

The **Catholic**



Labor Network



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

*Kalmanovitz Initiative
for Labor and the Working Poor*

Shared Values:

AFL-CIO Labor Federations and Catholic Conferences
in the State Legislatures, 2017

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*A joint study of the Catholic Labor Network and the Kalmanovitz Initiative
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The Catholic Labor Network is a membership organization that brings together Catholics — lay, religious and clergy — who find inspiration in Catholic Social Teaching on labor and work, and wish to share it with the world. We come together to exchange information about the Church and social justice and to support working people in their struggles. We promote the cause of workers and Catholic Social Teaching in our labor unions, parishes and other organizations.

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Georgetown University's Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor develops creative strategies and innovative public policy to improve workers' lives in a changing economy. The Initiative draws on Georgetown's distinctive identity—its commitment to intellectual excellence, grounding in the Catholic and Jesuit traditions, history of inter-religious cooperation, global reach, and prominence as an arena of policy debate in the nation's capital—to advance prosperity, broadly-shared economic justice, and respect for the dignity of labor.

Executive Summary

The Catholic Church and the U.S. labor movement share similar positions in several major policy areas, with each supporting a living wage for all who work, the right to organize in labor unions, and the protection of immigrants – even those who are undocumented. Many of these issues are actively contested in today’s politics. In this study, researchers sought to learn whether these shared values led to similar patterns in supporting or opposing bills in the state legislatures. The research team identified 9 worker justice topic areas and 2 immigration-related topic areas in which the Catholic Church and the AFL-CIO were fundamentally in agreement. The team then surveyed state Catholic Conference directors and state AFL-CIO presidents about their work during the 2017 state legislative session and conducted follow-up interviews with several of the respondents.

Key findings:

- The average state labor federation respondent reported working on 6.8 of the 11 issues during the 2017 state legislative session, while the average Catholic Conference director reported working on 2.4.
- Both groups reported similar involvement with immigration issues in 2017. 62% (8/13) of the labor federation presidents reported activity defending the rights of immigrants in the 2017 legislative session, and 57% (8/14) of Catholic Conference executive directors did.
- The AFL-CIO representatives reported on average working on 6 of the 9 worker justice issues during the legislative session, while the average Catholic Conference reported working on 1.6.
- Although the Catholic Conference directors must address a variety of social and economic issues, ranging from Catholic education to abortion and family issues, 64% of Catholic Conference respondents reported working on at least one worker justice issue in 2017, most frequently family and sick leave (43%) or the minimum wage (36%).
- Several members of each group reported a desire to work together more frequently on worker justice and immigration issues.
- Some AFL-CIO presidents reported frustration that their Catholic Conference counterparts put insufficient effort into worker justice issues; some Catholic Conference directors believed that their support on worker justice issues was not reciprocated by labor’s respect for their priority issues.

Introduction

The Catholic Church has a long and well-established tradition of social teaching on labor and work, starting with Pope Leo XIII's 1891 Encyclical Letter "Rerum Novarum," defending the right of workers to receive a living wage and to organize in labor unions. Inspired by this social doctrine, in the early to mid-20th Century the Church in America extended critical support to the labor movement on policy issues. Monsignor John Ryan, the first Social Action Director for what would become the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, spent his early years as a promoter of state minimum wage laws. The Church hierarchy, responding both to Church doctrine and the needs of a largely Catholic and immigrant working class, supported New Deal reforms such as the National Labor Relations Act, which protected the right of workers to organize in unions, and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which created the federal minimum wage.

A changed issue environment and today's polarized politics have made Church-labor collaboration on policy issues more difficult. Issues such as abortion and gay marriage—not on the agenda in the 1950s—frequently divide Church and labor leaders. Even so, the Catholic Church and the U.S. labor movement take similar positions in several major policy areas. Each supports a living wage for all workers, the right to organize in unions, and the protection of immigrants – even those who are undocumented.

Many of these issues are actively contested in federal, state and local politics. In this study, researchers sought to learn whether these shared values continue to foster similar actions, and even collaboration, in the state capitals. In each state, a state AFL-CIO labor federation functions as the collective voice of the state's labor unions in state politics; in most states, a state Catholic Conference represents the state's Catholic bishops in much the same way. The research team surveyed Catholic Conference executive directors and state AFL-CIO presidents about a list of worker and immigrant justice issues addressed in many state legislatures during the 2017 legislative session. The team then performed follow-up interviews with several of the survey respondents.

Methods

Using information from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Bill Tracking Database, the research team identified 11 major issue areas 1) that saw legislative activity in one or more states during 2017 and 2) in which the Catholic Conference and AFL-CIO were likely to be in agreement. Two issue areas concerned immigration policy, and nine concerned labor policy. These issue areas and examples of specific state legislation or policy within each issue area are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Issue Areas under Study

Issue Area	Examples of State Legislation
<i>Immigrant Worker Rights</i>	Providing workers access to drivers' licenses or government benefits regardless of immigration status; prohibiting immigrant workers from filing workers' compensation claims
<i>Sanctuary Cities</i>	Limiting law enforcement or other government agencies from cooperating with federal immigration enforcement activities, or preempting cities and counties from doing so
Agricultural workers	Union/Collective bargaining rights; Pesticide use and worker health
Living Wage/Prevailing Wage	Creating or removing living wage requirements for public service contractors, or prevailing wage laws for public construction projects
Minimum Wage	Increasing the state minimum wage, or preempting cities and counties from doing so
Public Employee Unions	Union/Collective bargaining rights; Agency fees; Pension benefits
Right-to-Work	Allowing union-represented workers to opt out of joining the union and paying dues
Sick/Family Leave	Requiring employers to provide paid or unpaid leave for workers to care for a sick family member or newborn child
Unemployment/Workers Comp	Changing eligibility and/or benefit levels for workers compensation or unemployment insurance programs
Wage Theft	Punishing employers who fail to pay wages for work performed or creating avenues of redress for workers who suffer wage theft
Worker Safety and Health	Any measure that increases or reduces employers' obligation to provide safe and healthful working conditions

In July, after most state legislatures had completed their 2017 session, the research team distributed a survey to state Catholic Conference directors and state AFL-CIO presidents. Respondents were asked to indicate each issue area in which they had worked on legislation in the 2017 session. They were also invited to share whether they had worked with their counterpart (the AFL-CIO for Catholic Conference respondents, and vice versa) on legislative issues this year or in the recent past, and to discuss the nature of their relationship more broadly.

The research team mailed the survey to 43 state Catholic Conferences and 45 State AFL-CIO federations, following up with phone and email reminders giving them the opportunity to complete the survey online if they preferred. The team ultimately received 14 useable responses from Catholic Conference executive directors (33% response rate) and 13 responses from state AFL-CIO presidents (29% response rate).

After collecting the survey responses the research team conducted ten follow-up interviews. Six interview subjects were state AFL-CIO presidents, and four were Catholic Conference executive directors.

Results

At least some respondents worked on legislation in each of the 11 issue areas during the 2017 session, with minimum wage issues mentioned by the largest number of respondents (59%) and agricultural labor issues the fewest (11%).

Overall, the average state AFL-CIO respondent reported working on 6.8 of the 11 issues during the 2017 state legislative session, while the average Catholic Conference director reported working on 2.4. On four of the issues – both immigration issues, and two of the nine labor policy areas – both groups reported similar levels of involvement. In the remaining labor policy issue areas, AFL-CIO presidents were much more likely to report activity than their Catholic Conference counterparts (See Table 2).

Table 2: Responses by Issue Area

Issue Area	Total	AFLCIO	CC
Minimum Wage	16	11	5
Public Employee Unions	15	13	2
Unemployment/Workers Comp	14	13	1
Worker Safety and Health	13	11	2
<i>Sanctuary Cities</i>	12	5	7
Sick/Family Leave	12	6	6
Living Wage/Prevailing Wage	11	8	3
<i>Immigrant Worker Rights</i>	9	5	4
Wage Theft	9	9	0
Right-to-Work	7	6	1
Agricultural workers	3	1	2

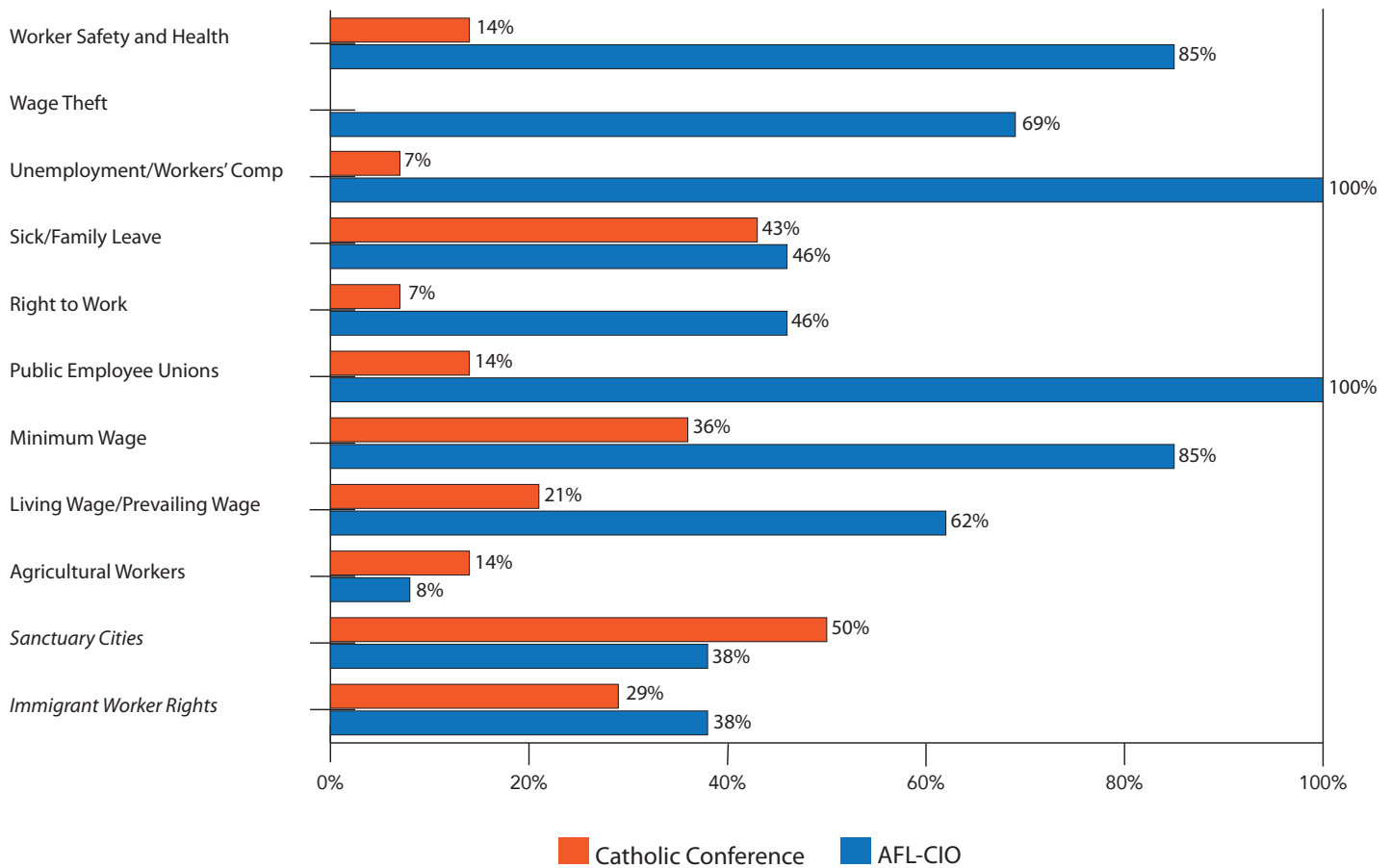
Immigration issues

Both groups reported similar involvement with immigration policy issues during the 2017 legislative session: 62% (8/13) of the labor federation presidents reported legislative work in at least one of the two issue areas, as did 57% (8/14) of Catholic Conference executive directors. Half (50%) the Catholic Conference directors reported work on sanctuary policies, compared to 38% of the AFL-CIO presidents; on other immigrant worker rights issues, 38% of AFL-CIO presidents reported work, while 29% of Catholic Conference directors said the same.

Worker Justice Issues

The average AFL-CIO respondent reported working on 6 of the 9 worker justice issues during the 2017 session, while the average Catholic Conference respondent worked on 1.6. These numbers are not directly comparable. Worker justice issues are the paramount concern of the AFL-CIO, while for the Catholic Conferences they represent one among many fields of activity, competing for resources

Chart: Issues addressed during 2017 Legislative Session: State AFL-CIO vs. State Catholic Conference



with other key priorities such as life issues (especially abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment), immigration issues, family and marriage, religious freedom, and Catholic education. Even so, it is notable that nearly two-thirds (64%) of the Catholic Conference executive directors reported working on legislation in at least one of the major worker justice issue areas during the 2017 legislative session.

Indeed, in some of these areas the Catholic Conference kept pace with the AFL-CIO. Both groups of respondents indicated significant – and similar – levels of activity on sick leave and family leave legislation in 2017: 43% of Catholic Conference directors and 46% of AFL-CIO presidents reported work in this policy area. While activity on agricultural labor was much less frequently cited by either group (presumably because such legislation was submitted in fewer states), both groups gave similar responses, with two of the Catholic Conference directors and one AFL-CIO president reporting work in this area.

In four of the remaining labor policy issue areas, AFL-CIO presidents were much more likely to report legislative activity, but two or more Catholic Conference directors also reported work. The most notable was the minimum wage: 85% of the AFL-CIO presidents worked on minimum wage legislation in 2017, but 36% (5 of the 14) of the Catholic Conference directors did as well. Most (62%) AFL-CIO presidents reported working on Living Wage/Prevailing Wage laws in 2017, while 21% (3 of the 14) of their Catholic Conference counterparts also did. All the AFL-CIO presidents worked on legislation pertaining to public employee unions in 2017, and 85% of them worked on workplace

health and safety legislation. Two (14%) Catholic Conference directors reported engaging on each of those issues.

The last three issues saw much legislative activity by the AFL-CIO presidents but fairly little by Catholic Conference directors. All the AFL-CIO presidents reported activity on Unemployment Insurance/Workers' Compensation, 69% on Wage Theft, and nearly half (46%) on "right-to-work" issues. One Catholic Conference director reported working on UI/Workers' Comp, and another on "right to work." Interestingly, none of the Catholic Conference directors reported working on Wage Theft legislation, even though many workers' centers supported by Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) grants are active on this issue.

Discussion

In interviews, most of the respondents in both groups recognized the close alignment of their policy goals on immigration and worker justice issues. They also expressed a desire for more collaboration – but candidly acknowledged that they seldom worked closely together. Why?

Part of the distance could be accounted for by different political approaches. The state AFL-CIO labor federations and the state Catholic Conferences both engage in similar activities during the state legislative session – lobbying, testimony, and letter writing – but in other ways their role is quite different.

The AFL-CIO endorses political candidates, donates to campaigns, and mobilizes volunteers for election canvassing, while the Catholic Conference does none of these things. Consequently, the AFL-CIO unions arrive at the state capital with a reservoir of goodwill among candidates they supported (mostly Democrats) and skepticism or enmity from those they opposed (mostly Republicans). Catholic Conference staff stress their nonpartisan identity, beginning legislative action without the political capital earned by supporting a winning candidate or the antipathy earned by opposing one.

This difference in electoral strategy shapes lobbying activity further downstream. During interviews, the research team asked each respondent about the coalition partners they most relied on in state politics. Most AFL-CIO respondents readily provided a list of progressive organizations they counted as allies in legislative efforts. To the Catholic Conference respondents, the question simply didn't make much sense. They said their coalition partners varied widely, issue by issue, making it impossible to generalize. Advocating for immigration issues or worker justice issues involved cooperating with a different set of allies than working on right-to-life or religious freedom issues. Since they were usually working on several of these issues at once, they were participating in multiple coalitions at any given time, each with a different composition.

In interviews, some of the AFL-CIO respondents expressed frustration that the Catholic Conference was not more active on worker justice issues. While they were not always familiar with the details of Catholic social teaching, they knew that the Church doctrine placed a strong emphasis on social and economic justice, but felt that the Catholic Conference prioritized contraception, abortion, and marriage during the legislative session, leaving worker justice issues as an afterthought. The data in this study do not allow us to evaluate this claim; we don't know how much attention Catholic Conferences devote to labor and worker justice issues or what the "right" amount would be. But the perception exists, and it serves to discourage labor cooperation with the Catholic Conference in the state legislatures.

In return, some of the Catholic Conference respondents expressed support for labor causes and an interest in partnering more with labor, but believed that labor did not understand their political role. Because their priorities included issues that fell on both ends of the conventional political spectrum, they tried to maintain relationships with both progressive and conservative officeholders and interest groups. Some respondents also indicated that they felt their relationship with labor was a one-way affair. They might lend support to a labor-backed minimum wage increase, then find labor supporting legislation mandating that Catholic institutional employers offer contraceptive benefits to employees in contradiction to Church teaching. The Catholic Conference respondents understood that labor and Church might necessarily hold different views on such issues, but wanted labor to confer and look for a mutually acceptable accommodation before proposing legislation.

Conclusions

Most AFL-CIO presidents and Catholic Conference directors expressed a desire to collaborate more in the state legislatures on these issues of shared concern, despite acknowledging some distance in their current relationship. Such a partnership offers considerable strategic advantages in promoting pro-immigrant and pro-worker public policy initiatives. Most state AFL-CIO federations have deep relationships with progressive legislators and groups, forged in electoral politics – but they also have ardent conservative opponents. In many cases, the Catholic Conference offers an alternative channel to reach these opponents. When they cannot actually win their support for such policy initiatives, they may at least succeed in moderating opposition. The survey responses here indicate some especially promising places to start: issues to which both sides already commit significant resources and effort.

Immigration is the first. Both groups have developed a strong commitment to the protection of immigrant workers and families. Even the most skeptical interview respondents recognized their counterparts' effort on this issue. Labor progressives who believed that the Catholic Conferences were aligned with conservative politics noted immigration as an exception; the Catholic Conference respondents noted that the unions were taking a principled stand on this issue despite opposition from some of their members. Working together on immigration issues offers an excellent opportunity to build the Church-labor relationship while achieving important social justice public policy ends.

Among the worker justice issues, sick leave/family leave, the minimum wage, and agricultural worker concerns stood out. Sick leave/family leave policies are an excellent candidate for collaboration: the United States is far behind most industrial democracies in sick leave and parental leave protection. For the Catholic Conference, sick leave and family leave policies offer an opportunity to testify in support of worker justice and defense of the family at the same time, which may account for their enthusiasm on this issue. Both labor and the Church are deeply concerned that the minimum wage has fallen far below that of a "living wage" that can support a family, and are ready to support legislative action to increase it. Finally, while agricultural worker issues more rarely appear on state legislative agendas, the survey and interview results indicate that when they do, both groups readily lend support.

The authors fervently hope that both groups can work together in the 2018 legislative session to advance these issues and build a solid foundation for future collaboration. ■