



Pilgrim Lodge

MAINE CONFERENCE ~ UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Being Sweatshop & Child Labor Free Is More Difficult Than We Imagined

Your 2009 PL T-Shirts *may not be* sweatshop free

(this does not apply to older T's, dean and staff shirts, sweatshirts, or sweatpants)

In 2005, the Outdoor Ministries Committee of the Maine Conference, United Church of Christ committed to purchasing clothes made sweat shop and child labor free. This pledge applied to clothes purchased for the program such as T-shirts for Deans and Staff members as well as the clothing we sell in the camp store. In some cases it has been more expensive and in others it has proven to be a complex and thorny task.

After a trip to the Common Ground Fair, our Director Bryan was impressed with the art work and quality of the T-shirts produced for the event. Each garment was made with organic material in keeping with the Maine Organic Farmers and Growers Association (MOFGA) who sponsor the fair. We researched the origin and found that Liberty Graphics was a local company based in Freedom, Maine. We were impressed with the wide arrange of designs, including many that were appropriately camp themed. Our administrator Karen set up and appointment and drove to Freedom to meet with the good people at Liberty Graphics in order to assure doing business with them was in keeping with our sweat free principles. We were surprised to find that some of the designs we were interested in were not available on organic shirts. We were disappointed when we discovered the alternative they used was a company named Gildan. We remember hearing that a few years ago Gildan was called on some particularly egregious involvement with sweat shop conditions. Liberty assured us that those days were in the past and as evidence provided us with the [Gildan webpage](#) outlining the improvements they've made in regard to working conditions for those who produce their shirts. We were pleased at the improvements and heartened by the fact that the message seemed to be getting out. We ordered some beautiful shirts for the Pilgrim Lodge store.

After the order was placed and well into the process we discovered something that concerned us. The watchdog group and that Gildan used as evidence of their improvements and upon which they set their standards on working conditions is [Fair Labor Association \(FLA\)](#). The FLA is a group created and maintained by the garment industry itself. Further research revealed that the [board of directors](#) is a mix of government and corporate leaders. In fact the first person listed is from Gildan itself. This "fox guarding the henhouse" situation is far from an objective standard with the rights of the worker being paramount.

To make matters more complicated, when the shirts were delivered, some were printed on shirts from another company "Anvil" which we had not even had the opportunity to check out.

This experience has taught us a lesson on how difficult it can be to try to support companies that are committed to human dignity and fairness in a culture driven by profit and image. Since the shirts were already printed we decided on the following steps. 1. We will tell our story by posting it on the web, near the camp store, and by giving out a note to everyone who purchases one of these questionable garments. 2. We will write an open letter to Liberty Graphics explaining our disappointment and declaring that we will no longer use their company if they cannot unequivocally guarantee that the products they sell us are made by workers treated humanely and fairly. 3. We will write to Gildan and Anvil and express our concerns. 4. We will continue to honor our commitment to sweat shop & child labor free and share our experience with our campers, staff and volunteers.

We are aware that trying to live in a way that is socially and environmentally responsible is an ongoing learning process and we hope that you will join us on this journey.

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" Galatians 6:2