



**WITNESS
FOR JUSTICE**

A weekly commentary from the
United Church of Christ

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Bean There, Not Doing That

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I have a toddler, therefore I drink coffee.

To get going and keep up with my delightful young one, I certainly savor but also definitely need at least a few cups to warm up and turn my own lights on—especially since I’m usually woken up before the sun.

I began drinking coffee as an adult in my first organizing job, where “coffee meetings,” as in congregational life, were the norm.

My work is within communities of faith and conscience, leveraging our power to manifest a just and fair world in all our endeavors. In these caffeinated meetings, many revolving around “Fair Trade,” I learned very quickly that not all coffee is created equal.

Whatever your preferred grind of bean for taking on the grind, coffee is an extremely popular commodity—and one that, for most of us, is cultivated far away. The history of how coffee became an everyday staple is riven with grave injustice, [beginning with the transatlantic slave trade](#). Much coffee available to us these days is still produced under exploitative and abusive conditions. Thanks to decades of organized global struggle, there are also abundant choices for coffee that “tastes like justice.” Nowadays consumers can leverage awareness of fairly and directly traded coffee producers into devoting our dollars to supporting workers and families worldwide who make this ubiquitous beverage possible.

Rooted in these Gospel values, the



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United Church of Christ [officially declared itself to be a “Fair Trade Denomination”](#) in 2005. We encourage “churches in the denomination to offer certified coffee, purchased through companies that follow the widely established and commonly agreed upon principles of justice and fairness for coffee farmers and their communities.”

However, as much as I may rely on coffee personally and professionally and prefer whenever possible a delicious pour over or French press, I have not spent a dime at Starbucks in over three years.

I was aware of burgeoning [labor organizing efforts nationwide by Starbucks baristas](#), but three years ago I heard and heeded a call to boycott after [the corporation sued Starbucks Workers United](#) over displays of solidarity with Palestinians by several of its union chapters in the wake of [the ongoing genocide](#).

I’ve since learned things that will decaffeinate any desire for Starbucks for people of faith and conscience. Backed by the SEIU and AFL-CIO, organized Starbucks baristas are now officially calling for a national boycott because their simple requests to secure a basic livelihood and dignified working conditions are being obstructed by a company that acts with unholy amounts of greed and corruption.

In just the past couple years, Starbucks has [completely rolled back its D.E.I. initiatives](#) and [canceled its ambitious climate preservation goals](#) while firing the entire sustainability team that had been employed to implement them. The company that once saw a moneymaking opportunity with “Black Lives Matter” merchandise during the Uprising of 2020 has [now chosen to open new stores in the region of China where genocide is being committed against the Uy-ghur people](#). Much of Starbucks coffee comes from Brazil, where the plantations that fill Starbucks cups are exactly that: hubs of forced labor—modern-day slavery.

All of this while Starbucks' CEO, who was given over \$100 million in his first four months on the job, enjoys unfettered private jet use as the company builds him a \$100 million office.

Meanwhile, the brave and exploited baristas have struggled against almost every unjust union-busting practice and have brought over 600 unresolved labor practice violations, making [Starbucks the biggest labor rights violator](#) in history. But all they—the people who do the actual work at the company—want is a better wage and working conditions, and our solidarity.

Seventeen dollars an hour? Three people on the floor at all times (so they can take a bathroom break)? Annual cost of living increases at a time when gas and grocery prices are skyrocketing and 1 in 6 Americans are behind on utility bills?

All of these asks and more are in the proposed contract from Starbucks Workers United, and would cost less than **one** average day of sales for Starbucks.

In Jesus' holy name, [join the boycott](#). And if you go for coffee in any of its amazing forms: Only buy and drink coffee that “tastes like justice,” at home, at work, at church, in community, and especially when your toddler wakes you up before the sun has decided to do the same.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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