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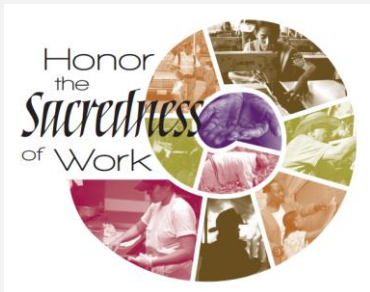
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## Fall Newsletter, October 2020

Welcome to the newest edition of our Worker Justice Wisconsin Newsletter. We have experienced some amazing growth and changes over the last few years... we are excited to share some of the most recent events with you.

### YTD WAGE THEFT WAGES RECOVERED: \$121,280

#### EVENTS



From Executive Director, Rebecca Meier- Rao

This year WJW continued its tradition of Labor in the Pulpits/On the Bimah/On the Minbar, where local faith communities commit to lifting up the dignity of work around the time of Labor Day weekend. This year we gave special focus to workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and those who have been subjected to discrimination in their workplaces. We created a video for congregations to use if they wished – I spoke about how our cases nearly tripled during the pandemic, and Sr. Maureen McDonnell (Sinsinawa Dominican) and Pastor Jacobo Castillo (Iglesia Fuente de Vida) reflected on worker justice/empowerment from the perspective of their faith traditions. Below is the transcript of my video message to all participating faith communities. Thanks to all faith communities who participated in Labor in the Pulpits this year – for your heartfelt prayers, messages of worker justice, and for lifting up the dignity of work during these most troubling times!

An important part of Worker Justice Wisconsin is its Worker Center, where mostly low-wage and immigrant workers come for assistance when they experience wage theft, workplace discrimination and other forms of labor exploitation. At the Center, workers are empowered to stand up for living wages, health and safety in their workplaces, and the right to organize and participate in collective actions against bad employers.

I want to tell you that since COVID-19, our Worker Center caseload has nearly tripled, and the reason for this is because the pandemic exacerbated longstanding worker injustices in Madison and Dane County. We saw hotels and restaurants laying off workers without paying them their last paychecks or earned PTO (this was particularly devastating for immigrant workers who did not qualify for unemployment, and therefore had no other form of income to sustain them). Both Discrimination and Health and Safety cases increased, while vulnerable workers contacted us to get help navigating the excruciating choice between keeping a bad job and having no income at all. We saw residential cleaners forced to work against the Safer at Home Order, and workers in various industries being forced to work with COVID-19 symptoms. Growing up in the Lutheran Church, I learned early on that ALL human beings are created in the Image and Likeness of God (it's clearly stated in Genesis 1:27). In the words of the theologian Bryan Massingale, what this means is that each and every "person has dignity, value and worth that is intrinsic and sacred." By virtue of our intrinsic and sacred dignity, we automatically deserve (not earn, but deserve) what is necessary for life to thrive: things like food, water, housing, health, and of course, safe working conditions and a living wage.

In my seven months as Executive Director of Worker Justice Wisconsin, I have found that too many employers in our community do not know, comprehend, or perhaps even care about the principle of human dignity. But I have also seen workers stand up for their rights, successfully confront bosses in discrimination cases, and demand their stolen wages back. In fact, at Worker Justice Wisconsin we have helped workers recover nearly \$120,000 in earned but unpaid wages this year alone. I have come to admire the dedicated passion of our staff, volunteers and board, as well as the open and

collaborative efforts of local unions and nonprofits. I have seen communities of faith support worker's rights and proclaim that Black and Brown lives matter. There is a recognition of human dignity in our midst. May we all join together this Labor Day and throughout the month of September to honor and uphold the dignity of every worker!

#### 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Faith Labor Breakfast

Planned for the last week in April, our 20<sup>th</sup> annual Faith Labor Breakfast was unfortunately postponed due the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. When the Safer at Home initiative first was announced, we were optimistic that we would still be able to hold the event at a later date. We had Alexis Herman, former US Secretary of the Department of Labor scheduled to be our keynote speaker. We were also able to secure many great sponsorships for the event. Unfortunately, as the pandemic continues to persist, we have had to make the hard decision to not hold an event this year. The Faith Labor Breakfast has been our most successful fundraising event each year and we are hoping that we will be able to continue our tradition in 2021. Stay tuned for more details and the opportunity to participate or sponsor next year's event.

We would like to thank the following sponsors for their continued support and understanding during the tough decision to cancel the event.

Platinum Level (\$2000) – Hawks Quindel, S.C. Law Offices, Painters District Council No. 7

Gold Level (\$1000) – Law Offices of Kurt Kobelt, SMART -Local Union 565, Mary Bell

Silver Level (\$500) – Paulette Harder, Edgewood College, Sinsinawa Dominicans, Carpenters Union Local 314, MTI

Bronze Level (\$100) – Pax Christi, Jim Cavanaugh, Mr & Mrs Skloot, Ekpevi Ayite Da Costa, Ann McNearly, CWA, SEIU Health Care Of Wisconsin, Lake Edge UCC, Rabbi Renee Bauer and Laurie Zimmerman, Wells Printing and Digital, WEAC, Michael Harder, Richard Wagner and John Murphy

Even though we were unable to host the event this year, we really feel thankful for these sponsors. With their generosity, we were able to have the extra funds to help ensure our staff had the needed office supplies and technical equipment to work safely at home during this tough time. As the number of cases increased due to the outbreak, we were able to keep our “doors” open, while safely at home to all those that sought our assistance.

## Highlights of 2020

During this difficult year, Worker Justice Wisconsin is proud to have been awarded grants from, and partnered with, the following:

- Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters ([sinsinawa.org](http://sinsinawa.org))
- Project RESPECT (<https://arccommsserv.com/sexual-exploitation-and-human-trafficking.php>)
- Madison Cooperative Development Coalition ([mcdcmadison.org](http://mcdcmadison.org))
- Dane County Bar Association Pro Bono Trust Fund ([dcbn.net](http://dcbn.net))

We are also immensely grateful for the sizeable contributions we have received from these local organizations:

- Construction Business Group ([cbgwi.com](http://cbgwi.com))
- CUNA Mutual Group ([cunamutual.com](http://cunamutual.com))
- North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters ([northcountrycarpenter.org](http://northcountrycarpenter.org))
- Painters District Council 7 ([iupatdc7.com](http://iupatdc7.com))

Worker Justice Wisconsin is part of the COVID-19 task force with the Dignity at Work Coalition, which is centered on the rights of low-wage and immigrant workers. As a coalition we have spoken

with city and county leaders as well as Madison & Dane County Public Health to help strengthen Forward Dane Order. We have collaborated with several area organizations to ensure that the Madison & Dane County Public Health [Workplace Requirements](#) poster is up in every workplace for all employees to see. We are now in the process of disseminating health and safety information to workers throughout the state of Wisconsin.



## 2020 ELECTION

*Here at Worker Justice Wisconsin we want to make sure that everyone remembers to VOTE in the upcoming election on Tuesday November 3<sup>rd</sup>!*

It is an understatement to say the results of this election will impact the labor industry. As our nation faces many of the hardest issues it has seen in recent history, every vote matters.

Regardless of party affiliation, Worker Justice Wisconsin would like to make sure that your vote is counted.

Please learn how to register at:

<https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote> or you can register, apply for an absentee ballot, check your ballot progress, and find polling locations: <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/> you

can even find where and when you can vote early. Please share these websites with friends and safely help those that need assistance to get to the polls. There is too much at stake to not vote.

2019 brought the highest number of discrimination cases into our office in the history of the worker center. If you are receiving this newsletter, you support and understand the mission at Worker Justice Wisconsin, as much as we love what we do, we would love to see legislation in place that can help

protect the clients that come in our door. A lot of current legislation is making it difficult for workers to support their families, to feel safe at work and simply get paid the wages they deserve. Regardless of their national origin or citizen status – they deserve to be represented.

So let's get out there and vote for those candidates that are aware and sympathetic to the concerns and issues of lower class workers and the rights of all workers to work in a safe and dignified work environment!

## Spotlight on the Board



**Jim Cavanaugh – Worker Justice Wisconsin Vice President**

*Each newsletter will include a spotlight on a current Worker Justice Wisconsin Board Member. As each of them has contributed in amazing ways, we would like to share some of the great histories that not only brought these wonderful people to our organization but also learn about what drives them to continue to fight for the rights of workers.*

*When speaking with Jim, we rediscovered some amazing facts about him. Here are some points from our conversation:*

**Jim, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?**

After working at the State Historical Society for 12 years, I was elected president of the South Central Federation of Labor(SCFL) in 1986. I was re-elected and served until my retirement in 2012. I've served on numerous boards and committees; both non-profit and governmental. I have been married to my wife, Vicki for 52 years, have 2 kids and 8 grandkids.

**What is your involvement with WJW and its previous incarnations (ICWJ and the WRC)?**

In the late 1990s SCFL called a meeting of union activists and clergy interested in a

collaboration on social and economic justices which led to the creation of the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice (ICWJ). Early on the ICWJ launched the Latino Workers Project, publishing a report in 2001 that recommended forming a bilingual worker center. After a half dozen years, the worker center (Worker Rights Center) became its own non-profit organization. I've been engaged with both organizations from the start and have served as the WRC's vice president from its beginning through the merger that resulted in creation of Worker Justice Wisconsin.

**What has motivated you to be on the board and stay involved throughout the years?**

Obviously, as a union activist and leader for some 45 years, I have always had an abiding interest in fighting for workers, especially those who were begin exploited the most. I tell everyone that I spent most of my life emphasizing the rights of union workers and now in my retirement I am concentrating on doing so for non-union workers, especially immigrants.

**Is there an area of worker's rights that you are especially passionate about?**

I get most worked up about employers who blatantly violate the law simply because they think they can get away with it- be it wage theft, discrimination, unhealthy/unsafe work conditions, or any other actions that treat their workers as expendable commodities rather than human beings.

**What is your vision and hope for the future of Worker Justice Wisconsin?**

I hope that WJW can reach and maintain a stable, consistent financial footing and that over time more and more low-wage workers will establish ownership and leadership in WJW.

Thanks Jim for your dedication and contributions to Worker Justice Wisconsin and the community. The clients we serve are forever changed by your early work to make WJW a successful organization.



**THE WORK CONTINUES...**

In these unprecedented times, the demand for our services has increased. Due to the continue dedication of our staff and unparalleled support from our donors we have been able to still hold Know Your Rights Trainings virtually.

On September 20, 2020 – we were able to hold our first Co-operative Training course for several workers that are interested in developing their own cleaning co-operative. WJW wants to empower workers. Providing them the training and education about how to create their own safe work environments with livable wages is the first step.



Actual pictures taken from the Co-operative Training on September 20, 2020 at the Madison Labor Temple- social distancing precautions honored.

***Thanks to all that participated and the staff that made this happen.***

**Worker Justice Wisconsin  
Board of Directors**

*Kurt Kobelt- President  
Jim Cavanaugh – Vice President  
Mary Bell – Treasurer  
Saul M. Castillo – Secretary  
Paulette Harder  
Daniela Juarez  
Victoria Gutierrez  
Jeff Mehrhoff  
Matt Robles  
Charity Schmidt  
Scott Watson  
Ekpevi Ayite di Costa  
Pastor Jacobo Castillo  
Sister M. McDonnell*

**Worker Justice Wisconsin -  
Staff**

*Rebecca Meier-Rao – Executive Director  
Kristen Taylor – Worker Center Manager  
Sarah R. Soliman – Office Manager  
Socorro Cortez- Worker Center Advocate*

*And a special thanks to our great  
volunteers and interns...  
Stefania Sani, Sean Anderson,  
Larissa Rojas and Elizabeth Euller*

Please visit us for all up to date events and happenings at:

[www.workerjustice.org](http://www.workerjustice.org)



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