

Labor Day Statement 2026



Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre, Archbishop of Louisville
Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development
September 7, 2026

Labor Day is an opportunity to celebrate workers and honor the dignity of work. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of participation in God's creation. This year, we focus on young people and vulnerable communities who face uncertainty in today's economy. Traditional economic indicators tell us the economy is growing, but hiring has slowed, especially for unemployed workers, and unemployment remains high for Black workers.ⁱ Roughly one-quarter of the labor force are low-wage workers; among them, 72% lack stable and secure jobsⁱⁱ and more than half are people of color.ⁱⁱⁱ More than 70% of Americans believe having children is unaffordable, an increase of 13 points in just the last year.^{iv} There is widespread concern that artificial intelligence (AI) will lead to higher unemployment and to fewer jobs that can support a family. Young people have been the most impacted so far^v and also experience the most anxiety about AI's impact on their work.^{vi} We must listen to the experiences of workers, families, young people, and communities of color as they struggle to find stability.

While affirming his predecessors' teachings on labor which support human flourishing and the common good, including dignified work, just wages, and support for labor unions, Pope Leo XIV, in his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*, highlights the new challenges arising from AI. He notes that although AI presents new opportunities, it also risks normalizing a vision that is anti-human. AI systems can imitate but never replace human intelligence. AI cannot feel, love, discern, or receive God's grace and wisdom. It is not morally neutral and risks creating "new forms of exclusion" (no. 102). AI must be carefully developed to ensure it serves the common good and humanity itself.^{vii}

Pope Leo expressly acknowledges the great risks of AI for workers: de-skilling, surveillance, rigid and repetitive tasks, reduced agency and creativity, unemployment, job insecurity, concentrated power, and increased inequalities. Furthermore, AI relies on low-wage workers, who are often hidden and who endure harsh conditions, caught in an exploitative supply chain. Pope Leo calls us to work together to "design systems centered on the human person and not solely on performance" (no. 150) and foster an economy that values the God given dignity of each person. Dignified work is not merely about productivity, but also participation in God's creation. A just economy is not judged on profit alone, but on inclusive growth and protection for the most vulnerable (no. 158).^{viii}

At first glance, the tasks may seem daunting: to ensure just development of AI systems, with worker participation, transparency and accountability; to protect good jobs, offer retraining where needed, and correct the power imbalances that are exacerbated by technology. And yet, we have been here before. In

response to the Industrial Revolution, Pope Leo XIII wrote *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 and the Church has brought the sacredness of the human person to the questions of work and labor for these last 135 years. We recognize that as we observe the 40th anniversary of *Economic Justice for All*, the U.S. bishops' landmark document on the economy, much of the teaching of this document remains relevant for our shared project in the United States. As we confront this latest challenge, we invite all to be partners in this work. The Church, the government, labor unions, civil society groups, corporations, and others all have a "shared responsibility" to protect the human person and the dignity of work (no. 181).

As new technology reshapes our economy and our work, let us be "builders of communion" (no. 16), ensuring that innovation and development is for the benefit of all, not just a few, and that each person can contribute to the Kingdom of God through their work.

ⁱ Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, "[June 2026 Jobs Day Analysis](#)," July 2, 2026.

ⁱⁱ Mathieu Despard, et al., "[Employment Stability and Security of Low-Wage Workers in the United States](#)," Washington University, Center for Social Development, January 7, 2026.

ⁱⁱⁱ WorkRise: an Urban Institute Initiative, "[Segregation in the Low-Wage Workforce](#)," October 24, 2024.

^{iv} Brigham Young University, College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences, "[2025 American Family Survey](#)" [Economic Crisis and Online Protection for Children Define New Challenges for American Families](#)," November 14, 2025.

^v Erik Brynjolfsson, et al., "[Canaries in the Coal Mine? Six Facts about the Recent Employment Effects of Artificial Intelligence](#)," Stanford Digital Economy Lab, November 13, 2025.

^{vi} Harvard Kennedy School, Institute of Politics, "[Harvard Youth Poll Reveals Mounting Strain on Young Americans – Financial, Institutional, and Social](#)," December 4, 2025; Quinnipiac University Poll, "[The Age of Artificial Intelligence: Americans' AI Use Increases While Views on It Sour, Quinnipiac University Poll on AI Finds: 7 in 10 Think AI Will Cut Jobs With Gen Z The Most Pessimistic](#)," March 30, 2026.

^{vii} See *Magnifica Humanitas*, no. 112, 99, 104, 102, 110.

^{viii} See *Magnifica Humanitas*, no. 150, 151, 108, 109, 158.