



## Catholic Committee of Appalachia STATEMENT ON STRIKE OF WEST VIRGINIA STATE EMPLOYEES

March 1, 2018

The Catholic Committee of Appalachia expresses its admiration and support for the teachers and service personnel in all 55 counties of West Virginia currently on strike. Students and others who have joined them in the work of organizing pickets, rallies, and conversations with legislators inspire us. Indeed, the Catholic tradition has long recognized the rights of workers to form unions and to organize strikes.<sup>1</sup> Currently, West Virginia ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in the United States for teacher salaries. We believe that we can do better and justice demands it. In accordance with the Catholic tradition, we join teachers and service workers in their call for “a permanent fix to healthcare through the Public Employees Insurance Agency [PEIA] and a stop to legislation on what they call attacks on seniority. They are also hoping lawmakers will walk away from a bill known as ‘paycheck protection’ that would make union members opt-in yearly to have dues withdrawn from paychecks.”<sup>2</sup>

Further, we join teachers and service personnel in their frustration over current proposals<sup>3</sup> suggested by West Virginia Governor, Jim Justice. As events continue to unfold, we support the need for a long-term fix to PEIA and a 5% pay raise for teachers and service personnel alike. We recognize the complexity of creating budgets and allocating funds; however, we must be conscious of the manner in which these demands are met. They must also advance the good of wider human and more-than-human communities. Indeed, this is an opportunity for us as a state to reflect on the ways in which we seek to fund programs that support the common good. Our social and economic life ought to reflect our values. We strongly oppose proposals such as co-tenancy<sup>4</sup> and urge that any increase in natural gas severance taxes, as a means to fund and meet teacher and service personnel demands, should not be tied to co-tenancy. Further, we must work to create new streams of revenue for our state, which are not tied to resource extraction.

In keeping with the Catholic tradition and the emphatic call by the Catholic bishops of the world for a faith that does justice<sup>5</sup> rooted in Jesus’s own prophetic ministry (Luke 4: 16-9), we encourage the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, and all West Virginia Catholic schools in particular, to actively support teachers and service personnel. This can be done in a number of ways. We can use this as an opportunity to discuss the history of labor organizing in West Virginia and Catholic Social Teaching’s affirmation of the rights of workers to form a union and to strike. We can also actively encourage and support teachers and students in discerning a call to walk out and join pickets in an expression of solidarity, a core principle of Catholic Social Teaching. Parishes and youth ministries can join in providing child-care and meals to support working families. This is also an opportunity for Catholic schools to review the justness of their own wages and insurance policies. In West Virginia, across

Appalachia, and in all places we continue to affirm that “the voice of the poor [and the Earth] are to be in some sense our first teachers.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *On Human Work*, in *Catholic Social Teaching: The Documentary Heritage*, Expanded Edition, David O’Brien and Thomas Shannon, eds. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), p. 407-9, no. 20. Available online at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091981\\_laborem-exercens.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html).

<sup>2</sup> Dave Mistich, “West Virginia Teacher Work Stoppage Hits Pivotal Day Monday,” *West Virginia Public Broadcasting* at [wvpublic.org](http://wvpublic.org), Feb. 26, 2018. Available at <http://wvpublic.org/post/west-virginia-teacher-work-stoppage-hits-pivotal-day-monday#stream/0>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.theintelligencer.net/news/top-headlines/2018/02/gov-justice-w-va-teachers-strike-comes-to-end-teachers-to-return-to-classroom-thursday/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.wvgazette.com/news/legislative\\_session/co-tenancy-bill-moves-quickly-to-wv-senate-floor/article\\_48ab967b-43cb-5d2e-b2b7-b4ab14518ee7.html](https://www.wvgazette.com/news/legislative_session/co-tenancy-bill-moves-quickly-to-wv-senate-floor/article_48ab967b-43cb-5d2e-b2b7-b4ab14518ee7.html)

<sup>5</sup> Synod of Bishops, “Justice in the World (1971),” in *Catholic Social Teaching: The Documentary Heritage*, Expanded Edition, David O’Brien and Thomas Shannon, eds. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), p. 306. Available on line at <https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf>. See paragraph no. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Catholic Committee of Appalachia, *The Telling Takes Us Home: Taking our Place in the Stories that Shape Us, a People’s Pastoral from the Catholic Committee of Appalachia* (Spencer, WV: Catholic Committee of Appalachia, 2015), 8.