

# **Our Lady Of The Miraculous Medal Church**

1434 Straight Path  
Wyandanch, New York 11798-3909

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To Believe, To Belong, To Be Compassionate

Creer, Compartir, Ser Compasivo

July 6, 2017

Rebecca Philbert  
C.E.O. & President  
Best Market  
1 Lexington Avenue  
Bethpage, NY 11714

Dear Ms. Philbert:

I am writing to you as pastor of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Church with concern for many of my parishioners as well as other working people on Long Island. With regret we have decided no longer to purchase at-cost fruit for our summer camp from Best Market. We reached this decision after much discussion and discernment. Permit me to explain our reasoning.

Our parish is located in Wyandanch, one of Long Island's most economically-challenged communities. Our Gerald J. Ryan Outreach Center serves 1,000 people a month, many of them working poor, who do not earn enough to make ends meet and therefore rely on us for food, clothing, emergency assistance and other resources to get through the month. Our Gerald J. Ryan Summer Camp has provided a safe play and educational experience for Wyandanch children for forty years. Thursday "fruit day" has become a favorite among the campers.

The cost of living is so high on Long Island that economists estimate a family of four needs to earn at least \$75,000 a year just to pay basic bills like food, rent, utilities, transportation, clothing, child care, and health insurance. A worker would need a job paying \$39 an hour in order to earn \$75,000 a year. This explains why the majority of Long Islanders are two-income families, or why so many have to work two jobs in order to pay their bills. Many still fall short, so they come to our outreach center.

I am painfully aware that in recent years, 51 unionized Waldbaum's and Pathmark supermarkets closed on Long Island; 1,500 workers lost their jobs. Unionized companies like Stop & Shop purchased some of the closed supermarkets. But others were taken over by Best Market, a non-unionized company, whose union philosophy, as stated in your

employee handbook, is "*strongly opposed to third party [i.e., union] representation.*"

Numerous economic studies have shown a direct correlation between the decline in unions and the growth of income inequality and wage stagnation in the United States. For example, *Fortune* magazine reported in a September 1, 2015 article by Thomas Kochan, an MIT professor of management:

*"It is no coincidence that the gap between wages and productivity began to expand dramatically around 1980, a turning point for collective bargaining. That's when union bargaining power began the three-decade-long decline that continues today. International competition was already eating away at unionized manufacturing companies in the US, but the trend was accelerated by ... growth of nonunion domestic competition. ... Recent estimates indicate the decline in unions accounts for as much as 20% to 30% of the rise in wage inequality."*

Closer to home, I have learned from United Food and Commercial Workers union researchers and organizers through their examination of actual pay stubs, that some of your workers have seen their union wage of \$24 an hour cut to \$12 an hour, which translates to \$23,040 a year, just below the Federal Poverty Level for a family of four. Some have also seen their hours cut.

Others, without union rules, now face weekly changes in their work schedules, never knowing which hours they will have to work, which parent-teacher conferences they will not be able to attend, or which of their children's soccer games they will miss.

In addition, without affordable, safe childcare, these so-called "flexible" hours create chaos for families with young children. And, I have been told, health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket health costs have skyrocketed for Best Market employees.

All of this explains why union researchers found that about 58 percent of Best Market employees leave your employment within two years and less than 12 percent remain with your company after five years. This does not bode well for the stability of the Best Market workforce.

Best Market is not alone among companies on Long Island engaged in a race to the bottom of wages, benefits and working conditions. With 24 formerly unionized supermarkets now in the Best Market chain, your company has come to symbolize the growing erosion of equal economic opportunities here on Long Island.

Our parish is about 70 percent Hispanic, drawing people who live in the towns of Islip, Babylon and Huntington. Many Best Market employees are Hispanic. Some of our

parishioners may very well work at nearby Best Market stores in West Islip, Islip, West Babylon or Huntington. Currently, about 25 percent of the people who come into our outreach center are Hispanic. I fear this number will grow as Best Market and other non-unionized supermarkets make it harder and harder for working families to pay their bills.

A parishioner told me that, before your expansion, workers seemed satisfied with their treatment at Best Market. Now it appears there is growing discontent among your workers as their wages and working conditions are deteriorating.

Pope Francis said this to a group of workers:

*"Every worker ... has the right to fitting remuneration, to social security and to retirement coverage.... There are...workers in popular jobs who are excluded from labor rights, who are denied the possibility of joining labor unions, who have no adequate and stable income. Today I want to join my voice to yours and support you in your struggle."*

I join Pope Francis in supporting their struggle.

Ms. Philbert, please know that I am grateful for the assistance your company has offered our summer camp program's "Fruit Day" in the past. My hope is that we could once again be able to accept your generosity, after you have taken steps to allow your workers to unionize and thereby secure their labor rights as well as decent wages and working conditions.

Yours truly,

Rev. William Brisotti, Pastor

Cc: Most Reverend John Barres, Bishop, Diocese of Rockville Centre  
Sr. Vicki Toale, OP, Pastoral Associate, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Church