

# The CATHOLIC LABOR NETWORK

Dr. Jeffrey Senese  
Saint Leo University  
33701 State Road 52  
St. Leo, FL 33574

Dear President Senese,

The right of workers to organize in labor unions is one of the most basic elements of Catholic Social Teaching. In this 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, the encyclical letter by Pope Leo XIII that first expressed this right in Catholic thought, it is most disappointing to hear that the administration of St. Leo's has unilaterally abrogated this right for its own faculty.

Although the civil law may exempt religious institutions from coverage under the National Labor Relations Act, the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively does not come from the civil law but from God. And this right belongs to employees of Church institutions no less than those of secular institutions. As the bishops of the United States reminded us in their 1986 pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, "All the moral principles that govern the just operation of any economic endeavor apply to the Church and its agencies and institutions; indeed the Church should be exemplary [347]" Indeed the bishops noted explicitly that "all church institutions must also fully recognize the rights of employees to organize and bargain collectively with the institution through whatever association or organization they freely choose [353]." It belongs to the faculty, and not the administration, to choose their bargaining representative.

This teaching of the Church is no less important today than in 1891 or 1986. In fact, in his social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI instructed us that "the repeated calls issued within the Church's social doctrine, beginning with *Rerum Novarum*, for the promotion of workers' associations that can defend their rights must be honoured today even more than in the past."

When Catholic institutions recognize the rights of their workers in accordance with Catholic Social Teaching they evangelize the world. We prayerfully request that St. Leo's reconsider its decision and once more, as in the past, model Catholic Social Teaching for the world in its labor relations.

In Solidarity,



Clayton Sinyai  
Executive Director