“There will be no poor among you” (Deut 15:4)
Support for the 5-10-15 campaign of solidarity

For Christians, work is not an ill fate but an activity by which each person is able to flourish and contribute to the common good. At a deeper level, work is “the collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 378).

This dignity of work demands that workers be duly recognized by putting in place working conditions that respect that dignity. Already in his own day, St. Paul remarked that “the labourer deserves his wages” (1 Tim 5:18). Such wages consist, as we all know, of the salary received and of the general conditions associated with it.

However, we often observe that working conditions imposed on many labourers threaten their dignity in various ways. This is particularly true in the case of women, migrants, youth, and Indigenous workers.

As Pope Francis reminds us, “we have to remember that the majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day, with dire consequences” (Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, para. 52).

In Québec, for example, the fact that the Act respecting labour standards does not oblige employers to inform their employees in advance of their schedules means that workers are often in a precarious position, unable to plan their personal lives or provide support to loved ones.

Who, for that matter, has never had the experience of having to miss work on account of health, family emergencies, or training? Although the law allows one to take unpaid leave in such situations, we are dismayed that employers are obliged to offer paid leave for such reasons only two days out of the year. For persons in low-income situations, going unpaid for any length of time entails serious consequences that perpetuate the precarity of their circumstances.

Finally, millions of workers earn less than $15/hour, a fact that is unsurprising given that the provincial minimum wage as of this writing is $12.50/hour. Thus someone who earns minimum wage in Québec will find themselves living just above the poverty line even if they work 35 hours a week – which does not guarantee that they will be able to ensure a dignified subsistence for themselves and their loved ones.
Hence the urgency of doing what is needed to ensure that Quebecers have access to wages that make possible a quality of life that at a minimum corresponds to their human dignity.

The Church’s social teaching calls social institutions in general and especially in the economic and labour sectors to place themselves at the service of the dignity of persons and not to work to their detriment. At the Second Vatican Council the bishops of the world affirmed that “in the economic and social realms, too, the dignity and complete vocation of the human person and the welfare of society as a whole are to be respected and promoted. For man is the source, the center, and the purpose of all economic and social life” (Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et spes, para. 63). Faithful to this conviction, Pope Francis adds that “we may not always be able to reflect adequately the beauty of the Gospel, but there is one sign which we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards. (Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, para. 195).

For several years now, the respective levels of government and various civic institutions have undertaken to combat poverty in Québec, and this is something we note with satisfaction.

Thus, for instance, in the wake of Québec’s adoption in 2005 of the Act to combat poverty and social exclusion, the government of Québec itself adopted a plan, updated from time to time, to combat poverty. However, it must be admitted that the real consequences of the plan are yet to be seen.

Out of a desire to contribute to these collective efforts, groups devoted to the rights of non-unionized workers, organizations dedicated to combatting poverty, and labour unions throughout Québec decided a few years ago to launch the “5-10-15” campaign.

This campaign lobbies for every worker to know their work schedule at least 5 days in advance, to have at least 10 days paid leave for sickness or family responsibilities, and to establish a minimum wage of at least $15/hour. This campaign is meant to benefit especially those who are non-unionized.

Aware of the concerns raised by the organizers of this campaign, and agreeing as we do with the solutions it proposes, the Québec Assembly of Catholic Bishops has decided to offer its support for the campaign through this Message for May 1st 2019. The Assembly calls on all Catholic organizations in Québec to adopt as a goal that all of their personnel should enjoy the working conditions envisioned by the 5-10-15 campaign.

The bishops are hopeful that the demands put forward by the 5-10-15 campaign will bring about advantages not only for lowest-income workers but also for the whole community, which will benefit from a valuing of the local economy, from a more stable labour force, from households less exposed to volatility, and from a greater social peace. As we do now, we invite all of you to support the 5-10-15 campaign. For more information, please see http://cinqdixquinze.org/ (French only).
Following Pope Francis’ example, we believe that the Catholic church and all of her members must be involved in the struggle for justice (cf. Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, para. 183).

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This message for May 1st was prepared by the Conseil Église et Société (‘Council on Church and Society’) and by members of the Table provinciale de pastorale sociale (‘Provincial Roundtable on Social Ministry’).

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