely to play fair when they know they are being watched.

Letters to the Editor are often productive as well, although less directly influential than some of the other strategies I have outlined. But again, any route you choose must be one that fits into the overall culture and social location of the wider congregation. If baby-steps are what the congregation is ready for, then by all means – use baby steps! Freelance “cowboy” behavior, no matter how well principled, will almost always move your congregation farther away from the kind of justice-making many of us hope for! Open communication, patience and baby steps are all important if you are to be successful in the long run.

## **The Pastoral**

Workers, whether by forming a union or through other kinds of organizing, are often under tremendous pressure. They are often risking (quite literally) everything: their jobs, homes, healthcare – everything! This invariably takes a huge toll on people, both physically and spiritually. Relationships suffer and people burn out under the stress of

fighting an uphill battle against an opponent who does not have to play by the rules. The future is uncertain at best, and it is hard to keep going.

One of the things we can do is offer pastoral care and support. Although this might sound fancy or like something a Minister should do – we must remember that we are all ministers, and we are all called to support those who suffer. Most of this simply boils down to listening and empathizing. Just letting workers know you support them (like when you bring food to a picket line) can be a great healing gift. Honk your horn when you pass a picket line, flash workers a thumbs-up. Just let them know you support them.

Your congregation can send a letter or card of support to the union, can bring food or even do a hymn-sing if you feel so moved. Just be there.

But above all – if you want to support workers and their feelings, never EVER under any circumstances – cross a picket line. This is the single most hurtful thing you can do to workers in their struggle. It is the equivalent to hitting them over the head with a baseball bat, and I do not believe I am exaggerating here. The feelings of pain and betrayal workers experience when people cross their lines is very real. It might be inconvenient, but every prospective customer who refuses to cross a picket line is a victory, a gift of hope for those workers. Everyone who crosses a picket line, on the other hand is saying (whether deliberately or not), “I don’t care about you.”

## **The Direct Approach**

The suggestions in this section are all examples of direct action. Some of these will be easier to do in a congregational setting than others, but they are also some of the most effective kinds of support any congregation can offer.

I will bullet point these, as they are just a small sampling of all the creative options out there:

- Join workers when they meet with management
- Count votes (usually a clergy person does this) at a union election to make sure the process is a fair one.
- Write letters: to Editors, Politicians, Employers and to workers
- Participate in matches, sit-ins, picket lines and other worker actions.
- Get involved with Jobs with Justice and any Worker’s Rights Board in your area. Participate in their actions and support these groups with both time and money.
- Lobby your representatives on the State and National levels to support the Employee Free Choice Act and other progressive labor legislation.
- Support living wage campaigns, which benefit working people everywhere.
- Have you congregation participate in the “Labor in the Pulpit” program on Labor Day
- Contact Interfaith Worker Justice and see how you can get involved.
- Keep lists of “Anti-Worker” companies at your church or meeting place and encourage congregants to avoid supporting those companies.

- Most of all – let working people know you are here to support them, and when they call – make sure to answer!

## Conclusion

As you can see, there are countless ways for Unitarian Universalists and your congregations to support justice for workers. The ideas presented in this guide are just a sampling, and I know that many great ideas can be added to these as you get out there and add your strength to the struggle.

I invite you to contact me with questions, thoughts or “news from the front” of your own experiences working for justice in your communities. I can be reached by email at [amcemrys@uuma.org](mailto:amcemrys@uuma.org).

## Resources, Organizations and Further Reading

### Unions:

- The AFL-CIO: <http://www.aflcio.org/joinaunion/>
- The Employee Free Choice Act: <http://www.americanrightsatwork.org/>
- Jobs With Justice: <http://www.jwj.org/>

**Union-Busting:** (a number of these sites have to do with Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart has always been viciously anti-union, but not more so than many employers who are less well-known. The tactics Wal-Mart uses are typical of tactics used by MANY employers.)

- The Anti-Union Watch  
<http://www.americanrightsatwork.org/antiunionnetwork/index.cfm>
- Read “Confessions of a Union-Buster” by Marty Leavitt.
- Wal-Mart’s Secret Union-Busting Manual for Store Managers!!!:  
<http://www.union-network.org/unisite/sectors/commerce/Multinationals/Wal-Mart%20management%20handbook%20on%20union%20busting.pdf>
- Human Rights Watch Report, “Discounting Rights: Wal-Mart’s Violation of US Workers’ Right to Freedom of Association: <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/us0507/>

### Faith/Labor Coalitions:

- Interfaith Worker Justice: <http://www.iwj.org/>
- Faith and Worker Justice: <http://www.aflcio.org/joinaunion/faith/>
- American Friends Service Committee: <http://www.afsc.org/>

### Community Organizing:

- ACORN: <http://acorn.org/>
- Direct Action Research and Training [www.thedartcenter.org](http://www.thedartcenter.org)
- Gamaliel Foundation: <http://www.gamaliel.org/default.htm>
- Industrial Areas Foundation: <http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/>
- InterValley Project [www.intervalleyproject.org](http://www.intervalleyproject.org)

- PICO National Network [www.picocalifornia.org](http://www.picocalifornia.org)

**Worker-friendly Shopping:**

- No Sweat: Union-made apparel: <http://nosweatapparel.com/>
- 2007 “Do and Do Not Buy” List of Anti-Union Companies: [http://unionlabel.org/?zone=/unionactive/view\\_page.cfm&page=Boycott](http://unionlabel.org/?zone=/unionactive/view_page.cfm&page=Boycott)

**Labor in Film:** Movies to help educate, agitate and activate!

- List of Worker/Union-themes Movies: [http://www.cgeu.org/wiki/index.php/Worker/Union-themed\\_Movies](http://www.cgeu.org/wiki/index.php/Worker/Union-themed_Movies)
  - Films especially good for congregational viewing and discussion include: Bread and Roses; Harlan County, USA; Matewan; 10,000 Black Men Named George, Live Nude Girls Unite!; American Dream; Silkwood; Norma Rae; Salt of the Earth; Modern Times.
  - See also Tom Zaniello’s excellent guide “Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds, and Riffraff: An Organized Guide to Films About Labor.”

## **What We Can Do to Support Worker Justice: A Checklist**

### **What We Can Offer**

- Moral Authority
- Institutional and Financial Resources
- Community Leadership and Connections
- Hands and Hearts

### **Levels of Engagement**

- The BIG Picture: national and statewide organizing, living wage and healthcare legislation etc.
- The Grass Roots: Supporting working people, both directly and indirectly in our local communities.

### **Put Your Congregation on the Map**

Contact local unions and immigrant rights groups, as well as other like-minded religious and community organizations, like Jobs with Justice and Interfaith Worker Justice.

## **How We Can Help**

*First, LISTEN! We are allies, not organizers. Respect always begins with listening.*

### **The Practical**

- Make meeting space available for workers who may need to meet discretely to avoid employer retribution.
- Let workers use office equipment, like computers, fax machines and photocopiers.
- Support pickets and other worker-actions by supplying them with food, water and a friendly face.
- Participate in matches, sit-ins, picket lines and other worker actions.
- Keep lists of “Anti-Worker” companies at your church or meeting place and encourage congregants to avoid supporting those companies.

### **The Political**

- Contact local politicians to voice your feelings about what any given group of workers are experiencing.
- Congregations can also write joint letters with other congregations and community groups. These joint efforts can be directed at politicians or at employers.
- Join workers when they meet with management.
- Write letters: to Editors, Politicians, Employers and to workers.

### **The Pastoral**

- One of the things we can do is offer pastoral care and support. We are all ministers, and we are all called to support those who suffer.

- Honk your horn when you pass a picket line, flash workers a thumbs-up. Just let them know you support them.
- Have your congregation participate in the “Labor in the Pulpit” program on Labor Day.
- DON’T cross picket lines!

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<sup>1</sup> William Ellery Channing, “Self-Culture” in *Channing’s Works, Vol. II* (Boston: Munroe and Francis, 1841) pp. 347-411.

<sup>2</sup> See Aaron McEmrys’ article on Brook Farm in the Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography for a deeper treatment of this subject: <http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/brookfarm.html>

John Haynes Holmes, *The Revolutionary Function of the Modern Church* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1912) pp. 100-101

<sup>4</sup> The full text of the 1997 General Assembly Resolution can be found here:

<http://archive.uua.org/ga/minutes97.html#jec>

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Lafer, Ph.D., “Free and Fair? How Labor Law Fails US Democratic Standards (Washington, D.C.: American Rights at Work, 2005) p27. The complete text is also available at

<http://www.americanrightsatwork.org/resources/facts/freeandfair.cfm>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Abraham Heschel, *The Wisdom of Abraham Heschel*, Ruth Marcus Goodhill, Ed. (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1975) p. 284

<sup>8</sup> Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) p. 103