



September 29, 2002 - Statement of His Eminence, Bernard Cardinal Law, Archbishop of Boston On the Possible Janitors' Strike

The low wage labor market is now the permanent economy for approximately 30% of the American workforce. The Church's social doctrine upholds the right to a living wage. Poor pay, no health insurance, little or no sick or vacation time, and no access to unemployment insurance are among the list of hurdles low-wage families are facing. For this trend to change, workers must make themselves visible. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected.

The Catholic Church has a proud history of supporting the dignity of human labor and the right of workers to bargain collectively. We also strongly support the negotiation process and we commend the great efforts that those on each side of the bargaining table have put into negotiating to avoid a strike.

Prior to any discussion of a strike, Catholic Charities, the social services arm of the Archdiocese of Boston, has been serving the families of janitors who have been unable to meet basic needs because of limited income. We have given these families nutritious food and have provided rental and utility assistance. We will continue to do everything in our power to help these families, but once the 7-day Union Strike Fund is exhausted, Catholic Charities and other community-based organizations will be overwhelmed by the needs of 10,000 janitors and their families.

Dramatic reductions in the Commonwealth's human services budget as well as a weakened economy have greatly strained our resources. Our food pantry programs in Boston and surrounding areas were as busy this past summer as they normally are in winter. Operationally, we are keeping our food pantries open one night per week to ensure underpaid workers at least some access to our support services. But we realize that beyond this support there is little help available for these members of our community. The janitors' families should know that Catholic Charities is putting emergency services at their disposal with sympathy and respect. A special fund has been established since we expect a steady increase in the need for these services.

Contributions may be sent to:

**Janitors' Families' Food Fund
Catholic Charities,
75 Kneeland Street, 8th Floor
Boston, MA, 02111**

Our prayers are with all those who are negotiating to bring about a respectful and equitable resolution of this situation. In a special way, our prayers are with the janitors and their families whose already precarious living conditions will be severely impacted by any prolonged work stoppage.

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