

# Labor in the Pulpit | Bimah | Minbar

## ORGANIZING GUIDE



**AFL-CIO**



# Honoring the Dignity of Working People

This is a moment when the labor movement is fighting for fundamental change in the workplace, for a new day of dignity and voice for all of America's workers. At this time, Labor Day is a time not only to celebrate the contributions of working people, but also to connect our struggle for dignity, democracy and collective voice on the job to the fundamental values of all faith traditions.

This Labor Day weekend, Sept. 4–Sept. 7, 2026, provides a unique opportunity for state federations, central labor councils and area labor federations to reach out to faith congregations in their communities by organizing a Labor in the Pulpit, on the Bimah and in the Minbar program. The program is also available on the weekend before (Aug. 28–30) and the weekend after Labor Day (Sept. 11–13) if this is more convenient for scheduling. Since the AFL-CIO is an inclusive organization, we want to be welcoming to diverse faith traditions in our local communities and provide outreach to faith groups that support labor's right to organize, but may not have been approached in the past.

The Labor in the Pulpit, on the Bimah and in the Minbar program places union leaders as guest speakers in faith congregations so they can speak about the values of equity, racial and economic justice, the solidarity that labor shares with the faith community and how, together, we can achieve a more just and equitable society for all. It is also a time to remember the struggles working people endured to achieve the many benefits we now enjoy and take for granted:

- An eight-hour day
- Workers' compensation
- Overtime pay
- Pensions
- Health and safety laws
- Social Security
- Medicare
- Vacation days
- Unemployment compensation
- Family and medical leave
- Restrictions on child labor
- A minimum wage
- The right to organize for collective bargaining

Labor Day provides a unique opportunity for the religious community and organized labor to rediscover our common bonds: social justice, democracy, equality, the dignity of all people, racial and economic justice, and fair treatment in the workplace. It calls us to recommit ourselves to work together in partnership to be a witness to actualizing these values.

# Faith, Justice and Labor Day

Each Labor Day weekend, in cities across the country, interfaith and ecumenical organizations, local religious leaders, state federations, central labor councils and area labor federations work together to recruit union leaders and congregations to participate in the Labor in the Pulpit, on the Bimah and in the Minbar program.

The program places union leaders, workers or worker advocates as guest speakers in congregations to speak out about their faith, work and the labor movement.

## **Why You Should Do It**

Labor in the Pulpit, on the Bimah and in the Minbar provides congregants with a deeper understanding of the relationship between their faith and work.

The program has served as a catalyst for closer cooperation between religion and labor in many cities and serves as a concrete step to establish ongoing relationships by unions, state federations, central labor councils and area labor federations with the local religious community. Labor in the Pulpit, on the Bimah and in the Minbar demonstrates the way the religious community, unions and other worker advocates can work together to achieve social and economic justice, and emphasizes the common values they share.

State federations, central labor councils and area labor federations can bring the program to congregations in their communities by simply following the steps outlined in this guide and utilizing the materials provided here.

**For more information, questions and any assistance you might need, contact Michael Szpak, Religion-Labor Coordinator, AFL-CIO Civil, Human and Women's Rights Department at 202-637-5284 or by email at [mszpak@afcio.org](mailto:mszpak@afcio.org).**

Also, please refer to the Resources section on page 11 for additional materials that will be helpful to you.

# Getting Started

## 1. Make the Decision and Set Goals

Set a manageable goal of placing speakers in one, five or more congregations. Be realistic while simultaneously accepting a challenge. Assign someone to work on matching speakers to congregations and, when possible, arrange a training program.

## 2. Recruit Congregations

Recruiting congregations to participate is like all recruiting: it is best done personally. Below are some tips on identifying congregations that might participate:

- Survey state federation executive council members, central labor council and area labor federation delegates and union affiliates to identify congregations with whom union members are involved as a way to begin outreach.
- Determine whether the state federation, central labor council, area labor federation and affiliated unions already have relationships with faith leaders who have supported worker justice campaigns in the past.
- Contact AFL-CIO constituency groups in your area to determine what relationships they have developed in the faith community and whether they can assist with recruitment.
- Send invitations to clergy whose faith groups support the freedom to join unions and then follow up (see “[What Faith Groups Say About Worker Justice](#)”). You can find the names of faith leaders in these congregations on the internet.
- Partner with a faith labor group in your area, if one is active, to recruit congregations.
- If time permits, convene a meeting with key religious social action leaders in your area—for example, the social action director for the Catholic diocese, the president of the Black Ministerial Association, staff for the Jewish Community Relations Council, the president of Church Women United and an imam active in the community. Ensure that the religious leaders invited represent a variety of faith bodies: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and other faith 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. The recruitment of congregations by a faith group is very effective. A faith leader meeting of this type, if not feasible at this time, is a goal to aim for in the future.

## 3. Recruit Speakers

Labor leaders who have spoken at services in past years have been pleased with the positive way they were received. Many were nervous ahead of time but found the experience rewarding. Recruiting for the first year may be the hardest! The easiest way to recruit speakers is to ask each union involved with the program to agree to provide a specific number of speakers. You also can invite workers and worker advocates to speak at the event.

## 4. Match Congregations With Speakers

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

- **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 a translator be found?
- **Faith tradition:** Union leaders, workers and worker advocates tend to be most comfortable speaking in congregations with which they are familiar. Whenever possible, match speakers with their own congregation or faith group.
- **Geography:** Avoid asking people to drive long distances unnecessarily.

## 5. Contact Speakers and Congregations

Once a match has been made, contact the speaker and the congregation. Urge the speaker to call the pastor, rabbi or imam as soon as possible.

## 6. Prepare the Speakers

Many speakers may be unsure about what to say in their presentation. A sample outline of a message for speakers is provided. State federations, central labor councils and area labor federations should consider hosting a training session for speakers if possible. Otherwise, each speaker should receive a one-on-one orientation before their presentation to make sure they feel comfortable.

## 7. Promote Your Program

One of the goals of Labor in the Pulpit, on the Bimah and in the Minbar is to reach a wider audience with a message of the crises facing working people and the concern of the religious community. We will provide a sample news release that you can share with your local newspaper's religion or community news editor. We also will provide social media materials.

### Within the Congregation

Ask religious leaders to start placing a Labor in the Pulpit, on the Bimah and in the Minbar announcement in their bulletins or newsletters or on their website before Labor Day.

### SAMPLE ITEM FOR A CONGREGATION NEWSLETTER, BULLETIN OR WEBSITE

#### Guest Labor Day Speaker

On [the Friday before, Saturday before or Sunday before Labor Day], we will join with congregations across the nation in the annual Labor in the Pulpit, on the Bimah and in the Minbar program. Nationally sponsored by the AFL-CIO, this is an opportunity to educate ourselves about the labor movement and issues impacting workers in general. [Name of speaker] will join us on [date] to speak on what it means to be a person of faith and a [union member/worker/worker advocate].

### PROMOTIONAL CHECKLIST

- ✓ Send any handouts and the news release to the congregations a few weeks before Labor Day.
- ✓ Send a news release for the religious affairs pages of local newspapers.
- ✓ Place announcements in the state federation, central labor council or area labor federation newsletter, local union newsletters and on websites.
- ✓ Announce Labor in the Pulpit, on the Bimah and in the Minbar events at central labor council and area labor federation meetings.

## 8. Evaluate and Follow Up With Congregations

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

**Evaluation:** Find out what worked and what didn't work by conducting a survey. Seek suggestions and comments from all speakers and all religious leaders whose congregations participated in the program. The following are some suggested survey questions:

On a scale of 1–10, with 1 representing the lowest and 10 the highest, rate the following:

*For Speakers:*

- How did the speaker feel about their presentation? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How was the presentation received by the congregation? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Would the speaker participate in the program next year?  Yes  No  Unknown
- Any additional comments:

*For Pastor/Rabbi/Imam:*

- How did the pastor/rabbi/imam think the congregation received the information presented? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Was the pastor/rabbi/imam pleased with the presentation?  Yes  No  Unknown
- Would the pastor/rabbi/imam participate in the program next year?  Yes  No  Unknown
- Would the pastor/rabbi/imam allow a presentation on a worker justice issue other than on Labor Day?  Yes  No  Unknown
- Any additional comments:

**Follow-up:** Send thank-you notes to speakers and pastors/rabbis/imams. The state federation, central labor council or area labor federation should consider hosting a meeting of union speakers and participating faith leaders as soon after the event as possible to evaluate the experience and make plans for next year's Labor Day.

**Next steps:** All faith leaders in congregations who participated in the program should be considered potential supporters for worker justice issues. If you have a local interfaith committee or religion-labor coalition or are planning to form one, these religious leaders are likely supporters. In the meantime, state federations, central labor councils and area labor federations should maintain contact with these faith leaders by including them on email lists and inviting them to address the labor body regarding the position of their faith group on the freedom to join a union and worker justice issues. If appropriate, faith leaders could be invited to offer an invocation at a state federation convention or central labor council or area labor federation meeting.

## CHECKLIST FOR SPEAKERS

### 1. Call the pastor/rabbi/imam as soon as you are assigned. Ask:

- ✓ What time does the service start?
- ✓ At what point in the service will I be speaking, and how long a talk is appropriate? (We are suggesting no more than five minutes.)

### 2. Getting there:

- ✓ Make sure you know the directions for getting there.
- ✓ Dress appropriately.
- ✓ Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the service begins.
- ✓ Identify yourself to and thank the pastor/rabbi/imam.
- ✓ Ask where you should sit and from where you will be speaking (some congregations have more than one pulpit, or—depending on the faith group—you may not be in a pulpit but speaking from the front of the congregation).

### 3. Final reminders for giving your presentation:

- ✓ Speak slowly, loudly and clearly.
- ✓ Be brief. (We are suggesting no more than five minutes.)
- ✓ Be prepared.
- ✓ Talk about your own experiences. It is most important to believe what you are saying.

### 4. Once you have finished:

- ✓ Take a deep breath and smile!
- ✓ Greet people after the service. This is a great opportunity to chat informally with interested people.

## SAMPLE SPEAKER INTRODUCTION FOR THE PASTOR/RABBI/IMAM

Labor Day is an opportunity to recognize and remember God's commitment to justice. We have with us today \_\_\_\_\_, who will speak to us about faith, work and the struggles of working people to be treated with dignity.

\_\_\_\_\_ is a member of \_\_\_\_\_.

## **SAMPLE OUTLINE AND TIPS FOR A UNION SPEAKER**

- Give a brief introduction and thanks to the congregation.
- State your reason for speaking.
- Note that Labor Day is an opportunity for people of faith to recognize God's commitment to justice.
- Offer a reminder that Labor Day is a hard-earned holiday coming out of the struggles of working people for the eight-hour day and the right to organize unions.
- Tie Labor Day to the appropriate faith group statement about the right to organize found in the Resources section on page 11 (see [What Faith Groups Say About Worker Justice](#)) if one is listed.
- Describe the importance of unions today in light of a current situation.
- Tell a personal story of how unions have had a positive impact on you or how they can help reverse some of the following problems:
  - Decline of earnings
  - Loss of job security
  - Downsizing and the increasing loss of jobs or heavier work burdens
  - Increasing need for multiple breadwinners in a family just to maintain the current standard of living
  - Growing disparity of wealth
- Point out that union contracts protect workers' rights.
- Emphasize that unions are responsible for benefits we often take for granted, such as the eight-hour day, the end of child labor, the public school system and pensions.
- State the importance of the religious community and unions working together.

### **Do's and Don'ts**

#### **Please do:**

- Keep your presentation within the allotted time frame.
- Be clear, concise and well prepared.
- Introduce yourself and discuss your role in the labor movement.
- Thank the pastor, rabbi or imam.
- Use your own experience in speaking on the connection between religious values and worker justice.

#### **Please do not:**

- Talk statistics
- Use jargon
- Talk for too long

### **Relatable Bible Verses:**

- Deuteronomy 15:11—Open your hand to the poor and needy.
- Deuteronomy 24:14–15—Don't withhold wages of poor and needy laborers, including those of "aliens."
- Proverbs 21:13—Don't close your ears to the cry of the poor.
- Isaiah 32:17—Justice will bring peace.
- Jeremiah 22:13—Woe to him who makes neighbors work for nothing and does not give them their wages.
- Amos 5:22–24—Let justice flow like a stream.
- Micah 6:8—God requires us to do justice, love and mercy and walk humbly.
- Luke 10:27—Love your neighbor as yourself.
- John 3:16–18—Love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.
- Romans 12:26—If one member suffers, all suffer.
- Corinthians 3:6–9—Each will receive wages according to the labor of each.
- James 5:4—The wages of laborers kept back by fraud cry out.
- Timothy 2:6—The farmer that labors must receive the first rewards.
- II Timothy 6:18–19—Rich people are to be generous and ready to share.

### **Selected Verses from the Quran:**

- Standing for Worker Justice: Quran 4:135; Quran 5:8
- Dignity of the Person: Quran 17:70
- Equality: Quran 4:32; Quran 3:194; Quran 49:13
- Employer Responsibility: Quran 17:35; Quran 83:1–3; Quran 26:181–183
- See the Resources section on the following page for additional teachings of Islam relating to worker justice in "The Quran and Worker Justice," "Labor in the Minbar: A Toolkit for Islamic Congregations" and "Social Justice: Labor Rights in Islam."

# Resources

While some of these resources may not be updated, they provide valuable information that can be useful for Labor in the Pulpit, on the Bimah and in the Minbar congregational outreach and presentations.

All of these materials may be found at [go.aflcio.org/lpbm](http://go.aflcio.org/lpbm) and there are individual links to the materials listed below.

## **FAITH-BASED INFORMATION**

### **What Faith Groups Say About Worker Justice**

<http://www.aflcio.org/interfaithwj>

### **The Quran and Worker Justice**

[aflcio.org/lipquaran](http://aflcio.org/lipquaran)

### **Catholic Parish Toolkit (2015)**

[aflcio.org/lipcatholic](http://aflcio.org/lipcatholic)

### **Protestant Congregation Toolkit (2014)**

[aflcio.org/lipprotestant](http://aflcio.org/lipprotestant)

### **Labor on the Bimah: A Toolkit for Jewish Congregations (2014)**

[aflcio.org/lipjewish](http://aflcio.org/lipjewish)

### **Labor in the Minbar: A Toolkit for Islamic Congregations (2014)**

[aflcio.org/lipmuslim](http://aflcio.org/lipmuslim)

### **Social Justice: Labor Rights in Islam**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AJ2fqnqkV8APkv5VTZgKHx7kP34K-D5O/view?usp=sharing>

### **The Quran and Worker Justice**

<https://aflcio.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Quraninsert2013%20%281%29.pdf>

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ELIZABETH H. SHULER  
President

FREDRICK D. REDMOND  
Secretary-Treasurer

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