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# Faith & Family

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## Labor, management and faith

### Two coalitions in diocese promote rights of workers

The voice of a Cintas Corp. employee rose slightly as she berated the handful of clergy and labor activists standing around her Aug. 19 at the gates to the company's Rochester facility. The activists — mostly members of the Rochester Labor-Religion Coalition — were giving workers entering and leaving Cintas copies of a coalition statement in support of the workers' right to join a union.

The Cintas employee — who declined to give her name — told activists that she and other employees were tired of activists criticizing her company, which is engaged in a dispute with a union attempting to organize its workers.

"Each day we have to defend ourselves to our customers, to our family, to our friends," she said. "Over and over and over, we say we don't want a union."

Cintas, headquartered in Cincinnati, is currently the target of a nationwide organizing effort by UNITE HERE, a union created through the merger of the Union of Needletrades, Textiles and Industrial Employees, and the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union. Cintas' primary business is selling, renting and cleaning uniforms.

The local Cintas employee arguing with activists said she had started as a line worker at the company and had been promoted to an office job. She said Cintas treated her and other employees fairly, but another worker leaving the plant by car said the unidentified woman did not represent the



A Cintas employee (center) confronts Rochester Labor-Religion Coalition member Joyce Herman (from left), United Methodist seminarian Bob Crystal, the Rev. Tom LeBeau of Seneca United Methodist Church, Interfaith Alliance of Rochester board member Robert Herman and Father Lawrence Tracy Aug. 19 as the activists gathered outside Cintas Corp. to distribute statements supporting the employees' rights to organize.

views of all workers.

"I want a union so we can be treated fair and respected," said Carolina Richardson, a folder at Cintas. She added that she felt the woman criticizing the activists was simply talking the management line. "She's not speaking for everybody. She's one of them."

The clergy gathered at Cintas Aug. 19 represented area Jewish and Christian congregations and included Father Larry Tracy, a priest of the Diocese of Rochester who resides at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in the city. The priest noted that he was upholding a long-standing tradition in the Catholic Church, one endorsed by Pope John

Paul II as well as several popes before him. That tradition supports workers' right to organize, Father Tracy said, noting that Catholic social teaching says all companies, no matter how well they treat their employees, are obliged to respect that right.

"It doesn't always mean that labor is always right and management is always wrong," he said. "But you can't have justice with one side dictating the terms."

### TERMS OF VOTE

Wade Gates, a national spokesman for Cintas, said the company would welcome a vote by employees to join a union as long as the vote is

conducted by secret ballot and monitored by the National Labor Relations Board. UNITE HERE, on the other hand, wants the company to recognize the union if a majority of workers sign cards indicating that is their wish.

In Rochester, Mike Roberts, a UNITE HERE organizer and co-chairman of the Rochester Labor-Religion Coalition, said the union would agree to an NLRB election if it believed Cintas would forego actions he perceives as "intimidating" pro-union employees. He noted that Cintas recently fired six Rochester employees, who the union believes were targeted for their pro-union ac-

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