News

Construction workers stand on the roof of a church with a coppery green dome and cross

Construction workers replace the tile roof of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Milwaukee May 27, 2023. Labor Day, a federal holiday in the United States is celebrated on Monday, Sept. 4. The observance honors the American labor movement and the works and contributions of laborers in the United States. (OSV News photo/Sam Lucero)



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The chairman of the U.S. bishops' domestic policy committee said the nation has "urgent work" to do to really show a "radical solidarity with working families" and provide ongoing support for the well-being of all families.

"There are signs of improvement and concern regarding the economy," Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Archeparchy of Philadelphia said in an Aug. 30 statement the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued in advance of Labor Day on Sept. 4.

Despite positive economic indicators of low unemployment, slowing inflation and new jobs being added, "more families feel like they are worse off today than the year before," he said, citing a Federal Reserve report.

"There is still urgent work needed to exercise radical solidarity with mothers, children, and families," said the archbishop, who is the chairman of the USCCB's

Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development. "Let us pray and act towards this end, always listening to the Lord who fulfills glad tidings in our hearing his word each day."

Gudziak also said "the essential role labor unions can and often do play in society must be acknowledged and affirmed," and added that unions should "continue to be supported in their work that supports healthy, thriving families, especially those who are most in need."

The archbishop highlighted the needs American families were facing in today's economy.

"The percentage of Americans who cannot afford an unexpected $400 expense has increased to 37%. While price increases are not as steep as they once were, grocery prices have still risen nearly 5% over the last year," he said, pointing to other statistics, including that three out of 10 mothers report "there have been times in the past year when they could not buy food."

"Millions have been priced out of homeownership while rental housing becomes even less affordable," he continued, and the cost of health care "is becoming out of reach for too many."

"We are called to join Jesus in his ministry to bring glad tidings to the poor. We must do more to support families," he said, noting that last October, the chairmen of several U.S. bishops' committees called on Congress to show a "radical solidarity" with mothers, children and families in a post-Roe world. In June 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court's Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization ruling overturned its 1973 Roe v. Wade precedent that legalized abortion nationwide, sending the issue back to the states.

In an Oct. 26, 2022, letter to Congress, the bishops' chairmen for their pro-life activities, family life, domestic policy and migration committees shared "their vision for an authentically life-affirming society that truly prioritizes the well-being of families and generously welcomes new life."

"They highlighted the USCCB's long history of support for nutrition programs, affordable housing, access to healthcare, safety net programs, and justice for workers -- including things like just wages, support for organized labor, and safe working conditions regardless of immigration status -- and called for policy solutions

to support all children and families," Gudziak recalled. Those priorities remain the same for the U.S. church, he said.

He pointed to laws Congress did enact at the end of last year that support families, measures the U.S. bishops backed, such as the Providing Urgent Maternal Protections (PUMP) for Nursing Mothers Act and a permanent option for states to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage for one year after birth.

But Congress should strengthen the Child Tax Credit, Gudziak said. Congress allowed the measure to expire at the end of 2021, with the consequence that 3.7 million children slipped back into poverty, with Black and Latino families experiencing the biggest impact, according to Columbia University's Center on Poverty and Social Policy.

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Gudziak also called for "national support for paid family leave," emphasizing it is "pro-life to support families", and he said there needed to be "better access to affordable, quality child care and pre-kindergarten, which also ensures just wages for child care workers and teachers."

Additionally, he said "families that choose to care for children at home should be supported."

"Faith-based child care and early education programs have served families for decades and should be included as part of the solution, in a manner consistent with their freedom to retain their religious character," he said.

"It is good that bipartisan discussions are happening right now around all of these issues," Gudziak said. "Congress should take prompt action in all of these areas to protect the well-being of mothers, children, and their families."

But he added, "Public policy changes are not the only way we can help families thrive."

He said, "Communities can organize to call attention to the problems facing families and to bring about solutions," adding that the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the bishops' domestic anti-poverty program, "supports this work and

is a great help to families that are struggling."

One example he pointed to is Washington Home Care Cooperatives in western Washington state, which receives CCHD support to provide "good-paying jobs through worker-owned businesses to those who deliver in-home care to elders and people with disabilities."

The bishops started CCHD 50 years ago to "empower people experiencing poverty to take action to help themselves," Gudziak said.

He stressed labor unions are key to working families' thriving and should be "encouraged in maintaining and increasing their focus on performing that critical role."

"Indeed, as Pope Francis has suggested, 'there are no free workers without trade unions,'"
he said, underscoring the pope's statement that they must also "be a voice for the voiceless."

"The purpose of the economy is to enable families to thrive. This notion is deeply rooted in Catholic social teaching," he said, adding that the church officially teaches that businesses, professional organizations, labor unions and the state must "promote policies that, from an employment point of view, do not penalize but rather support the family nucleus."

The Second Vatican Council said the "'entire process of productive work ... must be adapted to the needs of the person and to his way of life, above all to his domestic life, especially in respect to mothers of families,'" Gudziak said. "Are we meeting these standards? There is much more we can do."