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Organizing: Religious Leaders Urge Congress To Pass EFCA as 'Moral Imperative'

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Organizing
**Religious Leaders Urge Congress
To Pass EFCA as 'Moral Imperative'**

A group of U.S. religious leaders May 12 announced they are forming the organization Faith Leaders for Workplace Fairness in support of passage of the proposed Employee Free Choice Act (S. 560, H.R. 1409), legislation they said is based on a moral issue that goes beyond politics.

Overall, about 1,000 members of the clergy are active in work supporting EFCA, Kim Bobo, executive director of Interfaith Worker Justice and author of *Wage Theft in America*, said in a telephone press conference. More than 200 religious leaders of various denominations have signed statements of support for EFCA and plan to lobby Congress May 19, she said.

More fairness is needed to correct what he said is a moral imbalance in the political relationship, according to the Rev. Jim Wallis, preacher and author, editor in chief and chief executive officer of *Sojourners* magazine. Balance in employer and employee wages and decisionmaking is needed for greater stability in the workplace, he said. Calling the growing wage gap over the past 20 years a scandal of "biblical proportions," Wallis said to create a more equitable marketplace, workers need the help EFCA would provide in being able to gain union representation.

EFCA, introduced in the House and Senate March 10 (45 DLR AA-1, 3/11/09), would amend the National Labor Relations Act to, among other things, establish a procedure whereby the National Labor Relations Board would certify a union as the bargaining representative of employees if a majority of employees of the unit signs valid union authorization cards. The legislation also would allow unions to continue to petition for NLRB-supervised secret ballot elections, if they choose, once 30 percent of the workers have signed union authorization cards.

Rabbi Cites Judeo-Christian Support for Organizing

Rabbi Mordechai Liebling said there has been deep-rooted support in Judaism for the right to organize for two millennia. Liebling, who has written extensively about the relationship between money and values, said the balance of power depends on fair wages for everyone, but that unions must be strong for that to happen. He said the decline of unions over the past 20 years is tied to the decline of the U.S. middle class,

and therefore workers' rights to organize must be strengthened.

Underscoring Liebling's linking of religious beliefs to union organizing, Catholic theologian Joseph J. Fahey said Catholic scholars believe EFCA is rooted in Catholic social teaching that labor unions are essential for a just social order. Since Pope Leo XIII's support of labor unions in the late 19th century as a most important organization for workers in need, every subsequent pope has endorsed that position as a teaching of the Church, according to Fahey, a professor of religious studies at Manhattan College.

Three moral principles of freedom, justice, and restoration rooted in Catholic social teaching are built into EFCA, by providing workers—not the government or employers—the freedom to decide for or against representation, by providing justice through arbitration and mediation when workers negotiating a first contract are frustrated, and by providing restoration of worker rights and work time not properly compensated, Fahey said.

Bishop Greg Rickel of the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia in Washington state focused on the economic crisis, saying passage of EFCA is crucial because society cannot sustain the gap of salaries and accountability. EFCA has the power to level that power differential, he said.