



# Resources for Living Wage Worship Services and Community Events *Living Wage Days 2009*



*“A national minimum wage act that will give all Americans a decent standard of living” was a key demand of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Let us join together for justice so that everyone who works for a living can earn a living wage.*

*“Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an overflowing stream.”—Amos 5:24*

**A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it**  
***Raise the Federal Minimum Wage to \$10 in 2010***

**Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign**

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



## **Resources for Living Wage Worship Services and Community Events**

The Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign produced this guide to help raise the minimum wage and make Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of economic justice—including living wages for all American workers—a reality.

It is intended to be both informational and inspirational, containing action steps, background information and talking points about minimum wage and growing income inequality, tools for media, organizing and advocacy, and resources on the diverse theological perspectives underlying a call for fair wages, workers' rights and economic justice

You can use it to create living wage worship services, hold community events, craft minimum wage and living wage actions and materials, educate and mobilize people in your communities, and collect signatures for the Let Justice Roll Campaign to Raise the Federal Minimum Wage to \$10 in 2010.

*Resources for Living Wage Worship Services and Community Events*, 3rd Edition, was produced by Let Justice Roll Board Members

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## ***Resources for Living Wage Worship Services and Community Events* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, November 2008**

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# Let Justice Roll Living Wage Days 2009

## Raise the Federal Minimum Wage to \$10 in 2010

**Celeste Cook** cares for disabled people in their Atlanta homes, preparing meals and medicines, giving baths, and wheeling clients into fresh air on sunny days. She loves her job. But as a health care worker, Celeste cannot afford health insurance for herself or her family members because she is paid the minimum wage — a poverty wage.



In downtown Cleveland, Rodney Campbell gets up at 5 o'clock every morning to clean office buildings for \$6.55 per hour. He takes pride in his work. But when Rodney goes home, he struggles to provide for his children, sometimes relying on food banks to put dinner on the table. He worries about his kids' future.

Celeste and Rodney are not alone. The minimum wage is set so low that millions of people working full time on low wages (whether minimum wage or above minimum wage) are constantly choosing which necessities to go without: paying rent or buying food, paying for childcare or paying for healthcare.

**Take Action! Hold a Let Justice Roll Living Wage Worship Service or Community Event on the weekend of Jan. 10-11, 2009 or a later date.**

- Invite low-wage workers and their families to share testimonials at your services and events.
- Gather Signatures for Faith Leaders, General Public & Business Leaders Letters to Congress for \$10 in 10 to be Delivered to the New Congress in 2009 [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org).
- Consider holding a collection or special offering for the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign.
  - Sign Up for Living Wage Days at <http://www.letjusticeroll.org/livingwage-signup.html>

*This Resource guide for Living Wage Worship Services and Community Events has policy points, educational and worship resources, a sample order of service and program, youth activities and more!*

Sponsoring a Let Justice Roll Living Wage Day Service or Community Event will help bring the minimum wage closer to a living wage by supporting the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign to raise the federal minimum wage to \$10 in 2010. In hard economic times, it is more important than ever for people of faith to stand with low-wage workers and their families. Let us remember the minimum wage was not enacted during good times, but during the extremely hard times of the Great Depression.

**Join the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign**

***A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it***

# About Let Justice Roll

## A Job Should Keep You Out Of Poverty, Not Keep You In It

The **Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign** is the leading faith and community coalition for living wages across the United States. Since 2005, we have helped raise state and local minimum wages in numerous states, and played a key role in raising the federal minimum wage for the first time in a decade. More than 90 faith, community, labor and business organizations have joined the nonpartisan Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign. We invite you to join us!

Talking about values is no substitute for valuing hardworking men and women all across this nation who need a higher minimum wage. At \$6.55, the federal minimum wage buys less today than it did in 1950. The minimum wage will finally increase to \$7.25 on July 24, 2009. It would take \$10 to match the buying power of the 1968 minimum wage.

The minimum wage is a poverty wage instead of an anti-poverty wage.

The minimum wage is a bedrock moral value. It is immoral that workers who care for children, the ill and the elderly struggle to care for their own families.

It is immoral that the minimum wage keeps people in poverty instead of out of poverty.

Let Justice Roll played a leading role to pass ballot initiatives in 2006 raising state minimum wages in Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Nevada and Ohio. These victories built on successful earlier legislative campaigns that raised state minimum wages in Arkansas—the first state in the South in which the Legislature voted to increase the state minimum wage above the federal level—as well as Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Let Justice Roll helped raise state minimum wages in Indiana, Kentucky, New Hampshire and New Mexico in 2007.

In Kansas—where Let Justice Roll is working to raise the state minimum wage and to pass citywide raises—Kansas City Kansas became the first city in the state to raise the minimum wage above the state's lowest-in-the-nation minimum wage of \$2.65 an hour. Let Justice Roll organizers are also working in state and local minimum wage and living wage campaigns in Georgia, Tennessee and in the Cleveland, Ohio area. And Let Justice Roll is supporting campaigns in states such as in New Jersey and looking ahead to new campaigns in the South, where so many workers suffer the hardship of low wages.

Federal, state and city minimum wage raises are putting thousands of dollars more into the hands of those for whom every extra dollar counts in the struggle to pay rent, health care and other necessities.

**Let Justice Roll calls on Congress to raise the minimum wage to \$10 in 2010.**

We summarize why raising the minimum wage is good for workers, business, communities and the economy in the section, “Policy Points: Raise the Minimum Wage to \$10 in 2010.”

Let's build on the victories of 2006 - 2008, and make 2009 the turning point to a true living wage for all workers—whatever their state, whatever their job.

# **A Just Minimum Wage Good For Workers, Business and Our Future**

**By Holly Sklar and the Rev. Paul Sherry**

Wages reflect our personal values and our nation's values. Wages reflect whether we believe workers are just another cost of business—like rent, electricity or raw materials—or human beings with inherent dignity, human rights and basic needs such as food, shelter and health care.

The minimum wage is where society draws the line: This low and no lower.

Our bottom line is this: A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it.

The federal minimum wage was enacted through the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which also set standards for overtime pay and restrictions on child labor. The Fair Labor Standards Act was designed to eliminate “labor conditions detrimental to the maintenance of the minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency and general well-being of workers.”

Set too low, the minimum wage is doing the opposite of what the Fair Labor Standards Act intended. It is reinforcing “labor conditions detrimental to the maintenance of the minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency and general well-being of workers.”

...

The minimum wage has become a poverty wage instead of an antipoverty wage. This has ripple effects through our workforce and society far beyond minimum wage workers and their families.

The minimum wage sets the wage floor. As the wage floor has dropped below poverty levels, millions of workers find themselves with paychecks above the minimum, but not above the poverty line. Millions of workers are working hard, but can't make ends meet.

Poverty rates are higher now than in the 1970s, thanks in part to the falling minimum wage.

...

The high road is not only the better road, it is the only road for progress in the future. An America that doesn't work for working people is not an America that works. We will not prosper economically or ethically in the global economy relying on low wages, outsourcing and debt in place of innovation and opportunity. We will not prosper in the global economy relying on disinvestment in place of reinvestment. We can't succeed that way anymore than farmers can “compete” by eating their seed corn.

The United States is an increasingly shaky superpower with a hollowed-out manufacturing base, large trade deficit and growing debt held heavily by other countries. Households have propped themselves up in the face of falling real wages by maxing out work hours, credit cards and home equity loans, and relying where possible on help from parents and grandparents who earned enough to support their families and save for the future. This is not a sustainable course.

The low road is like a “shortcut” that leads to a cliff.

...

Raising the minimum wage is an economic imperative for the enduring strength of our workforce, businesses, communities and economy.

Raising the minimum wage is a moral imperative for the very soul of our nation.

Join us in the cause to abolish poverty wages once and for all.

© Excerpted from *A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and Our Future*, by Holly Sklar and the Rev. Dr. Paul H. Sherry. Order hard copies or download by visiting [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org).

# Raising the Minimum Wage in Hard Times

Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign  
By Holly Sklar, Sr. Policy Adviser, 11/24/08

Also see “Policy Points: Raise the Minimum Wage to \$10 in 2010.”

## ■ The federal minimum wage was enacted during the Great Depression to promote economic recovery.

The federal minimum wage was not enacted during good times, but during the extraordinarily hard times of the Great Depression.<sup>1</sup> When the federal minimum wage was established in 1938, the unemployment rate was still a very high 19 percent.

President Franklin Roosevelt called the minimum wage “an essential part of economic recovery.” It would put a floor under workers wages, alleviate the hardship of inadequate wages, and stimulate the economy and job creation by increasing consumer purchasing power. The federal minimum wage was also meant to promote economic development and stop the original “race to the bottom” of employers moving to cheaper labor states in a downward spiral.

In his January 3, 1938 annual message to Congress, calling for passage of the historic Fair Labor Standards Act, Roosevelt said, millions of workers “receive pay so low that they have little buying power. Aside from the undoubted fact that they thereby suffer great human hardship, they are unable to buy adequate food and shelter, to maintain health or to buy their share of manufactured goods.”

Roosevelt said, “The increase of national purchasing power [is] an underlying necessity of the day.” And so it is today.

## ■ The long-term fall in worker buying power is one reason we are in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Consumer spending makes up about 70% of our economy. The minimum wage sets the wage floor. A low minimum wage institutionalizes an increasingly low-wage workforce.

A growing share of workers make too little to buy necessities—much less afford a middle-class standard of living. The richest 1% of Americans, meanwhile, has increased their share of the nation’s income to a higher level than any year since 1928—the eve of the Great Depression.

As we are seeing so painfully, an economy fueled by rising debt rather than rising wages is a house of cards.

“When businesses don’t pay a living wage all society pays,” says U.S. Women’s Chamber of Commerce CEO Margot Dorfman. “We pay through poverty and needless disease, disability and death from inadequate healthcare. We pay as women struggle to put food on the table. We pay as businesses and communities suffer economic decline.”

A rising minimum wage is part of the solution, not the problem, in an economic meltdown fueled by spiking oil and food prices, a bursting housing bubble, cascading credit crisis, extreme inequality, and speculation and greed run amok in an unregulated casino economy.

## ■ Raising the minimum wage boosts consumer purchasing power and economic recovery.

We hear a lot of talk about the importance of consumer spending to recovery from our current economic crisis. Well, consumers can’t spend what they don’t have.

If consumer purchasing power is at the heart of economic recovery, wages are at the heart of consumer purchasing power.

Minimum wage workers, like all workers, are also consumers. Minimum wage raises are well-targeted stimulus because they go directly to those who need to spend additional dollars on food, fuel, housing, healthcare and other necessities.

Minimum wage workers don't put raises into predatory lending Ponzi schemes, commodity speculation or offshore tax havens. They recycle their needed raises back into local businesses and the economy through increased spending.

## ■ Raising the minimum wage does not increase unemployment in good times or bad.

Extensive research refutes the claim that increasing the minimum wage causes increased unemployment and business closures. Some key national, state and citywide studies appear, in chronological order, in the endnote.<sup>2</sup>

The buying power of the minimum wage reached its peak in 1968. The unemployment rate went from 3.8% in 1967 to 3.6% in 1968 to 3.5% in 1969. The next time the unemployment rate came close to those levels was after the minimum wage raises of 1996 and 1997.

As *Business Week* put it in 2001, “Many economists have backed away from the argument that minimum wage [laws] lead to fewer jobs.”

Numerous states raised their minimum wages higher than the federal level during the 1997-2007 stagnation of the federal minimum wage at \$5.15. States that raised their minimum wages above the federal level experienced better employment and small business trends than states that did not.

Two important studies, controlling for non-minimum wage factors, published by the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, further advanced the research on minimum wage employment effects. *Minimum Wage Effects Across State Borders* compared all neighboring counties in the U.S. located on different sides of a state border with different minimum wage levels between 1990 and 2006 and found no adverse employment effects from higher minimum wages. *Do Minimum Wages Really Reduce Teen Employment?* analyzed the 1990-2007 period, which includes the last two recessions (July 1990 to March 1991 and March 2001 to November 2001) as well as the 2007 minimum wage increase. Researchers found no significant teen employment loss due to minimum wage increases.

## ■ Raise the floor to lift the economy.

The minimum wage sets the wage floor. As Roosevelt and his advisers understood, we have to raise the floor to lift the economy.

Frances Perkins was Secretary of Labor from 1933 to 1945 and the first woman to serve in a presidential cabinet. She accepted the position after securing Roosevelt's commitment to champion the minimum wage, unemployment insurance and old-age insurance. In 1933, while still serving as Industrial Commissioner of the New York State Department of Labor, Perkins wrote in the magazine, *Survey Graphic*, about the real “cost of a five-dollar dress”:

It hangs in the window of one of the little cash-and-carry stores that now line a street where fashionable New Yorkers used to drive out in their carriages to shop at Tiffany's and Constable's. It is a “supper dress” of silk crepe in “the new red” . . . A cardboard tag on the shoulder reads: “Special \$4.95.” Bargain basements and little ready-to-wear shops are filled with similar “specials.”

But the manufacturer who pays a living wage for a reasonable week's work under decent conditions cannot turn out attractive silk frocks to retail at \$5 or less . . .

If the purchaser does not pay a price that allows for a subsistence wage and reasonable hours and working conditions, then the cost of the "bargain" must be sweated out of the workers.

The red silk bargain dress in the shop window is a danger signal. It is a warning of the return of the sweatshop, a challenge to us all to reinforce the gains we have made in our long and difficult progress towards a civilized industrial order.

The Department of Labor is located in the Frances Perkins Building. It's time to stop undoing Perkins' legacy and build on it.

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<sup>1</sup> For a good overview, see Jonathan Grossman, "Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938: Maximum Struggle for a Minimum Wage," U.S. Department of Labor, [www.dol.gov/dol/esa/public/minwage/history.htm](http://www.dol.gov/dol/esa/public/minwage/history.htm).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Lawrence F. Katz and Alan B. Krueger, "The Effect of the Minimum Wage on the Fast Food Industry," Industrial Relations Section, Princeton University, February 1992; David Card, "Using Regional Variation in Wages to Measure the Effects of the Federal Minimum Wage," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, October 1992; David Card and Alan Krueger, *Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); David Card and Alan B. Krueger, "Minimum Wages and Employment: A Case Study of the Fast-Food Industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania: Reply," *American Economic Review*, December 2000 (in this reply, Card and Krueger update earlier findings and refute critics); Jared Bernstein and John Schmitt, Economic Policy Institute, *Making Work Pay: The Impact of the 1996-97 Minimum Wage Increase*, 1998; Jerold Waltman, Allan McBride and Nicole Camhout, "Minimum Wage Increases and the Business Failure Rate," *Journal of Economic Issues*, March 1998; A Report by the National Economic Council, *The Minimum Wage: Increasing the Reward for Work*, March 2000; Holly Sklar, Laryssa Mykyta and Susan Wefald, *Raise The Floor: Wages and Policies That Work For All Of Us* (Boston: South End Press, 2001/2002), Ch. 4 and pp. 102-08; Marilyn P. Watkins, Economic Opportunity Institute, "Still Working Well: Washington's Minimum Wage and the Beginnings of Economic Recovery," January 21, 2004; Amy Chasanov, Economic Policy Institute, *No Longer Getting By: An Increase in the Minimum Wage is Long Overdue*, May 2004; Fiscal Policy Institute, *States with Minimum Wages above the Federal Level Have Had Faster Small Business and Retail Job Growth*, March 2006 (update of 2004 report); John Burton and Amy Hanauer, Center for American Progress and Policy Matters Ohio, *Good for Business: Small Business Growth and State Minimum Wages*, May 2006; Liana Fox, Economic Policy Institute, *Minimum Wage Trends: Understanding past and contemporary research*, November 8, 2006; Paul Wolfson, Economic Policy Institute, *State Minimum Wages: A Policy That Works*, November 27, 2006; Arindrajit Dube, Suresh Naidu and Michael Reich, "The Economic Effects of a Citywide Minimum Wage," *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, July 2007; Jerold L. Waltman, *Minimum Wage Policy in Great Britain and the United States* (New York: Algora, 2008), pp. 17-19, 132-136, 151-162, 178-180; Sylvia Allegretto, Arindrajit Dube and Michael Reich, *Do Minimum Wages Really Reduce Teen Employment?*, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, Univ. of CA, Berkeley, June 28, 2008; Arindrajit Dube, T. William Lester and Michael Reich, *Minimum Wage Effects Across State Borders: Estimates Using Contiguous Counties*, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, August 2008; Michael F. Thompson, Indiana Business Research Center, "Minimum Wage Impacts on Employment: A Look at Indiana, Illinois and Surrounding Midwestern States," *Indiana Business Review*, Fall 2008.

# Policy Points: Raise the Minimum Wage to \$10 in 2010

Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign  
By Holly Sklar, Sr. Policy Adviser, 11/24/08

Also see the companion piece, “Raising the Minimum Wage in Hard Times”

“It is but equity...that they who feed, clothe and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labor as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed and lodged.”

— Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776.

“A self-respecting democracy can plead no justification for the existence of child labor, no economic reason for chiseling workers' wages or stretching workers' hours. Enlightened business is learning that competition ought not to cause bad social consequences, which inevitably react upon the profits of business itself.”

— Franklin D. Roosevelt, “A Fair Day's Pay for a Fair Day's Work,” May 24, 1937.

“Remember that almost every dime of these [minimum wage] workers' pay goes directly to local businesses for food, gas and clothing.”

— Dan Gardner, commissioner of Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries, 2007.

## Summary

- Recent minimum wage raises are too little, too late.
- The minimum wage is a poverty wage instead of an anti-poverty wage.
- The minimum wage sets the wage floor. A low minimum wage institutionalizes an increasingly low-wage workforce.
- A low minimum wage reinforces a growing gap between haves and have-nots.
- Workers are also consumers. The long-term fall in worker buying power is one reason we are in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.
- Minimum wage raises go directly to those who need to spend their increased income on food, housing, healthcare, fuel and other necessities.
- Raising the minimum wage lifts workers, business and the economy.
- \$10 in 2010 will make up ground lost in minimum wage buying power since 1968.
- \$10 in 2010 will bring us closer to the Fair Labor Standards Act “minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency and general well-being of workers.”
- \$10 in 2010 will strengthen the eroded foundation under our families, communities and economy.
- A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it.

### ■ Recent minimum wage raises are too little, too late.

The decade between the federal minimum wage increase to \$5.15 an hour on Sept. 1, 1997 and the July 24, 2007 increase to \$5.85 was the longest period in history without a raise.

- Family health insurance, which cost half a year's minimum wage income in 1998, costs more than the total annual minimum wage today.

Recent minimum wage raises are so little, so late that even with the minimum wage increase on July 24, 2008 to \$6.55, workers are still making less than they did in 1997, adjusting for the increased cost of living.<sup>3</sup>

- The 1997 minimum wage is worth \$7.04 in 2008 dollars.

About 10% of the workforce will benefit from the next (and last) scheduled raise to \$7.25 on July 24, 2009, along with more than 6 million children. In the states with the highest proportion of workers affected—Alabama, Texas, South Dakota, Arkansas, South Carolina, Mississippi, West Virginia, Louisiana and Kansas—17.5% to 19.1% of workers will receive increases.

Yet, the \$7.25 minimum wage is so overdue that by the time it takes effect in 2009, it will likely be lower in inflation-adjusted dollars than where it started when first set at \$5.15 in 1997. And it will be far behind the minimum wage of 1968.

### ■ **Workers have taken many steps back for every step forward since 1968.**

It would take a \$10.08 minimum wage as of 2008 (3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr) to match the buying power of the minimum wage in 1968—four decades ago.

- In 2008 dollars, the 1968 hourly minimum wage of \$10.08 adds up to \$20,966 a year.
- The July 24, 2008 hourly minimum wage of \$6.55 comes to just \$13,624 a year.
- The July 24, 2009 minimum wage of \$7.25 comes to just \$15,080 a year.

The two longest periods without a minimum wage increase both occurred in recent decades (between the raises on Jan. 1, 1981 and Apr. 1, 1990 and between those on Sept. 1, 1997 and July 24, 2007). To make matters worse, the minimum wage increases after the record-breaking periods without a raise were small compared to prior increases over shorter time spans.

It is immoral that the minimum wage is worth less now than it was in 1968, the year Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in Memphis while fighting for living wages for sanitation workers.

### ■ **Minimum wage does not provide a minimally adequate living standard.**

The federal minimum wage was enacted in 1938 through the Fair Labor Standards Act, designed to eliminate “labor conditions detrimental to the maintenance of the minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency and general well-being of workers.”

When set too low, the minimum wage does the opposite of what the Fair Labor Standards Act intended by reinforcing detrimental labor conditions.

Setting minimum wage too low means people are continually juggling which necessities to go *without*. Will it be “heat or eat,” rent or healthcare?

Setting minimum wage too low means more working people and families living in homeless shelters and cars. It means more working people turning to overwhelmed food banks.

- According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, there is no county in the country where a full-time worker making minimum wage can afford a one-bedroom apartment, (without spending more than 30% of their income on housing).
- The 2006 Conference of Mayors Hunger and Homelessness Survey found that 37% of adults requesting emergency food assistance were employed, as were 13% of the homeless.

It is immoral that workers earning minimum wage, who care for children, the ill and the elderly, struggle to care for themselves and their families.

## ■ The minimum wage is a poverty wage instead of an anti-poverty wage.

You can't fight poverty with a poverty wage.

Poverty rates are higher now than in the 1970s, thanks in part to the eroded value of the minimum wage.

Contrary to stereotype, the typical minimum wage worker is an adult over age 20. Most have high school degrees or beyond. They are healthcare aides who can't afford sick days, and childcare workers, retail clerks and security guards. They are young adults trying to work their way through college on wages that have fallen far behind the rising cost of tuition, housing, food and fees.

- Between 1998 and 2008, tuition and fees at public four-year colleges rose 50%.

A low minimum wage gives a green light to employers to pay poverty wages to a growing share of the workforce. As the wage floor has dropped below poverty levels, millions of workers find themselves with paychecks above the minimum—but not above the poverty line. More and more workers are in jobs with low wages and little or no benefits. More jobs are keeping people in poverty instead of out of poverty. More children of working parents are growing up in poverty.

## ■ A low minimum wage institutionalizes an increasingly low-wage workforce.

The minimum wage sets the wage floor. If the minimum wage had stayed above \$10, it would have put upward pressure—rather than downward pressure—on the average worker wage.

If the minimum wage had stayed above the \$10 value it had in 1968, Wal-Mart and McDonald's, our nation's largest employers, couldn't routinely pay wages much lower.

- Wal-Mart's wages would be closer to Costco, which pays starting wages of \$11 an hour plus much better benefits. Costco CEO Jim Sinegal has long asserted, *"Paying your employees well is not only the right thing to do, but it makes for good business."*
- McDonald's wages would be more like In-N-Out Burger, which has a starting wage of \$10 an hour plus benefits and has long ranked first or second nationwide among fast food chains in overall excellence.

Most of the ten occupations projected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to have the **largest employment growth during 2006-2016** have disproportionate numbers of minimum wage workers.

These include retail salespersons, fast food workers, home health aides and janitors. Raising the minimum wage is essential to them, their families and our economy.

## ■ Workers have not gotten "A fair day's pay for a fair day's work."

"As the productivity of workers increases, one would expect worker compensation to experience similar gains," a 2001 U.S. Department of Labor report observed. Increasingly, though, since the 1970s, the gains have gone to owners and top executives.

- Between 1947 and 1973, worker productivity rose 104% and the minimum wage rose 101%, adjusted for inflation. The middle class grew.
- Between 1973 and 2008 (3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr), productivity rose 87% and the minimum wage fell 17%, adjusted for inflation. Average worker wages fell 12%.
- Between 1973 and mid-year 2008, domestic corporate profits rose 161%, and profits in the disproportionately low-wage retail industry jumped 309%. The middle class shrunk.

Contrary to myth, **higher education does not protect workers from falling real wages.**

- The inflation-adjusted wages of recent college graduates were lower in 2007 than in 2001.

## ■ **A low minimum wage reinforces a growing gap between haves and have-nots.**

There has been a massive shift of income from the bottom and middle to the top. The richest 1% of Americans has increased their share of the nation's income to a higher level than any year since 1928—the eve of the Great Depression.

CEOs at big corporations make more in a couple hours than minimum wage workers make in a year—not counting CEO perks and benefits.

- In 1980, the average CEO at a big corporation made as much as 97 minimum wage workers.
- In 1997, the average CEO made as much as 728 minimum wage workers.
- In 2007, CEOs made as much as 1,131 minimum wage workers.

It is immoral that some are paid so little their children go without necessities—while others are paid so much their grandchildren will live in luxury without having to work at all.

## ■ **A low minimum wage reinforces discrimination and union busting.**

A disproportionate number of minimum wage workers are women and people of color. An unfair minimum wage compounds race and sex discrimination on and off the job. Union jobs typically pay higher wages. An unfair minimum wage compounds the widespread violations of workers' right to organize and union busting, which keeps unionization so artificially low.

“We know of no more crucial civil rights issue facing Congress today than the need to increase the federal minimum wage and extend its coverage,” Dr. Martin Luther King told Congress in March 1966. “A living wage should be the right of all working Americans.”

- The 1966 minimum wage was \$8.46, adjusting for inflation—higher than it is today.

## ■ **Raising the minimum wage does not increase unemployment.**

Critics routinely oppose minimum wage increases in good times and bad, claiming they will increase unemployment, no matter the real world record to the contrary. The buying power of the minimum wage reached its peak in 1968. The unemployment rate went from 3.8% in 1967 to 3.6% in 1968 to 3.5% in 1969.

The next time the unemployment rate came close to those levels was after the minimum wage raises of 1996 and 1997. Contrary to what critics predicted when the minimum wage was raised, our economy had unusually low unemployment, high growth, low inflation, and declining poverty rates between 1996 and 2000. The unemployment rate fell from 5.6% in 1995 to 4% in 2000. Unemployment went down across the board across the country—including among people of color, teenagers, high school graduates with no college, and those with less than a high school education.<sup>4</sup> As *Business Week* put it in 2001, “Many economists have backed away from the argument that minimum wage [laws] lead to fewer jobs.”

States that raised their minimum wages above the long stagnant \$5.15 federal level experienced better employment and small business trends than states that did not.

Recent studies by the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment (Univ. of CA, Berkeley), carefully controlling for non-minimum wage factors, add to the long body of research, which shows that minimum wage raises do not cause increased unemployment. (See the companion piece, “Raising the

Minimum Wage in Hard Times,” for more on studies refuting harmful employment and business effects from minimum wage increases.)

New Jersey “raised its minimum wage in two stages in October of 2005 and 2006. And it raised it a lot: a 39% increase, from \$5.15 to \$7.15. If the minimum wage critics had been right, such a large increase should have hurt state employment generally and low-wage employment in particular. But that didn’t happen. The state’s unemployment rate was lower during 2005 through 2007 than during the three years before the increase. And even while New Jersey struggled through slow growth in high-wage jobs in those years, low-wage employment was as strong or stronger than before the increase. The rate of job growth in laundry services, child care, and fast-food eating places, among other fields, went up.”

Brock Haussamen, [Raise the Wage Campaign](#), “Six Reasons Why a Stronger New Jersey Minimum Wage Won’t Weaken New Jersey Employment,” 2008.

## ■ Raising the minimum wage boosts business and the economy.

Workers are also consumers. Consumer spending makes up about 70% of our economy.

Minimum wage raises go directly to those who need to spend their increased income on food, healthcare, fuel and other necessities. Minimum wage workers don't put raises into predatory lending Ponzi schemes, commodity speculation or offshore tax havens. They recycle their raises back into local businesses and the economy by buying needed goods and services.

In the months leading up to the 2007 passage of federal legislation to increase the minimum wage above \$5.15, more than 800 business owners and executives—including the CEOs of Costco, the U.S. Women’s Chamber of Commerce, and **small business owners from every state**—signed a statement in support of raising the minimum wage, saying “*We cannot build a strong 21st century economy when more and more hardworking Americans struggle to make ends meet.*” See [www.BusinessforaFairMinimumWage.org](http://www.BusinessforaFairMinimumWage.org).

In the words of the business leaders statement, “Higher wages benefit business by increasing consumer purchasing power, reducing costly employee turnover, raising productivity, and improving product quality, customer satisfaction and company reputation.” Decent wages reinforce long-term business success.

## ■ A minimum of \$10 in 2010 is needed for a minimum standard of living.

Original proposals for the Fair Labor Standards Act “Provided for a commission that would set the minimum wage after a public hearing and consideration of cost-of-living estimates provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). By this procedure, the wage would have been updated according to changes in the standard of living and inflation. The version of the FLSA that became law, however, left action on future increases to Congress and the president.”<sup>5</sup>

Today, there is a great gap between the minimum wage and a minimum living standard.

In 2001, the *Raise the Floor* book and Ms. Foundation Raise the Floor project called for an \$8 federal minimum wage based on a carefully researched *national average minimum needs budget* for a single adult (including housing, healthcare, food and other necessities, and taxes and tax credits). *Raise the Floor* research showed such a minimum wage would be not only affordable but also beneficial to business. A companion poll in 2002 found that 77% of likely voters favored increasing the minimum wage to \$8 an hour. \$8 in 2001 is worth \$9.88 in 2008 dollars.<sup>6</sup>

The official poverty measure has become so out of touch with reality that research shows you need about double the official poverty threshold to get a more realistic measure of what people actually need to afford necessities.

- For example, according to the Economic Policy Institute's updated online Basic Family Budget Calculator, the national median basic needs budget (including taxes and tax credits) for a one-parent, one-child family is \$30,761 (2007 data) while the Census Bureau's 2007 poverty threshold for a one-parent, one-child family is \$14,291.<sup>7</sup>

According to the Economic Policy Institute, 30% of families have incomes less than adequate for a family budget meeting necessities. Among families with a full-time worker, 23% fall short of a Basic Family Budget. (EPI's data does not include single-person households.)

**The minimum wage should be raised to \$10 in 2010 (a full-time annual wage income of \$20,800).**

Future minimum wage increases should reflect the updated cost of an adequate minimum living standard. **We should not repeat the error of the poverty measure and lock in an eroded minimum wage by indexing it to inflation from an inadequate base level.** Adjusting for inflation means the minimum wage goes up as inflation goes up. It's like running in place instead of falling backwards. But it's not moving forward—sharing the gains of higher productivity and economic progress. It's not “A fair day's pay for a fair day's work.” It does not strengthen the floor under our economy and society.

■ **\$10 in 2010 would be about half the average worker wage.**

During the 1950s and 60s, the minimum wage averaged around half the average worker wage. The minimum wage was 53% of the average worker wage in 1968. Before the increase from \$5.15 to \$5.85 in 2007, the minimum wage had eroded to a record low 30% of the average hourly wage.

- The 2008 (3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr) average hourly wage is \$18.07. Minimum wage would now be \$9.58 if it were 53% of that average hourly wage.

Average wages would be higher now if the minimum wage had reinforced the linkage between wage and productivity growth instead of undermined it.

Average wages would be higher now if the minimum wage floor had risen in value rather than fallen.

■ **Raising the minimum wage promotes the high road over the low road.**

The U.S. is the only industrialized country in the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) where the wages of minimum wage workers have not at least kept pace with inflation since 1997.

- The British Department of Trade and Industry says, “The national minimum wage is an important cornerstone of Government strategy aimed at providing employees with decent minimum standards and fairness in the workplace... It helps business by ensuring companies will be able to compete on the basis of quality of the goods and services they provide and not on low prices based predominantly on low rates of pay.”

Paul Lightfoot, CEO of AL Systems and a productivity adviser to major retailers, wrote in the *New York Journal News*, “Unfortunately, businesses often make decisions contrary to their long-term profits, in this case driven by misplaced fears of competitive disadvantage. Shortsighted managers often can't resist the mirage that paying lower wages is an easy and obvious tactic to lower costs. By increasing the floor on minimum wages, the playing field can be leveled, eliminating the mirage that currently seduces managers. Under such a policy, workers win with higher wages and stable employment. Employers win with higher productivity, lower turnover and a more robust consumer base for their products... Everyone wins with the higher economic growth that comes from a larger middle class and fewer poor.”

In the book, *How We Compete: What Companies Around the World Are Doing To Make It In Today's Global Economy*, Suzanne Berger reports the findings of MIT's Industrial Performance Center study of more than 500 companies. She observes:

“Contrary to the widely held belief of many managers, we conclude that solutions that depend on driving down costs by reducing wages and social benefits -- in advanced countries or in emerging economies -- are always dead ends...

“Strategies based on exploiting low-wage labor end up in competitive jungles, where victories are vanishingly thin and each day brings a new competitor... As low-end firms that compete on price move from one overcrowded segment of the market to the next, there is virtually no chance of gaining any durable advantage. The activities that succeed over time are, in contrast, those that build on continuous learning and innovation.”

If employers can't stay in business without keeping their workers in poverty, there's something wrong with their business models.

### ■ **\$10 in 2010 brings us closer to the day when all workers are paid a living wage.**

We must break the cycle of too little, too late raises.

We must re-link the minimum wage to what people actually need to live on.

We can't build a strong economy on downwardly mobile wages and rising debt and insecurity.

We can't build a strong economy with a widening gap between the top and bottom any more than we can have a strong apartment building with an ever more luxurious penthouse at the top and a crumbling foundation below.

Paying workers enough to live on should not be optional—in good times or bad.

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<sup>3</sup> Figures are adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index, CPI-U, published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Full-year 2007, half-year 2008 or third quarter 2008 data are used as appropriate and available. Hourly wages are annualized by multiplying by 2080 (40 hours x 52 weeks).

<sup>4</sup> A Report by the National Economic Council, *The Minimum Wage: Increasing the Reward for Work*, March 2000, and Jennifer L. Martel and David S. Langdon, “The job market in 2000,” *Monthly Labor Review*, February 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Ettlinger, Economic Policy Institute, *Securing the Wage Floor*, October 12, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Holly Sklar, Laryssa Mykyta and Susan Wefald, *Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies That Work For All of Us* (Ms. Foundation for Women/South End Press, 2001). January 2002 national poll of likely voters by Lake, Snell, Perry and Associates for the Ms. Foundation for Women. *Raise the Floor* developed national minimum needs budgets ranging from one-person households to two-adult, two-child households. More recent basic needs budget reports and online calculators generally start at two-person households or cover specific localities but not national estimates.

<sup>7</sup> The official poverty thresholds were originally developed in the 1960s by taking the price of a nutritionally inadequate lowest-cost food plan meant for “temporary or emergency use when funds are low” and multiplying by three—based on a 1955 survey finding that food cost about a third of a family budget. Now food is a much smaller share of family budgets while other necessities cost more so the basic formula does not cover the cost of healthcare, housing and other basic expenses. The Census Bureau's 2007 one-person poverty threshold is \$10,590 (about half the annualized figure of \$20,550 at \$9.88 an hour). Numerous living wage campaigns base their wage rates on the family-of-four Census Bureau poverty threshold. The 2007 poverty threshold of \$21,203 for a family of four comes to \$10.19 an hour.

In response to growing concern over the official poverty measure, the Congress initiated an in-depth review undertaken by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) resulting in *Measuring Poverty: A New Approach* (1995). Recent developments include New York City's creation of an alternative poverty measure based on the NAS approach and the Measuring American Poverty Act introduced in Sept. 2008 by Rep Jim McDermott, chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support.

## Real Value of the Minimum Wage 1938 – 3rd Qtr 2008 \$2008

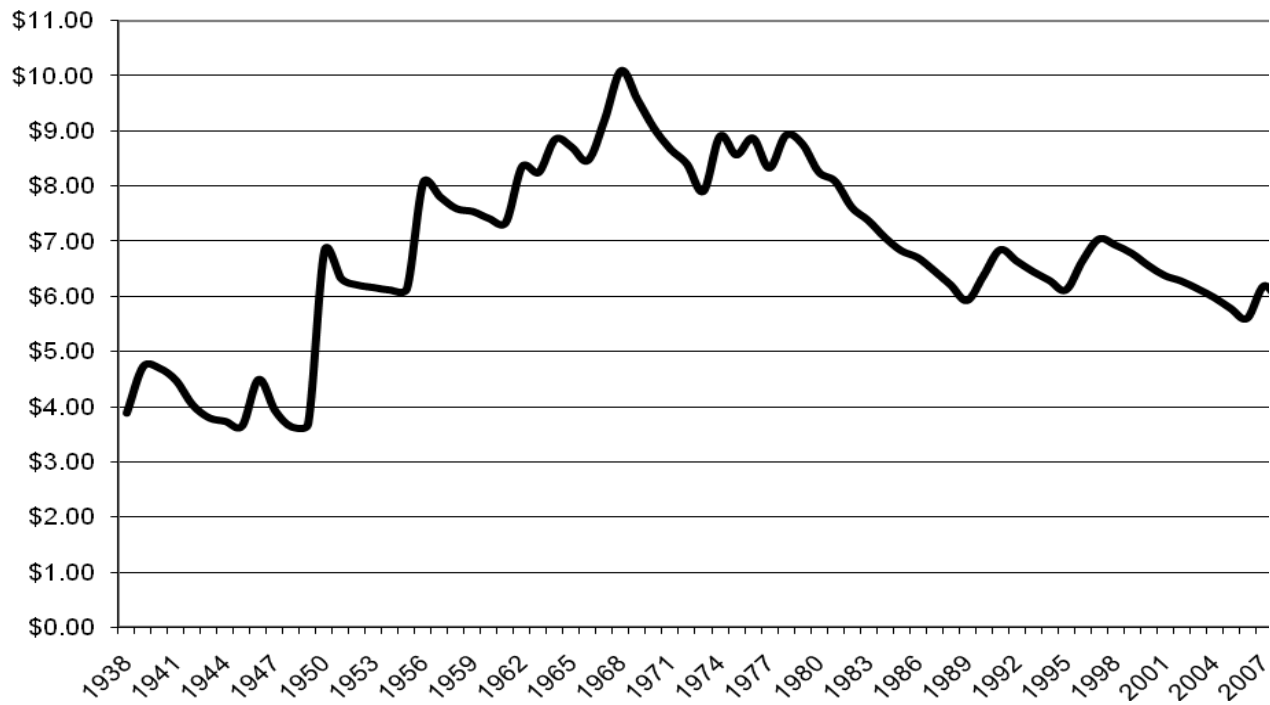


Chart prepared by Laryssa Mykyta. Inflation adjusted using CPI-U through 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2008.

## States and Cities with Minimum Wages above \$6.55 Federal Rate

Effective and Scheduled Rates as of Nov. 24, 2008

Fed. Minimum	\$6.55	July 24, 2009: \$7.25
State*	2008	2009 <small>Effective Jan. 1 unless noted</small>
Alaska	\$7.15	Jul. 24: \$7.25
Arizona**	6.90	7.25
California	8.00	8.00
Colorado	7.02	7.28
Connecticut	7.65	8.00 in 2009; 8.25 in 2010
Delaware	7.15	Jul. 24: 7.25
Florida	6.79	7.21 until Jul. 24: 7.25
Hawaii	7.25	7.25
Illinois	7.75	Jul 1: 8.00; 2010: 8.25
Iowa	7.25	7.25
Maine	7.25	Oct. 1: 7.50
Massachusetts	8.00	8.00
Michigan	7.40	7.40
Missouri	6.65	7.05 until Jul. 24: 7.25
Montana	6.55	6.90 until Jul. 24: 7.25
Nevada	(6.55 with health benefits) 6.85	Inflation adjusted Jul. 1
New Hampshire	7.25	7.25
New Jersey	7.15	Jul. 24: 7.25
New Mexico	6.55	7.50
New York	7.15	Jul. 24: 7.25
Ohio	7.00	7.30
Oregon	7.95	8.40
Pennsylvania	7.15	Jul. 1: 7.25
Rhode Island	7.40	7.40
Vermont	7.68	8.06
Washington	8.07	8.55
West Virginia	7.25	7.25

### *CITYWIDE MINIMUM WAGE*

Albuquerque, NM	7.15	7.50
San Francisco, CA	9.36	9.79
Santa Fe, NM	9.50	9.92
Washington, DC	7.55	Jul. 24: 8.25

### *STATEWIDE LIVING WAGE*

**Maryland** enacted the first statewide living wage—for employees of state services contractors and subcontractors. 2008 rates are \$11.72 an hour in the Baltimore-Washington area and \$8.81 elsewhere. Inflation Adjusted.

\* **Most workers are covered under the federal minimum wage. Where Federal and State law have different minimum wage rates, the higher standard applies.** See U.S. Dept. of Labor, Minimum Wage Laws in the States, <http://www.dol.gov/esa/minwage/america.htm>.

\*\* Shading indicates inflation adjusted.

**Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org)**

# **Please Sign the Faith Leaders Letter to Congress for \$10 in 2010 Minimum Wage**



Dear Members of Congress:

As leaders of our faith communities, we call on the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress to raise the minimum wage and join us in bringing needed economic security to our families, our communities and our country.

An adequate minimum wage is a bedrock moral value for our nation. Where the Congress sets the minimum wage reflects whether our society truly believes that workers are human beings with inherent dignity, inalienable rights and basic needs such as food, shelter and healthcare.

For too long, the minimum wage has not provided even a minimally adequate standard of living. We experience the results in our communities. Across the United States, a growing number of hardworking men and women are turning to our food banks, soup kitchens and homeless shelters to feed and house themselves and their children because their wages are too low.

It is immoral that people work full time but have to choose between paying the rent and paying for food, paying for childcare or paying for healthcare. It is immoral that some are paid so little their children go without necessities while others are paid so much their grandchildren will live in luxury without having to work at all. A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it.

Between September 1997 and July 2007, we experienced the longest period in history without a raise in the minimum wage. Adjusting for inflation, the scheduled raise to \$7.25 in July 2009 will leave workers about where they were in 1997 and far behind 1968, when the minimum wage reached its peak value of about \$10 in 2008 dollars.

It is immoral that the minimum wage is worth less now than it was the year Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in Memphis while fighting for living wages for sanitation workers. The eroded value of the minimum wage has reinforced growing inequality, which has given the richest 1 percent of Americans a greater share of our nation's income than any year since 1928. This has undermined our communities, our economy and our democracy. Prophetic voices like Dr. King and others throughout the ages have called for justice for the underprivileged and poorest in society.

We, faith leaders all across America, call on Congress to raise the minimum wage to \$10 in 2010.

- \$10 in 2010 is necessary if we are to make up the ground lost in real wages since 1968.
- \$10 in 2010 will bring us closer to the goal of the "minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency and general well-being of workers" articulated by the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established the minimum wage 70 years ago.
- \$10 in 2010 will bring us closer to the day when all workers are paid a living wage.

As Adam Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, "It is but equity . . . that those who feed, clothe and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labor as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed and lodged."

The Golden Rule teaches us, "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*" We call on the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress to raise the minimum wage and join with us in ending poverty wages.

Sincerely,

**List of signatories in formation will be posted at [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org), beginning in December 2008.**

**\$10 IN 2010 FAITH LEADERS LETTER TO CONGRESS ENDORSEMENT FORM\***

Please sign online at [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org) or use the form below.

Please provide ALL information requested:

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Webpage (*optional*): \_\_\_\_\_

Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Congregation, house of worship, faith organization or program:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*\* Please interpret faith leader broadly to include Reverend, Rabbi, Imam, Director of faith-based program, Religious Social Action Committee Chair, and so on.*

If you are not a faith leader, please use the general public sign on at [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org) instead, or indicate you are signing as a member of the general public when you send back this form.

Please mail form to: Karen Spradlin, LJR National Faith Organizer, 12604 Bannockburn PI, Oklahoma City, OK 73142.

Or email [karen.spradlin@sbcglobal.net](mailto:karen.spradlin@sbcglobal.net) or call 405-213-3282 to sign the letter or help with the campaign.

**Thank you!**

**\$10 IN 2010 GENERAL PUBLIC LETTER TO CONGRESS ENDORSEMENT FORM\***

**Please sign online at [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org) or use the form below.**

**Please provide ALL information requested:**

Title:

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Name:

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Email:

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Phone:

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Address:

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City:

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State:

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Zip Code:

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Webpage (*optional*):

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Job Title:

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Name of Congregation, house of worship, faith organization or program:

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Please mail form to: Karen Spradlin, LJR National Faith Organizer, 12604 Bannockburn PI, Oklahoma City, OK 73142.

Or email [karen.spradlin@sbcglobal.net](mailto:karen.spradlin@sbcglobal.net) or call 405-213-3282 to sign the letter or help with the campaign.

**Thank you!**

# Business for a Fair Minimum Wage

**Business for a Fair Minimum Wage** is a project of Business for Shared Prosperity, a partner organization in the Let Justice Roll Campaign.

Business for a Fair Minimum Wage has organized unprecedented business support for raising the minimum wage and moving it as quickly as possible to a living wage at the federal and state level. Over 800 businesspeople signed the Business Owners and Executives for a Higher Minimum Wage Statement, including Costco CEO Jim Sinegal and U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce CEO Margot Dorfman, and **small business owners from all 50 states**. Business for a Fair Minimum Wage helped win the first federal minimum wage raise in ten years in 2007, and significantly shifted public debate and media coverage, providing a strong and growing counter to the "It's bad for business" refrain that once monopolized business voices about increasing the minimum wage.

To see the list of signatories in support of raising the minimum wage above the current federal rate as well as op-eds and news coverage, please visit [www.businessforafairminimumwage.org](http://www.businessforafairminimumwage.org). Check back in 2009 for the new statement and list of signatories supporting \$10 in 2010.

"And while the U.S. Chamber of Commerce opposes the minimum wage rise, the U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce supports it. 'We all lose when American workers are underpaid,' said Margot Dorfman, CEO of the U.S. Women's Chamber."

*Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, 2007*

"The chief executive of Costco Wholesale, the nation's largest wholesale club, yesterday became the most prominent member of a new organization of business owners and executives pressing Congress to approve an increase in the federal minimum wage."

"Jim Sinegal, a maverick entrepreneur who founded Costco in 1983 and has resisted Wall Street pressure to cut wages and benefits for his 130,000 employees, said he signed onto the effort because he thinks a higher minimum wage would be good for the nation's economy as well as its workers."

*Washington Post, Jan. 30, 2007.*

"People who tell you that raising the minimum wage will hurt small business are flat out full of it. Low minimum wages do NOT help small business..."

"Small business owners know that keeping workers is easier and cheaper than finding and training new ones... Our long-term employees are way more likely to establish ongoing relationships with customers. And every small business owner knows that the longer an employee stays with you -- the more they know about your business and your customers, and the higher their productivity..."

"Neighborhood retailers, local restaurants and small manufacturers need only look at our customers to know what's best for us."

**Statement by Lew Prince, St. Louis business owner, at Senate Press Conference With Sen. Ted Kennedy, Sen. Sherrod Brown, Rep. George Miller, Jan. 19, 2007.**



JOIN CEOs AND SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS IN EVERY STATE SUPPORTING A HIGHER MINIMUM WAGE

**WE, the undersigned business owners and executives, support raising the minimum wage to benefit business, workers and our economy.** The minimum wage is too low for workers to afford necessities for themselves and their families. Workers and customers should not have to choose between paying the rent and buying needed groceries, healthcare or transportation. A fair wage floor is essential to healthy businesses and communities, and enduring economic progress.

*"Most low-wage workers pump every dollar of their paychecks directly into the local economy by spending their money in their neighborhood stores, local pharmacies, and corner markets,"* said Dan Gardner, commissioner of Oregon's Bureau of Labor and Industries. *"When the minimum wage increases, local economies benefit from the increased purchasing power."*

Higher wages benefit business by increasing consumer purchasing power, reducing costly employee turnover, raising productivity and improving product quality, customer satisfaction and company reputation. In a National Consumers League survey, 76 percent of American consumers said, *"How well a company treats/pays employees influences what they buy."*

The minimum wage buys less today than it did in the 1950s. We cannot build a strong 21st century economy on a 1950s' wage floor.

The longest period without an increase since the first federal minimum wage in 1938 occurred between the raises in 1997 and 2007. States that raised their minimum wage above the stagnant federal level had better employment and business trends than the other states.

Unfortunately, today's minimum wage is still worth less than in 1997, adjusted for inflation. It's far below the \$10 in buying power of 1968's minimum wage. We must break the cycle of too little, too late raises. We cannot build a strong economy when more and more hardworking Americans struggle to make ends meet in jobs that don't pay a living wage.

**WE SUPPORT a phased increase in the federal minimum wage to \$10 in 2010.**

A fair minimum wage is a sound investment in the future of our businesses, our workforce, our communities and our nation.

Public signatories list includes name, title, business or business-related affiliation, city, state, website (if available).

**Please Print** \*First Name \_\_\_\_\_ \*Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

\*Title (e.g., owner, manager, CEO, retired CEO) \_\_\_\_\_

\*Business or Business Organization Name \_\_\_\_\_

\*E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Website \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ \*City \_\_\_\_\_ \*State \_\_\_\_\_ \*Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Office Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Other Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Business or Organization \_\_\_\_\_ Total Employees/Members \_\_\_\_\_

\* **Required Information**  **Please check** if you are willing to: Give Media Interviews (provide Phone #) \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Potential Endorsers \_\_\_\_\_ Write a Letter to the Editor or Op-Ed \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Elected Representatives \_\_\_\_\_

**Business for a Fair Minimum Wage is a project of Business for Shared Prosperity. Please hand form to event organizer or mail to Business for Shared Prosperity, Box 301045, Boston, MA 02130. Thank you!**

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

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## **Organize a Living Wage Worship Service or Community Event**

## Carrying on Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Fight For Economic Justice

### ***“Injustice Anywhere is a Threat to Justice Everywhere.”***



Most people remember the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom as the occasion where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his famous “I Have a Dream” address. A key demand of the march was “a national minimum wage act that will give all Americans a decent standard of living.” Certainly, Dr. King did not dream that the value of the minimum wage would be lower today than it was in 1963.

On March 18, 1968, days before his murder, King told striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tenn., “It is criminal to have people working on a full-time basis . . . getting part-time income.” King said, “We are tired of working our hands off and laboring every day and not even making a wage adequate with daily basic necessities of life.”

Dr. King was killed on April 4, 1968, the day after he delivered what would be his final speech, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.” In that speech he said:

*The issue is injustice. The issue is the refusal of (the city of) Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants, who happen to be sanitation workers. . . . Now we’re going to march again and force everyone to see that there are thirteen hundred of God’s children here suffering, sometimes going hungry, sometimes going through dark and dreary nights wondering how this thing is going to come out. That’s the issue.*  
—Memphis, Tenn., April 3, 1968

When speaking to the striking sanitation workers, Dr. King said:

*You are demanding that this city will respect the dignity of labor. So often we overlook the work and the significance of those who are not in professional jobs, of those who are not in the so-called big jobs. But let me say to you tonight that whenever you are engaged in work that serves humanity and is for the building of humanity, it has dignity and it has worth.*  
—AFSCME Memphis Sanitation Strike, April 3, 1968

Earlier that same year at a labor meeting, he wrote:

*When there is massive unemployment in the black community, it is called a social problem. But when there is massive unemployment in the white community, it is called a Depression.*

*We look around every day and we see thousands and millions of people making inadequate wages. Not only do they work in our hospitals, they work in our hotels, they work in our laundries, they work in domestic service, they find themselves underemployed. You see, no labor is really menial unless you’re not getting adequate wages. People are always talking about menial labor. But if you’re getting a good (wage) as I know that through some unions they’ve brought it up . . . that isn’t menial labor. What makes it menial is the income, the wages.*  
—Local 1199 Salute to Freedom, March 1968

King believed that the struggle against racism and the struggle for economic justice were inextricably connected. In his *Letter to Amalgamated Laundry Workers, January 1962* he wrote:

*As I have said many times, and believe with all my heart, the coalition that can have the greatest impact in the struggle for human dignity here in America is that of the Negro and the forces of labor, because their fortunes are so closely intertwined.*

On March 18, 1966, King called for Congress to boost the minimum wage. He wrote:

*We know of no more crucial civil rights issue facing Congress today than the need to increase the federal minimum wage and extend its coverage. . . . A living wage should be the right of all working Americans.*

Martin Luther King, Jr. on Labor [www.afscme.org/about/1029.cfm](http://www.afscme.org/about/1029.cfm);  
Interfaith Worker Justice—King, Faith and Worker Justice [www.iwj.org/materials/materials\\_mlkday03.html](http://www.iwj.org/materials/materials_mlkday03.html);  
The Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers Project at Stanford University [www.stanford.edu/group/King/](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/)

# Organizing a Living Wage Day Worship Service or Community Event

Holding a Let Justice Roll Living Wage Worship Service or Community Event is a powerful way to inspire, educate and *mobilize* your congregation, organization and/or community to support and *act* for raising the minimum wage to \$10 in 2010. We invite you to reach out to everyone, including both workers and business people, in your congregations, organizations and communities to participate in Living Wage Days on January 10 and 11, 2009 or a later date. Raising the minimum wage is good for workers, families, business, communities and our economy.

Testimonials from workers struggling to support themselves and their families on wages that do not respect their labor or dignity should be at the heart of your service or event. Followed by on the spot and ongoing advocacy efforts, these services and community events can create transformative partnerships between low-income workers and families and your wider faith community or network. Offerings, collections and fundraising are also a sustaining part of putting your faith and values into action.

Let Justice Roll sponsored hundreds of Living Wage Days services and community events across the country over the Martin Luther King, Jr., weekend in early 2006. These services and events—including more than 65 in Ohio and 20 in Arkansas, for example—were crucial to building support for campaigns to raise the minimum wage. More Living Wage Day worship services and events followed. The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, for example, designated UUSC Justice Sunday, March 26, as Living Wage Day. Other denominations and faith communities took other opportunities to raise this issue in their congregations.

In October 2006, Let Justice Roll sponsored additional Living Wage Days service and community events during the first two weekends of the month. Once again, hundreds of congregations and faith communities answered the call, and raised a unified voice for wage justice. Over 1,000 faith leaders signed a Letter to Congress urging them to raise the minimum wage. We know that it is again time to raise this voice, and ask people of faith and good conscience to call on our local, state and federal government to require that businesses pay fair wages. Beginning on January 10 and 11, 2009 Let Justice Roll will again sponsor Living Wage Days events to remind our elected officials that the work of wage justice is not over, it is just beginning. As leaders in this cause, Let Justice Roll will not rest until we have worked to achieve fair and just wages for all.

## **JAN. 9-10, 2009 NATIONWIDE LIVING WAGE DAYS**

**Please let us know if you are hosting or co-hosting a Let Justice Roll LIVING WAGE DAY worship service or community event on the weekend of Jan. 10-11, 2009, or a later date. You can sign up online at [www.letjusticeroll.org/livingwage-signup.html](http://www.letjusticeroll.org/livingwage-signup.html). And let us know what you did—report your efforts and successes on the website after the event, so that we can share and celebrate with one another our efforts for achieving wage justice.**

### **National Office**

Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign  
Rev. Stephen Copley, Chair of the Board  
Phone: 501-626-9220; Email: [scopley@letjusticeroll.org](mailto:scopley@letjusticeroll.org)

# Steps for Organizing a Living Wage Worship Service or Community Event

Whether you are planning a worship service or a community event you will need to:

1. Establish a small planning committee. This committee can work with an existing committee such as the social action or public witness committee.
2. The planning group will need to design the Order of Service or Program to include:
  - Readings from your faith tradition or other inspirational readings.
  - Hymns and songs.
  - Testimonials from low-wage workers and/or low-income families.
  - An offering or collection.
  - A time to gather signatures on the Let Justice Roll Faith Leaders, Business Leaders & General Public Sign-On for “\$10 in 2010.”
  - Organizing and advocacy—both on the spot and recruiting for next steps of the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign.
  - See relevant sections of this guide for suggested resources and actions and a Sample Order of Service.
3. Reach out to the organizations listed in the Testimonials section of this guide or ones you know of in the community that can provide effective speakers with moving testimonials.
4. Begin outreach immediately and add in more detailed information as your event comes together.
5. Have a meeting date planned and advertise it at your service or event for follow-up and next steps.
6. Stay connected with the national Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign. Make sure that someone is assigned to be the contact with your denominational or organizational representative. Go to [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org) to sign up and see current member organizations and state campaign contacts.
7. Order ***A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and Our Future***, by Holly Sklar and the Rev. Dr. Paul Sherry. Generous bulk discounts are available for hard copies. See [www.letjusticeroll.org/justminimumwage.html](http://www.letjusticeroll.org/justminimumwage.html) or the order flyer at the end of this resource guide. Or order by calling 800-889-5733.

**Contact Let Justice Roll Speakers Bureau** to bring a speaker to your event or service or for help in finding a speaker in your area.

## Publicize Your Living Wage Day Service, Event and Activities

Contact Let Justice Roll and/or sign on at [www.letjusticeroll.org/livingwage-signup.html](http://www.letjusticeroll.org/livingwage-signup.html) to make sure we are aware of your event for possible inclusion in national, state or local press releases or other press work. A list of Let Justice Roll state contacts is available at [www.letjusticeroll.org/stateminimumwagecampaigns-contacts.html](http://www.letjusticeroll.org/stateminimumwagecampaigns-contacts.html).

## Testimonials in the Pulpit and Public Square from Working Families and Business People

### Low-Wage Workers and Organizations

Lifting up the voices of people most affected by low wages in your house of worship or organization and inviting low-wage workers to speak at your public gathering is an effective way to educate and mobilize your congregation or community. By doing so we create alliances that transform us all through the act of building beloved community and taking action together. Once such partnerships are formed they can lay the basis for sustainable action in the future. Working together for the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign creates stronger bonds and greater power for putting our faith and values into action for social justice. Interfaith Worker Justice, ACORN, the National Employment Law Project, and Jobs with Justice all have programs for bringing low-wage workers and people with low-incomes into our congregations and communities. Many faith-based community organizations also bring people together to work for a living wage.



For information about:

**Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ)** [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)

Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) calls upon our religious values in order to educate organize and mobilize the religious community in the U.S. on issues and campaigns that will improve wages, benefits and working conditions for workers, especially low-wage workers.

To contact **Interfaith Worker Justice**:

1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., 4th Fl., Chicago, IL 60660

Phone: (773) 728-8400; Fax: (773) 728-8409;  
E-Mail: [jweiss@iwj.org](mailto:jweiss@iwj.org)

### For Interfaith Worker Justice Labor in the Pulpit Program

[www.iwj.org/outreach/labor\\_day.html](http://www.iwj.org/outreach/labor_day.html)

*Note:* While these resources are organized for Labor Day, they are also appropriate for Living Wage Days.

To find an **IWJ affiliate** near you go to [www.iwj.org/outreach/lg.html](http://www.iwj.org/outreach/lg.html)

### Jobs with Justice

Founded in 1987, JwJ's mission is to improve working people's standard of living, fight for job security and protect workers' right to organize. JwJ's core belief is that in order to be successful, workers' rights struggles have to be part of a larger campaign for economic and social justice. To that end, JwJ has created a network of local coalitions that connect labor, faith-based, community and student organizations to work together on workplace and community social justice campaigns.

Jobs with Justice coalitions now exist in over 40 cities in 29 states in all regions of the country, made up of both member organizations and thousands of individual activists who sign the Jobs with Justice pledge to be there five times a year for someone else's struggle as well as their own. JwJ creates strategic alliances locally and among organizations nationally to develop a broad base of support. By building a base of diverse constituencies at the local level as well as providing training, coordination and networking at the national level, Jobs with Justice is re-building the infrastructure that gives communities a sense of their own power.

### Jobs with Justice:

1325 Massachusetts Avenue NW  
Suite 200

Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: 202-393-1044  
Fax: 202-393-7408  
E-mail: [info@jwj.org](mailto:info@jwj.org)  
[www.jwj.org/index.htm](http://www.jwj.org/index.htm)

To find local **JwJ Coalitions** go to:  
<http://www.jwj.org/LocalCoal/contact.htm>

**ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now)**  
[www.acorn.org](http://www.acorn.org)

**ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now**, is the nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, working together for social justice and stronger communities. Since 1970, ACORN has grown to more than 175,000 member families organized in 850 neighborhood chapters in 75 cities across the United States and in cities in Canada, the Dominican Republic and Peru.

ACORN's accomplishments include successful campaigns for better housing, schools, neighborhood safety, health care, job conditions and more.

ACORN Living Wage Resource Center  
1486 Dorchester Ave,  
Boston, MA 02122  
Phone: 617-436-7100  
Fax: 617-436-4878;  
E-mail: [natacorncam@acorn.org](mailto:natacorncam@acorn.org)

To find an **ACORN Office** near you:  
[www.acorn.org/index.php?id=2593](http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=2593)

**The National Employment Law Project (NELP)** has advocated for over 30 years on behalf of low-wage workers, the poor, the unemployed and other groups that face significant barriers to employment and government systems of support. NELP works to ensure that employment laws cover all workers; supports worker organizing and alliance-building among key constituent groups working with low-wage workers; helps workers

stay connected to jobs and employment benefits; and on expanding employment laws to meet the needs of workers and families in changing economic conditions.  
For more information [www.nelp.org](http://www.nelp.org).

Contact: National Employment Law Project  
75 Maiden Lane, Suite 601  
New York, NY 10038  
Phone: (212) 285-3025  
Fax: (212) 285-3044  
E-mail: [nelp@nelp.org](mailto:nelp@nelp.org)

### **Faith-Based Community Organizations**

There are hundreds of faith-based (also known as congregation-based and broad-based) community organizations working on local and state living wage campaigns. These organizations are associated with the national and regional networks including:

The Gamaliel Foundation [www.gamaliel.org](http://www.gamaliel.org)

Industrial Areas Foundation  
[www.industrialareasfoundation.org](http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org)

Direct Action and Research  
Training (DART) [www.thedartcenter.org](http://www.thedartcenter.org)

People Improving Communities Through  
Organizing (PICO) [www.picocalifornia.org](http://www.picocalifornia.org)

Interfaith Valley Project (IVP)  
[www.intervalleyproject.org](http://www.intervalleyproject.org).

These organizations are dedicated to creating partnerships that cross divisions of race and class and many will be willing to find speakers for your Let Justice Roll Living Wage Worship Service or Event.

For a listing of local and regional faith-based community organizing affiliates in the United States, visit:  
[www.interfaithfunders.org/resources.html](http://www.interfaithfunders.org/resources.html)

## Faith In Action: Raise the Minimum Wage

*"Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an overflowing stream."—Amos 5:24*

Talking about values is no substitute for valuing hardworking men and women all across this nation who need a higher minimum wage.

The minimum wage is a bedrock moral value.

At \$6.55, the federal minimum wage buys less today than it did in 1950. It would take \$10 to match the buying power of the 1968 minimum wage.

It is immoral that the minimum wage is worth less now than it was the year Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in Memphis while fighting for living wages for sanitation workers.

It is immoral that workers who care for children, the ill and the elderly struggle to care for their own families.

It is immoral that the minimum wage keeps people in poverty instead of out of poverty.

*A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it.*

We will keep organizing for a decent minimum wage so that workers no longer have to choose between rent and health care, food and child care.

Minimum wage workers are predominantly adults, mostly women, and members of low-income families. They are working and "playing by the rules." But low wages rob them of the fruits of their labor, disrespect their dignity and block them from living the full life that God intends for them and their families.

We must break the cycle of too little, too late raises.



WE CALL ON CONGRESS to raise the minimum wage and join us in bringing needed economic security to our families, our communities and our country. Increasing the minimum wage to \$10 in 2010 is necessary if we are to make up the ground lost in real wages since 1968.

\$10 in 2010 will bring us closer to the goal of the "minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency and general well-being of workers" articulated by the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established the minimum wage 70 years ago.

\$10 in 2010 will bring us closer to the day when all workers are paid a living wage.

Contrary to myth, states that raised their minimum wage above the federal level have had better employment trends, including among retail and small businesses, than states that have not.

*"Most low-wage workers pump every dollar of their paychecks directly into the local economy by spending their money in their neighborhood stores, local pharmacies and corner markets. When the minimum wage increases, local economies benefit from the increased purchasing power."*

—Dan Gardner, Commissioner, Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries.

As people of faith, we desire to see God's will be done "on earth, as it is in heaven." All people deserve a fair share of the resources that God provides. None of God's children should work for poverty wages.

God has given us warm hearts to stir us to work for justice. Let us tell Congress to represent the people and raise the minimum wage.

The **Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign** is the leading faith and community coalition for living wages across the United States. More than 90 faith, community, labor and business organizations have signed on to the nonpartisan Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign. *We invite you to join us!*

**Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign**

Rev. Steve Copley, *Chair*, Let Justice Roll  
P.O. Box 2441, Little Rock, AR 72203

[scopley@letjusticeroll.org](mailto:scopley@letjusticeroll.org), Phone: 501-626-9220

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

## **Sample Order of Service /Program\***

*“There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American [worker] whether he is a hospital worker, laundry worker, maid or day laborer.”*

*—The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

**Welcome/Invocation**

**Song/Hymn**

**Opening Words/Prayer**

**Testimonials from the Pulpit from Working Families**

**Silent Meditation/Reflection**

**Offering/Collection with Readings/Music**

**Responsive Reading**

**Hymn/Song**

**Altar Call for Gathering Signatures for the \$10 in 2010 Campaign**

**Closing Words/Prayer/Benediction**

***See suggested resources below from various faith traditions.***

\*Adapted from materials developed by Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community.

## Hold an Offering or Collection

The Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign invites contributions to help fund organizers, outreach materials, media work, website and other expenses.

We suggest that at your Living Wage Sunday or event that you dedicate your weekly offering or a collection to ***Let Justice Roll***.

If you are holding a community event, be sure to plan time during the event to ask for contributions, rather than waiting until the end.

Tell people during the service or event how much you want to raise. Set your goal beforehand based on average worship attendance or expected event attendance and what you think would be a possible average amount.

Tell them that the amount they raise will help pay for a specific need of the campaign such as salary for an organizer in a state with a ballot initiative or a full page signatory ad in a major newspaper.

Aim high. Be realistic and reasonable, but ask your congregation or community to stretch.

### ***Words and Music of Inspiration***

During the collection you may want to:

- Read from the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ask members of different ages, genders and races to read.
- Read from scripture.
- Sing hymns or songs.

*“Lift Every Voice and Sing”* is a very appropriate and moving hymn for a Living Wage Worship Service on Martin Luther King, Jr. Weekend.

See other sections of this guide for more suggestions.

**Your donations are tax deductible. Please send checks payable to:**

Let Justice Roll  
P.O. Box 2441  
Little Rock, AR 72203

**Donate online by clicking on the *Donate Now* button at [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org)**

## **Advocacy and Organizing At the Worship Service or Community Event**

Advocacy efforts need to begin right during the worship service or event. Make sure that people know what to do and take action and sign-up before they leave. Elements to include are:

1. Collect signatures and e-mail addresses for the Faith Leaders, Business Leaders and General Public Sign-On Letters for \$10 in 10 to be delivered to the new Congress in 2009. See <http://www.letjusticeroll.org/faithletter.html>. [Note: \* *Please interpret faith leader broadly to include Reverend, Rabbi, Imam, Director of faith-based program, Social Justice Committee Chair, Board Presidents, Religious Educators, and so on*].
2. A call and sign-up sheet for volunteers to be part of a delegation to visit your elected federal representatives at their home offices and state representatives. (Or local representatives for city/town campaigns.)
3. A letter-writing table with sample letters. See sample letters in this Resource Guide and the Letters to the Editors Sampler at [www.letjusticeroll.org/pressroom/letterstoeditor.html](http://www.letjusticeroll.org/pressroom/letterstoeditor.html).
4. Contact information for writing and calling your elected representatives.
5. Information about Let Justice Roll and federal, state and local minimum wage and living wage legislation and campaigns.
6. Petitions for gathering signatures for statewide ballot initiatives.
7. Announcement of your next meeting and what you will be doing at it.
8. Get commitments for coming to the meeting.

## **After the Worship Service or Community Event**

Now that you have launched your campaign you will need to:

1. Enter the signatures and e-mails you collected onto the Let Justice Roll website at [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org).
2. Recruit more volunteers for your Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign.
3. Join your local Let Justice Roll Living Wage Coalition. See our website for information on state and local coalitions.
4. Stay in touch with the national Let Justice Roll Living Wage Coalition. Sign up for regular updates at [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org).
5. Keep working with interfaith partners and allied organizations.
6. Hold educational events and other programs.
7. Organize legislative advocacy efforts for increasing the federal and state minimum wage and for local living wage campaigns. For Action Alerts sign up at [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org).
8. Organize nonpartisan voter registration and GOTV drives for the 2010 elections among working families, women, people of color and young adults.
9. Make the issue of living wages and fair minimum wages part of federal, state and local election conversations.

## **Resources From Various Faith Traditions**



## **Raise the Federal Minimum Wage to \$10 in 2010 2008 Action of Immediate Witness**

Because: Unitarian Universalists as a community of faith uphold the inherent worth, rights and dignity of all people;

Whereas: We have supported a fair minimum wage since 1961, passing a resolution supporting an agricultural minimum wage for migrant workers, and since then our sustained commitment has yielded more than three dozen economic justice resolutions, including a 1997 General Resolution calling for Unitarian Universalist congregations and individuals "to work specifically in favor of mechanisms such as a true single minimum wage, applicable to all workers, that provides an adequate standard of living";

Whereas: The Unitarian Universalist Association and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee are members of the national interfaith Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign, hundreds of Unitarian Universalist ministers and faith leaders sent a Letter to Congress in January 2007 urging Congress to raise the federal minimum wage (enacted July 24, 2007) and Unitarian Universalist congregations have supported legislation and ballot initiatives in several states to raise state minimum wages since 2005;

Whereas: The current minimum wage is a poverty wage instead of an anti-poverty wage, the 2007 minimum wage increase was from \$5.15 to \$5.85 and the minimum wage is still worth less than in 1997, when it was \$6.95 in 2008 dollars;

Whereas: By the time the minimum wage reaches \$7.25 in 2009, it will not be worth much more than it was in 1997 and could be worth less if inflation rises more rapidly than the Congressional Budget Office forecasts;

Whereas: The federal minimum wage sets the wage floor for all wages;

Whereas: More than 800 business owners, executives and venture capitalists from every state have signed a statement asserting, "Higher wages benefit business by increasing consumer purchasing power, reducing costly employee turnover, raising productivity, and improving product quality, customer satisfaction and company reputation";

Whereas: A minimum wage of at least \$10 in 2010 is necessary to provide workers with a minimum standard of living;

Whereas: The pay gap between minimum wage workers and CEOs grew nearly fifteen times wider between 1980 and 2006;

Whereas: A minimum wage of \$10 in 2010 would restore the minimum wage to about half the projected average worker wage; in 1968 the minimum wage was 53 percent of the average worker wage and in 2006 the minimum wage had eroded to 31 percent of the average worker wage; and

Whereas: Low-wage workers whose labor is often exploited and invisible support others' unearned privilege;

Therefore, be it resolved: The 2008 General Assembly supports the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign urging the 111th Congress in 2009 to raise the federal minimum wage to \$10 by 2010. We urge all Unitarian Universalist congregations and individuals to participate by

- educating themselves about poverty and requirements for a minimum standard of living;
- holding Let Justice Roll rallies, workshops and worship services on the weekend of January 9-11, 2009;
- signing the \$10 by 2010 Faith Leaders Letter to Congress;
- participating in other Let Justice Roll activities; and
- advocating with low wage workers.

## Christian Readings and Prayers

“That world of the poor, we say, is the key to understanding the Christian faith ... The poor are the ones who tell us what the world is and what service the church must offer to the world.”

—Oscar Romero, February 17, 1980

“It is not enough to give soup and bread; this the rich can do. It is only for your love alone that the poor will forgive you the bread you give them.”

—Vincent de Paul

### Scripture and Economic Justice

The Bible abounds in passages that address issues of money, wealth and economic justice. As recorded in the first chapter of Genesis, God gave the abundant fruits of the earth to all people and animals for their sustenance (Gen. 1:29, 30). And God gave all humanity—not just a few—the authority to steward the earth’s resources for the benefit of all (Gen. 1: 27, 28).

This means that humanity has both the duty and the ability to organize economic life in such a way that all people can have lives of dignity, sufficiency and community participation. Because of this, God’s intent for people to enjoy just and compassionate economies can begin to be realized.

Jesus said, “Sell your possessions and give to the poor” (Luke 12:33). Acts describes how the early believers carried out this instruction (Acts 2:45). Paul writes that affluent Christians must be “rich in good works, generous and ready to share” (1 Tim. 6:18). John warns that God’s love does not live in anyone who refuses to help brothers and sisters in need (1 John 3:17).

Scripture addresses systemic, not just individual, issues of economic justice. The Law of Moses called for debts to be canceled and slaves to be freed every seven years (Deut. 15). Every fiftieth year, an equitable redistribution of land was to be carried out (Lev. 25). The Law also included many other public legal provisions for just economic relationships (e.g. Lev. 19, 25; Deut. 14, 16, 24).

Isaiah censures monopolistic practices that deprive people of their homes and livelihood (Isa.5:8-10). Amos condemns exploitation of the poor through unjust institutions (Am. 2:6,7; 4:1; 5:12). James denounces the wealthy who defraud their employees (James 5:4). And Jesus himself promises a great re-ordering in which the positions of the rich and poor will be reversed (Luke 16:19-3; Luke 6:20-31 and 1:52-53).

### ***The Trade Pledge Prayer\****

I dare to pray: Lord, let the world be changed, for I long to see the end of poverty;

I dare to pray: Lord, let the rules be changed for I long to see all jobs pay a wage that enables a life of dignity and sufficiency;

I dare to pray: Lord, let the rules be changed, for I long to see trade bring justice to the poor;

I dare to pray: Lord, let my life be changed, for I long to bring hope where good news is needed.

In the strength of your Spirit and inspired by Your compassion, I make this promise to work for change, and wait confidently for the day when You make all things new.

Amen.

© Peter Graystone/Christian Aid, used by permission. \*Modified for Living Wage Worship Resources, Oct. 2005.

## ***In Our Hearing: A Responsive Reading***

**Refrain Leader:** Generous Lord, show us how to trade places to see with the eyes of the prophets  
Your truth.

**All:** In Your mercy, forgive us. In Your grace, help us to hear Your word. (Continue repeating the refrain after each scripture reading.)

**Reader:** Isaiah said, “Justice is turned back and righteousness stands at a distance, for truth stumbles in the public square.” (Isa. 59:14)

**Reader:** Jeremiah said, “Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness and his upper rooms by injustice, who makes his neighbors work for nothing and does not give them their wages.” (Jer.22:13)

**Reader:** Amos said, “Hear this, you that trample on the needy and bring to ruin the poor of the land saying . . . we will practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweeping of the wheat.” (Amos 8:4-6)

**Reader:** Malachi said, “See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me.” (Mal. 3:1)

**Reader:** Mary said, “... The Lord has shown strength with his arm and scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.” (Luke 1:51)

**Reader:** Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he said, “Today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:18-19, 21)

**All:** In our hearing, God’s word will be fulfilled.

*Adapted from a prayer written by Linda Jones/CAFOD, used by permission, [www.share-elsalvador.org/cafta/faith\\_eco.htm](http://www.share-elsalvador.org/cafta/faith_eco.htm).*

## ***Prayer of Transformation***

**Liturgist:** God, give us the imagination we need today to live in a land where justice and compassion flourish.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Liturgist:** We ask, God, for the strength to help make this land—our nation—a place where schools are well-funded; where public classrooms are much smaller and well-equipped; where public school buildings—bright, clean, safe, modern and inviting—employ well-compensated teachers; where student bodies look as diverse in race, class and culture as does the United Nations; where our youth and young adults are prepared to lead America into the first century ever to live in peace with justice.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Liturgist:** We ask for the courage to make this nation one where people who get sick and need to see a doctor are never sent away; where people are fit and healthy; where mental health services are available to everyone.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Liturgist:** God, show us how to provide, so that across this land everyone who needs a job has one. Give us the resolve to make this a nation where no one earns less than a living wage; where compensation between genders—right down to each shiny penny—is equal and men and women are

equally valued; where those who cannot work and the elderly are fully provided and cared for; where immigrants are free from exploitation; where corporations give equal weight to social responsibility and profitability.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Liturgist:** God, help us to make fair trade of goods and services between nations standard practice, promoting genuine global harmony. Fill us with the wisdom to aid our nation to support the wise use of global resources with the aim of providing everyone with fair wages and livable economic conditions.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Liturgist:** God, help us to live in a land where rolling hills and valleys are mint green, the sky is baby blue, and water runs crystal clear. Show us how to join together to clean up pollution and prevent any further destruction of our environment.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Liturgist:** God, help us to make condemnation of varied orientations, race and ethnicities nonexistent in our nation. Help us to make compassion more than a word tossed around during political stump speeches. Help us to live in a land where monuments are no longer dedicated to the “glory” of war. Help us, God, to toil to “make things right” so we never again to return to the dark days of bigotry, hatred and homophobia.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Liturgist:** God, we pray that in our nation, we might see to it that no one in jail sits on death row because the death penalty is deemed immoral and cruel; that those suffering from substance abuse are medically treated instead of being sent to prison cells; that prisons work from a philosophy of rehabilitation rather than punishment.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Liturgist:** God, help us—our church and this nation—spark a peace with justice movement, where faith with works and your grace has transformed everything. May these blessings, we pray, be acts of justice and compassion supported through Neighbors in Need.

**All:** Amen.

## Jesus: A Low Wage Worker



### United Church of Christ – Justice and Witness Ministries

Jesus was a low-wage worker, just like too many workers in the United States today. Nurses aides, hotel housekeepers, farm workers, day laborers, early child care specialists, fast food workers, retail sales clerks and custodians are examples of workers who provide needed services but who usually receive wages so low that they cannot keep a family out of poverty. Jobs should lift workers out of poverty, not keep them there. We sometimes justify poverty wages by assuming certain workers are not worthy of living wages. But all workers are children of God, made in God's image. They deserve a living wage.

*Excerpted from United Church of Christ – Justice and Witness Ministries, "Jesus: A Low-Wage Worker" <http://www.ucc.org/justice/pdfs/jlww.pdf>*

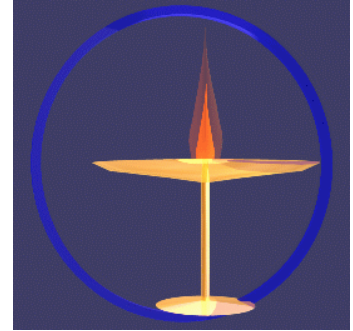
#### Additional resources from the United Church of Christ

- Low-Wage Work: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/worker-justice/low-wage-jobs.html>
- Worship Resources (created for use on Labor Sunday, but useful for any worship that lifts up workers): <http://www.ucc.org/justice/worker-justice/labor-sunday.html>
- General Synod Resolution For the Common Good: <http://www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions/FOR-THE-COMMON-GOOD.pdf>

## Unitarian Universalist Readings and Hymns

*“Rewarding an honest day’s labor with a just living wage is the right thing to do, and advocating for fair compensation is our religious duty. It is only when our most vulnerable sisters and brothers achieve a basic level of economic and physical security that they can embark upon a ‘free and responsible search for truth and meaning.’ Making that spiritual journey possible for all people is the heart and soul of Unitarian Universalism.”*

—Rev. William G. Sinkford, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA)



Unitarians and Universalists have been actively supporting justice for working people since the birth of our movement in America. As early as 1838, William Ellery Channing, one of the chief architects of Unitarianism, added his substantial public support to the ‘Workingman’s Associations’ that were forbears to our present day labor unions. He believed that working people were the children of God, and had the same tremendous potential as any human being, but that they could not truly manifest that potential until the gross economic and social exploitation of the day were overcome.

Not long after Channing, Theodore Parker began speaking out about economic exploitation (See his sermon, “Poverty”, for example) and was keenly supportive of the work and vision of Brook Farm, a utopian community founded by Unitarian ministers. Following in this vein, the great Unitarian minister John Haynes Holmes argued that individual salvation was impossible without social salvation, the liberation of all people from whatever shackles them. He described poverty and the attendant injustice that perpetuates it, as a “social crime.” Our fidelity to that commitment has been recently articulated by the General Assembly of Unitarian Universalist Congregations.

—Rev. Aaron McEmrys, Minister, Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara, CA

***There is Power in Union: A Unitarian Universalist Guide to Supporting Worker Justice***  
[http://www.uua.org/documents/mcemrysaaron/power\\_union.pdf](http://www.uua.org/documents/mcemrysaaron/power_union.pdf).

Dr. King never lost hope. And we need to sustain our hope as well, to create our own “stone of hope.” I recall hearing those words, “stone of hope,” from Dr. King as I sat in a crowded room at the UUA’s General Assembly in Hollywood, Florida, in June of 1966, listening to him deliver the Ware Lecture. Dr. King decried militarism, economic injustice and the scourge of racism. He invoked the words of Jefferson and Lincoln, a call for Americans to live up to the ideals that this country was based upon. And he called for Unitarian Universalists to be part of this struggle, reminding us “when the church is true to its nature, it stands as a moral guardian of the community and of society.”

### **Unitarian Universalist Association 2008 General Assembly Action of Immediate Witness (AIW) to Raise the Federal Minimum Wage to \$10 by 2010**

*Because:* Unitarian Universalists as a community of faith uphold the inherent worth, rights and dignity of all people;

*Whereas:* We have supported a fair minimum wage since 1961, passing a resolution supporting an agricultural minimum wage for migrant workers, and since then our sustained commitment has yielded more than three dozen economic justice resolutions, including a 1997 General Resolution calling for Unitarian Universalist congregations and individuals “to work specifically in favor of mechanisms such as a true single minimum wage, applicable to all workers, that provides an adequate standard of living”;

*Therefore, be it resolved:* The 2008 General Assembly supports the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign urging the 111th Congress in 2009 to raise the federal minimum wage to \$10 by 2010. *For full text of the AIW, see p. 32 above or* <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/socialjustice/statements/115810.shtml>.

Today I call upon Unitarian Universalists to honor Dr. King's memory by renewing our commitment to peace and justice. I believe there will be backlash every time the circle of equality is widened, but I hew my stone of hope with these words: "The arc of the universe is long," said Dr. King, quoting 19th century Unitarian abolitionist Theodore Parker, "but it bends toward justice."

—*From Martin Luther King, Jr.: Remembrance, Reflection and Renewal, Pastoral Message from the Rev. William G. Sinkford, President, Unitarian Universalist Association*  
[www.uua.org/president/050115\\_king.html](http://www.uua.org/president/050115_king.html)

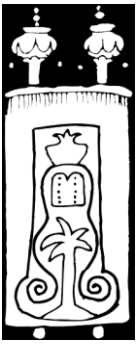
Is the living wage an important enough issue to engage the congregation in years of educating and dialogue? Is the living wage too specific an issue? What I believe wholeheartedly is that **poverty** in the United States is a religious and ethical issue, which threatens the very essence of the way we live. Poverty shatters the worth and dignity of our people. I hope [UUs] will intentionally work to eliminate the injustice caused by poverty. I don't want controversy to scare us from exploring and acting on this issue. We cannot be like Buddha's parents. We cannot shield our children or ourselves from the pains of the world. Facing it, talking about it, and finding ways to change it is what we should be modeling for our children.

—*From the 2000 UUA General Assembly Award Winning Social Justice Sermon: Skinner Sermon Presentation **Why No Living Wage?** by Ginger Luke, Director of Religious Education, [River Road Unitarian Church](http://www.uua.org/ga/ga00/459.html). For full text [www.uua.org/ga/ga00/459.html](http://www.uua.org/ga/ga00/459.html)*

The ***UUA Singing the Living Tradition Hymnal*** has many hymns and readings on Martin Luther King, Jr. and racial and economic justice. For example, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" #149 is a very appropriate, and moving, hymn for a Living Wage Worship Service on or near MLK Weekend. Look in the Topical Indices of Readings and Hymns under Martin Luther King, Jr., beloved community, equity, labor, justice and more. Available at [www.uua.org/bookstore/](http://www.uua.org/bookstore/).

#### **Additional Resources:**

- **Unitarian Universalist Service Committee Economic Justice Living Wage Program**  
<http://www.uusc.org/programs/econjustice/livingwageinfo.html>.
- **Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations Resources for Living Wage**
- <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issues/livingwage/index.shtml>.
- **Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community** [www.uujec.org](http://www.uujec.org).



## Jewish Readings and Prayers

### ***The Torah and Jewish thinkers emphasize the importance of economic justice and fair wages:***

You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer . . . but you must pay him his wages on the same day, for he is needy and urgently depends on it

—Deuteronomy 24:14-15

You shall not defraud your neighbor, nor rob him; the wages of he who is hired shall not remain with you all night until the morning

—Leviticus 19:13

If one hires a worker to work with straw and stubble and the worker says to him, “Give me my wages,” if the employer says, “take the results of your labor as payment,” we do not listen to him.

—Mishnah Bava Metziah 10:5

One who withholds an employee’s wages is as though he deprived him of his life.”

—Baba Metzia 112a

The eighth and most meritorious degree of charity is to anticipate charity by preventing poverty.

—Maimonides

### ***Providing for Our Kinsmen, Providing for the Stranger***

“Do not shut your heart against your needy kinsman,” we read in *Parshat Re’eh*. “Rather you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs. . . . Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the Lord your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings. For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.

Elsewhere we are told to provide not only for our kinsman, but for the stranger and others left vulnerable in our society. And how must we provide? According to Maimonides, the highest form of *tzedakah* is to offer someone a job, or to train someone in a livelihood, so that person can then support himself or herself. Maimonides’ position, of course, is based on a presumption that having a job or trade enables one to support oneself. But can one really support oneself on minimum wage, for instance? How, in our society, can we make sure that there are decent paying jobs for all—or that the most needy, both kinsman and stranger, are adequately trained for the jobs that exist?”

*From Labor on the Bimah: A Special Resource for Synagogues (Part of the National Labor in the Pulpits Program). For more information about Labor on the Bimah and Jewish reflections on labor, go to Labor on the Bimah: Special Resources for Synagogues at [www.nicwj.org/pages/materials.LOTBtxt.html](http://www.nicwj.org/pages/materials.LOTBtxt.html).*

### **Additional resources**

**Jews United for Justice, “Toward a Living Wage: Facts, Figures and Jewish Perspectives”**

[www.jufj.org/programs/jobs/TowardALivingWage.pdf](http://www.jufj.org/programs/jobs/TowardALivingWage.pdf).

**The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, “Living Wage”**

[rac.org/advocacy/issues/issuelw/](http://rac.org/advocacy/issues/issuelw/).

**The Shalom Center, “Judaism and the Living Wage,”** by Deb Kolodny, March 24, 2005, A speech for National Jewish Fast for Peace and Justice, delivered at the national rally in Washington D.C., July 2000

[www.shalomctr.org/index.cfm/action/read/section/GLOB/article/article845.html](http://www.shalomctr.org/index.cfm/action/read/section/GLOB/article/article845.html).

## Islamic Readings and Prayers



**“And O my people! Give just measure and weight,  
nor withhold from the people the things that are  
their due.” *Quran 11:85***

**“O ye who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for  
Allah in equity...Deal justly, that is nearer to your  
duty.” *Quran 5:8***

### ***To Serve the People***

To worship God is nothing other than to serve the people.  
*It does not need rosaries, prayer carpets, or robes.*  
All peoples are members of the same body,  
created from one essence.  
*If fate brings suffering to one member  
The others cannot stay at rest.*  
—Saadi

**Adel**, *justice*, **Mizan**, *balance or equilibrium*; and **Ihsan**,  
*compassion* are crucial words to understand the search for  
what economic justice could mean in an Islamic context.  
Without justice, balance and compassion, there is not economic justice . . .  
In Islam, people can be seen as stewards of God’s gifts.  
We are accountable for the proper stewardship of those gifts and that wealth.  
Leaders, in particular, are accountable.  
**Massooliyya**, *responsibility*, is another one of those terms  
that resonate in a truly Islamic environment.\*

*From Dr. Paul Sullivan, “Islam, Economic Justice and Economic Development in the Arab World,”  
Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, November 17, 2004.*

**“O ye who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity...Deal justly, that is nearer to  
your duty” (*Quran 5:8*).**

Social justice is a central Islamic theme, the objective of social justice in Islam is to promote and maintain social order, harmony, balance and general welfare. It is a comprehensive system that balances the private with the general good, so that the one compliments the other. Islam is both a religion and a comprehensive way of life and exemplifies justice for its practitioners. It is a formula that will satisfy anyone’s moral and spiritual needs as well as natural aspirations. Islam instructs people on how they may live in harmony and peace with others, regardless of socio-economic status, race, gender or faith.

The notion of justice in Islam is based on equality and human dignity. God has enjoined justice and righteousness for all humans in all matters including but not limited to family matters, workers issues, trade and all relationships. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of God be upon him said, *“Your servants/workers are your brothers whom God the most High has placed under your authority. Therefore, a person who has a brother under his authority, should feed him out of that which*

*he eats himself and should dress him with the same kind of clothes which he wears himself; he should not assign work to him which is beyond his capacity, and if you do so, then help him in his work”(Bukhari collection).*

In Islam workers issue are lucid: **“And O my people! Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due”** (*Quran 11:85*). The employer – worker relationship must be based on justice and mutual consent honoring the dignity of the worker. To illustrate this, it is ordained that workers’ wages should be made clear before a worker commences his or her work. The Prophet Muhammad said *“Give the employee his wages before his sweat has had time to dry”* (Ibn Majah collection). It is also required by employers not to give workers work that is beyond their capacity. Employers are accountable for their workers and have to ensure that their workers are justly treated at all times. However, there must be equilibrium, as employers care for their workers; employees too have dutiful rights and obligations toward their employer. The Prophet peace and blessings of God be upon him, said *“God likes, if one of you performs a piece of work, that he should do it well.”* This saying of the Prophet means to exemplify that a Muslim who is entrusted with a job should do it the best of manners. Muslims believe that working towards establishing social justice is a mandate of their faith. The notion of equality in labor laws is prerequisite to attaining social justice.

### **Additional resources**

Muslim American Society [www.masnet.org](http://www.masnet.org).

Council-American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), [www.cair.com](http://www.cair.com), 202-488-8787; [info@cair.com](mailto:info@cair.com)

## Religious Society of Friends: Advices and Queries

Friends' social concerns are deeply rooted in the belief that there is that of God in every person and a belief that God calls us to live, both individually and as a society, in ways that bring honor and respects the dignity of all persons.

In the tradition of Friends, advices and queries are provided to encourage people to consider how to be more faithful in God's service. Below are several advices and queries that may be useful to individuals and/or Meetings regarding wages and work.

- ❖ From *Quaker Faith and Practice*, The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain 1995, p. 23.61:

"It remains to speak of ... the conduct of our ordinary work and business. Nowhere is the practical working of our faith put to a severer test, yet nowhere is there a nobler and more fruitful witness to be borne. Business in its essence is no mere selfish struggle for the necessities or luxuries of life, but a vast and complex movement of social service. However some may abuse its methods for private ends, its true function is not to rob the community but to serve it." (*First adopted 1911, London Yearly Meeting*)

"The opportunity of full development, physical, moral and spiritual, should be assured to every member of the community, man, woman and child. The development of a [person's] full personality should not be hampered by unjust conditions or crushed by economic pressures."

(*From Foundations of a True Social Order, adopted 1914*)

- ❖ From *Faith and Practice*, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Adopted 1955, Revised 1972, Advices, p.85:

"Let the sense of kinship inspire us to unceasing efforts toward a social order free of violence and oppression, in which no one's development is hindered by meager income, insufficient education or too little freedom in directing his or her own affairs. ... Friends are advised not only to minister to those in need, but also to seek to know the facts of social and economic ills so as to work for the removal of those ills. ...."

- ❖ From *Putting Dignity and Rights at the Heart of the Global Economy: A Quaker Perspective* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee [AFSC], 2004), p. 71; Queries, below, pp. 81-83:

"The vision of our Working Party is clear: a world in which everyone's inherent dignity is respected and everyone has the opportunity to exercise their economic rights—including the right to a decent standard of living and meaningful education, work and service in a sustainable environment. Achievement of this vision requires the commitment of individuals, the socially responsible behavior of businesses and restructuring of government policies."

### Queries

#### **As Consumers:**

Are you mindful of how your actions and purchases impact the lives of those who have produced the goods? In making a purchase or investment do you consider factors in addition to price such as how the product was produced, how workers shared in the proceeds, and what impact this production has on the environment?

**As Investors:**

Are you socially conscious about where you invest your time and resources? Do you understand the impact of the companies and organizations you are involved with? Do you assess your investments in terms of their contribution to economic justice and peace?

**For Business Owners, Managers and Investors:**

Can you describe your business as socially responsible in that it incorporates the interests and concerns of workers, communities and the environment into all its actions and policies? Are you working with like-minded enterprises to encourage other businesses to make this commitment and to demonstrate that socially responsible enterprises can be profitable and successful? ... Do you assure that the workers in your organization share in the successes and profits of your enterprise? Is everyone associated with your business accorded their full economic rights, including a living wage?

**For Citizens:**

...Are you constantly evaluating policies and actions by the standard of nurturing dignity and guaranteeing economic rights for everyone?

Do you carry out your responsibilities as a citizen to influence your government about domestic and international economic policies including minimum wage, fair taxation, trade agreements, debt relief, international aid and so on to serve the interests of all people?

**For Quaker Meetings:**

Are you as a Meeting, and as individuals, committed to the elimination of poverty in your community, nation and world? Are you working on strategies of action, not to ameliorate, but to eliminate poverty? Are you striving for economic justice with the same determination that you are striving for peace?

## Resources

*A Just Minimum Wage: Good For Workers, Business and Our Future*, Holly Sklar and the Rev. Dr. Paul H. Sherry, produced by the American Friends Service Committee and the National Council of Churches in support of the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign, 2005.  
<http://www.letjusticeroll.org/justminimumwage.html>.

*Faith & Practice: A Book of Christian Discipline*. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, adopted 1955, revised 1972. <http://www.pym.org/publish/fnp/>

*Quaker Faith and Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, text approved 1994 with revision to May 2004. <http://quakersfp.live.poptech.coop/qfp/iti>.

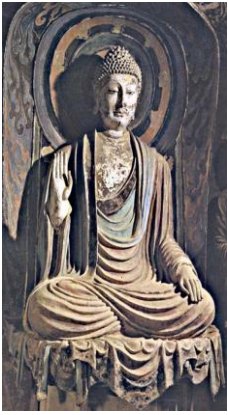
*Putting Dignity and Rights at the Heart of the Global Economy: A Quaker Perspective*. Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 2004. <http://www.afsc.org/resources/pdf/Putting-Dignity-Rights.pdf>.



**American Friends  
Service Committee**

**Economic Justice Program**  
[www.afsc.org/economic-justice/](http://www.afsc.org/economic-justice/)

Compiled by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), U.S. Economic Justice Program, 2006. AFSC is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace and humanitarian service. Its work is based on the Quaker belief in the worth of every person and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice.



## Buddhist Readings and Prayers

### Buddhism and Economic Justice\*

“The Buddha states in the Kutadanta Sutta, how in order to raise the social and economic conditions of a country, the farmers and traders should be given the necessary facilities to carry on their farming and business, and that the people should be paid adequate wages.”

“Thus when they have enough for their subsistence and are economically secure, crime is lessened and peace and harmony prevail. (Dighanikaya)

In another discourse the Buddha explains to Anathapaindika, the banker, the four kinds of happiness a layman ought to enjoy.

The first is ownership or economic security, so that he has sufficient means acquired lawfully by his own effort;

the second is the joy of wealth or happiness gained by the judicious expenditure of lawful wealth;

the third is the bliss of not being in debt,

the joy and satisfaction that comes with the thought:

“I owe nothing to anyone”: the fourth is the bliss of being without blame, which is the satisfaction derived from the thought;

“I am blessed with blameless acts of body, speech and mind.”

—*Anguttara Nikaya - ii 69*

### Free from Suffering

May all sentient beings be well and enjoy the root of happiness;

Free from suffering and the root of suffering;

May they not be separated from the joy beyond sorrow.

May they dwell in spacious equanimity

Free from craving, fear and ignorance.

—*Bodhisattva Vows (adapted)*

\*From Buddhism and Economic Justice by *Dr Rewata Dhamma*,

[www.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/ebdha139.htm](http://www.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/ebdha139.htm)

### Additional resources

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship, [www.bpf.org/html/home.html](http://www.bpf.org/html/home.html)



# WAGES and the WORD:

## A SCRIPTURAL APPROACH TO MINIMUM WAGE POLICY

Protestants for the Common Good, A Christian Theological Companion to *A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and Our Future* by Holly Sklar and the Rev. Dr. Paul Sherry.

### THE WORKING POOR

“They work full time in the richest nation on earth, yet they can’t make ends meet. They can’t make ends meet because their wages are too low.”<sup>1</sup> The fact is, today’s federal minimum wage of \$6.55 is lower than it was in 1950(?), adjusting for inflation. Six dollars and fifty-five cents per hour is simply not enough for families to live on. Many full-time, working Americans cannot meet their basic needs, often forced to choose between feeding their families or heating their homes. In light of this, Sklar has put forth arguments for a higher minimum wage and other policy changes so that “if you work full time, you should not be poor... No one should be working poor.” Jobs should pay enough to support workers and their families. After all, paychecks ought to keep workers out of poverty, not in it. The federal minimum wage should be more than just an arbitrary wage floor. We must ensure that the minimum wage is in fact a *living wage*.

“If you work full time, you should not be poor. No one should be working poor.”

### THE WORD OF THE PROPHETS

Both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament speak specifically about the just treatment of laborers, and the equitable payment of wages. For example, Leviticus 19:13 says, “You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning.” Deuteronomy is more specific (24:14-15); “You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other

Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt.” Clearly, it seems that throughout our history, people of faith have been intimately connected to the specific issue of justice in the payment of wages.

### MINIMUM WAGE IN THE VINEYARD

Jesus tells a parable in the book of Matthew about workers in a vineyard (20:1-16). A vineyard owner hires workers at the beginning of the day, the middle of the day, and at the end of the day. He then pays all of the workers the same wage regardless of the amount of time each has spent laboring in the vineyard. Those who worked all day are indignant: “They grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat’” (v.11-12). But the owner persists in his payment, citing that the first shall be last and the last first. What is important to note in this parable is that at the very beginning, the owner tells the workers he will pay them “whatever is right” (v.4). This is an indication that there is an expected minimum wage for people to make each day, presumably an amount which is enough to survive. No matter how many hours the

workers toiled in the vineyard, the owner pays each worker what is “right”—a wage that will keep them out of poverty.

### LOVING NEIGHBORS, LIVING WAGES

The Bible does more than command or condone an acceptable wage. It also condemns those who do not pay acceptable wages or who live in wealth while their servants or staffers are hungry. Jeremiah applies this condemnation to the distribution of wages (22:13): “Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages.” The Lord, through the prophet Jeremiah, emphasizes that we cannot live in wealth while paying those who work for us little or nothing. In this passage, those who work for the owner of the house are the owner’s neighbors. While geographically applicable at the time of this passage, Christianity has long claimed a definition of “neighbor” which is inclusive of more than just geography.

Christians are to love their neighbors as themselves (Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31-33, Luke 10:27), a principle which would naturally extend to wages in a Christian community—pay others as you would like to be paid.

### THE SIN OF SOCIAL INJUSTICE

Malachi also speaks of the just anger of the Lord in reference to wages. He describes the coming of the Lord and the final judgment when the refiner’s fire which will clear out all impurities; a litany of sinners including sorcerers and adulterers, but also “those who oppress the hired workers in their wages” (3:1-5). In this passage, sins of personal piety and sins of social injustice are listed side by side, specifically including the sin of paying poorly. Nonetheless, while many of us condemn others and each other for sins of personal

piety, it is rare that we hear about the damnation of the employer who does not pay sufficient wages.

### RAISING THE FLOOR

In the New Testament, James speaks of the miseries that will come to employers who do not properly compensate their workers (5:1-7). He says, “Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (v.4). The very wages themselves have cried of injustice to God. Their gold and silver have rusted and the rust is evidence against them (v.3). Miseries are coming to them (v.1), because of their unjust practice of paying wages. In these passages alone, we can see a trend. As people of faith, and neighbors to all, we are scripturally obligated to pay a fair wage and fight against the unjust payment practices that contribute to an ongoing cycle of poverty. We who do not have employees of our own to pay well or to pay poorly are not

exempt from this commitment, however. All of us must help the poor from whatever position we hold. We must join together as a community of faith to “raise the floor” and establish an equitable and just living wage.

### PUT YOUR FAITH INTO ACTION

Contact your U.S. representative and U.S. senators and tell them to act again to raise wages for the poorest in our country. To obtain contact information for your U.S. senators, go to [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) and click on your state. To find your U.S. representative’s contact information, go to [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and type in your zip code.

1. *Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies That Work For All of Us*, by Holly Sklar, Laryssa Mykyta and Susan Wefald (Ms. Foundation for Women/South End Press, 2001).

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Christians are to love their neighbors as themselves, a principle which would naturally extend to wages. Pay others as you would want to be paid.

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# The Biblical, Theological and Moral Grounding in Support of Raising the Minimum Wage

## Speech By the Reverend Felix Carrion

Today, we gather as one community to give voice to protest and encouragement, moral outrage and moral affirmation. The voice of the religious community is integral to this collective consciousness and collective concern.

Although I speak as a minister of the Church of Jesus Christ, today I am joined by others of different faiths whose sacred writings also raise moral questions about injustice, inhumanity and the “the disintegration of society which goes by the name of poverty.” (Conrad Boerma)

The Bible is not silent on poverty. Ultimately, the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament do not just frown upon poverty, but call for a moral fight against it—to uproot its causes; to create the social frameworks and conditions of covenant and community; to support the work of all God’s children to promote the common good. The fight to eradicate poverty is a moral, spiritual and communal imperative.

We now understand that the Bible, taken as a whole, does not lend credence to the idea that poverty is a curse from God; that the poor are poor because God wills it as a punishment for sin and indolence. Poverty is scandalous in the eyes of God. In the Torah, the Jewish law, we find the following message God gave to Moses:

You shall not make gods of silver alongside me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. You need make for me only an altar of earth.—*Genesis 20:23 and 24*

You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor . . . you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials . . . you shall not oppress a resident alien . . . for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.  
—*Genesis 23*

If we serve God, not silver and gold, our relationship to God, to creation and to one another can only be honest, fair and just. But, if we serve silver and gold, our moral fortitude will fail and our relationships will be corrupt.

The poor and working class may not be the political constituency to whom many in government paid attention. But the poor are God’s constituency—their clout with God is that they are the children of God, “made in the image and likeness” of their Creator.

The prophets, says Abraham Heschel, were outraged by the plot of the rich and mighty to extract from the poor all they could get. Heschel declares, “To us a single act of injustice—cheating in business, exploitation of the poor—is slight; to the prophets, a disaster . . . to them, it is a catastrophe, a threat to the world.”

Abraham Heschel marched with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who in the prophetic tradition, proclaimed, “There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American whether he is a hospital worker, laundry worker, maid or day laborer.” Jesus Christ followed in the prophetic tradition. In his hometown synagogue, he inaugurates his ministry when he reads and claims for himself the words of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of jubilee.

Expressions of the Christian faith which leave this message out, distort the gospel and co-opt its social power for the transformation of our political economy.

The early Church embraced this mandate as well. In the epistle of Ephesians we read: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the oikonomos of God." (2: 19)

How interesting that our word for economy comes from the Greek word "oikonomia," which is a compound of the word "oikos," household and "nomos," law or management. Economy means "the law or the management of the household."

Here then is a vision for a political economy not driven by the accumulation of wealth, in the interests of the few, but focused on inclusion, support and empowerment of all in God's household, including the aliens, the strangers.

"Power, property, work and needs" must all be aligned in such a way that they respond to the interests of the whole household, thereby in the process creating working conditions and compensation scales of fairness, decency, justice and equity. The egalitarian principle of democracy really takes its inspiration and form from this biblical and theological framework of "oikonomos."

And in God's household there is enough to go around for everyone. God provides manna in the desert; Jesus feeds the multitudes; the Lord's Supper nourishes all people! Why then are rule by notions of scarcity. Scarcity is the result of hoarding. (Even Kevin Phillips, in his book, *Wealth and Democracy*, decries the growing gap between the rich and the poor in America today.) Abundance (and supra-abundance) is a part of God's creation.

This brings us back to the beginning of it all.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and their multitudes. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and God rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.—*Genesis 2:1-3*

Work is not a punishment for sin in this first account of Creation. It is holy; it is God's work; it is fruitful; it is productive; it brings fulfillment to God; it is creative; it is beautiful; it is good. We are called to live in this tradition of work as having worth, and to make of it what it was for God.

Raising the minimum wage is the minimum that we can do at this point in our collective journey to uphold an inclusive and equitable vision of relationships that is creative and fulfilling for all the people of our country.

## Sample Sunday School Lesson Plan or Living Wage Discussion

By Rev. Jeannie M. Hunter, Associate Pastor, Second Presbyterian Church, Nashville, TN

Read Matthew 20:1-16 aloud.

Discuss it as a group

What is your first response? What is this parable about?

**Two scenarios** are described below. The instructor/leader may form the class into two groups that report back to the main group or address both scenarios in the main group:

**The field:** The workers gathered in a parking lot hours before dawn. As with every day, they hoped the buses would come soon, and that the drivers would choose them to go into the field that day and work. The buses arrived and one by one, workers were picked to go to the tomato fields. They picked tomatoes, gently tossing them into 32-lb. buckets and taking the buckets to large trucks. They received a token for each bucket. At the end of the day, their backs were sore and their hands were discolored with pesticides. Some of the people never got picked to ride a bus to work. Sometimes, a bus came back if there was more work to do, but it was unlikely. At the end of the day, those who had worked all day might take home \$30. Those who had not worked went home with nothing.

**This is a present-day description of the plight of many farm workers. It is uncannily similar to the story described in the parable.**

**The store:** The workers got to work fifteen minutes early, as always. They lifted boxes and stocked shelves for seven and a half hours, with two fifteen-minute breaks. One coworker had to miss work that day because she took her child to see a doctor. She did not have health insurance, because her employer limited her hours to 35 per week, less than “full-time,” and therefore exempt from the health insurance requirement. She had to pay for the doctor visit and her prescription out-of-pocket on top of missing a day’s wages—sick days are not in the hourly workers’ plans, either. After earning \$7 per hour, the workers clocked out and took the bus to their various homes.

**In each small group**, discuss the short scenario. Imagine being in the position of the worker in the field or the store. What would it feel like to take home such low wages each day? Do some math together and calculate the monthly salary. Would you be able to pay your rent/mortgage? Would you be able to buy groceries? Pay for your electricity and other utilities? Pay for car, insurance and gas? Do you have children or other dependents to feed?

Most Americans agree that someone who works a full day should not be in poverty. What kind of wages do you think a person should get paid and why?

**In the large discussion group**, ask each group to briefly describe their discussion. What happened in the scenario they read, and what were the sentiments/thoughts of the group?

**Ask someone else to read the parable again out loud.**

## Discussion

What do you notice this time?

How do the present-day scenarios lend a new perspective to this parable?

The vineyard owner in the parable says he will pay, "Whatever is right." What is "right," in today's society? Minimum wage is currently [\$6.55] per hour. Is that "right?" Why or why not?

Often, the authors of parables want the reader to imagine themselves in the role of the main character. Here, the writer is describing the day of the vineyard owner, the person with the power to affect wages. In what ways do we have the power to affect wages (lobbying Congress, purchasing goods or services only from those who pay fairly, paying our own employees—including church employees—fairly, etc.)?

**Offer the good news**, that Christ came "to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (See Luke 4:16-19) One way Christ does this is through us, the church.

### Close in prayer:

Holy God,

You bring good news to the poor.

Help us to be the bearers of that good news.

Help us to be the subject of that good news.

Help us learn how to make that good news happen.

You proclaim release to those who are captive.

Help us proclaim your will to the ones who may affect change.

Help us release those who are held captive by poverty.

Help us learn how to break those chains.

You bring recover of sight to the blind.

Help us learn what to look for, and

Help us to see it.

Help us teach others to see.

That we may speak your truth

That we may follow your way

That we may bring your light

And create your justice, your peace.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray, AMEN

## Activity for Children and Youth

From Center for World Education, University of Vermont.

*Economic and Social Justice: A Human Rights Perspective* by David Shiman

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/tb1b/Section2/activity2.html>.

The distribution of wealth and power within society usually affects a person's opportunities to achieve full human rights and live a life with dignity. This exercise involves the distribution of wealth. It challenges participants to examine the concepts of "fairness" and "responsibility" and reflect on their own actions.

This one hour activity can be used with all ages and has specific suggestions for young children.

### OVERVIEW

The distribution of wealth and power within society usually affects a person's opportunities to achieve full human rights and live a life with dignity. This activity involves the distribution of wealth. It challenges participants to examine the concepts of "fairness" and "responsibility" and reflect on their own actions.

Time: 1 hour Materials: 100 pennies (or 100 peanuts or wrapped candies for younger participants)

Setting: Elementary school; Adult groups (See suggestions for adaptation for young children at end of activity,)

### PROCEDURE

Note: Keep in mind the socioeconomic composition of your participant population. Guard against having this activity confirm the existing inequalities in wealth and power.

#### PART A: The Scramble

1. Explain to participants that in this activity they will distribute the wealth and power of the world among themselves. This wealth is represented by the 100 pennies. There is only one rule: no participant may touch another member of the group at any time.
2. Arrange the room so that participants have a fairly large area to play the game. Have participants stand or sit in a circle and scatter the pennies evenly in the middle of the circle. Withhold three participants from this part of the activity. Distribute mittens for some participants to wear but postpone discussion of reasons for this until debriefing. Note: To emphasize that some start off with more than others, consider giving three or four participants five extra pennies to begin with as well as providing them with special scooping shovels.

At the order of GO, have participants (except the three withheld) gather as many pennies as possible without touching one another. Note: Penalties for violations of this rule may be needed, such as removal from the game or payment to the person touched.

3. After all the pennies have been collected, have participants report their wealth to the class. Record participants' names and number of pennies on a board or chart paper under three categories:

1) GREAT WEALTH AND POWER (those with six or more pennies—the smallest group);

2) SOME WEALTH AND POWER” (those with three to five pennies—the middle group); and

3) LITTLE WEALTH AND POWER” (those with two or fewer pennies—the largest group).

4. Remind the group that these pennies represent their wealth and power in the world. The amount they possess will affect their capacity to satisfy their needs (e.g., basic education, adequate food and nutrition, good health care, adequate housing) and wants (e.g. higher education, cars, computers, toys, television and other luxury items). Those participants with six or more pennies will have their basic “needs” and most of their “wants” met; those with three to five pennies will have their basic needs met, and those with two or fewer pennies will have difficulty surviving due to disease, lack of education, malnutrition, and inadequate shelter.

5. Tell participants that they may, if they wish, give pennies to others; however, they are not required to do so. Tell them that those who do share will be honored as “DONORS,” with their names placed on the board. Allow a few minutes for participants to redistribute the pennies if they wish. Then ask for the names of those who gave away pennies and the amount each gave. List them on the board or chart entitled “DONORS.” Ask if anyone changed category as a result of giving or receiving pennies and record these shifts on the chart.

6. Explain that some people in their country (and perhaps in their community) and in every country around the globe lack adequate necessities, such as food, education, health care, and shelter. Point out that others, often in the same community or country, are able to acquire almost everything they need and want.

### **PART B: Creating Economic “Fairness”**

1. Divide participants into groups according to the number of pennies they have. Distribute those three participants withheld from the original "scramble" randomly among the different groups. Make note of their reactions to being placed in one group rather than another but save discussion of their placement until the debriefing session.

2. Give each group the task of creating a plan for the fair distribution of the pennies (the world's wealth). Each group should prepare to: a) show why their plan is fair, b) explain what needs to be done (if anything), and c) describe what the group plans to do and why. Give the groups ten minutes to devise their plans.

3. Ask each group to appoint a spokesperson to explain their plan to the others and answer questions. After the plans have been presented and discussed, announce that a vote will now be held on which plan to adopt.

4. When participants are ready to vote, announce the following: Participants with six or more pennies have five votes, those with three to five pennies have two votes, and those with two or fewer pennies have one-half vote. This strategy reinforces the fact that the distribution of power often reflects that of wealth.

Have participants vote and tabulate the results. Announce which plan is to be implemented. Carry out this plan, redistributing the wealth if necessary.

### **PART C: Debriefing the Activity**

*Note: Debriefing is an essential step in this process.*

Draw on the following questions to promote a productive discussion. Be sure to devote time to a discussion of changes needed and changes undertaken.

- How did you feel about the way in which the pennies were acquired and distributed?
- Were you treated fairly?
- Did some people give pennies away? Did you give away or receive pennies? Why or why not? How did this feel?
- What determined whether or not people gave away pennies? Knowing what the pennies represented? Having one's name displayed? Feeling guilty? Something else?
- What aspects of this game represented how the world's wealth and power are distributed?
- What about the three participants assigned to groups? Were they fairly treated? Is what happened to them similar to what happens to people around the globe? What sorts of people? Is it just chance where we end up?
- What about the participants with mittens (and scooping shovels)? What kinds of people do the mittens (and scooping shovels) represent? What group did they end up in?
- How did the members of the different groups feel about their situation? Did the recommended plan for fair distribution reflect whether the group had more or fewer pennies?
- After playing this game do you have a better understanding of the situation or attitude of poor people/nations? Of the situation or attitude of wealthy people/nations?
- Why were some people given more votes than others? Was this an accurate representation of those with more or less power in the world?
- Who are the "haves" and the "have nots" in the world today? Which countries are the "haves" and the "have nots"? Who are the "haves" and "have nots" in our country today? In our state or community? Why?
- Should the "haves" be concerned about the situation of the "have nots"? For what reasons? economic? moral/religious? political? Why might the "haves" give money or resources to the "have nots"? Is this a way to solve the problems of poverty?
- What might the "have-nots" do to improve their situation? What are some actions that "have-nots" have taken around the globe and at home to address the inequalities of wealth and power?
- Do you think there should be a redistribution of wealth and power throughout the world? Why or why not? If yes, how would you propose to accomplish this? What principles would guide your proposals for change?

- Do you think there should be a redistribution of wealth and power in this country? Why or why not? If yes, how would you propose to accomplish this? What principles would guide your proposals for change?

## **GOING FURTHER**

1. Media. Ask participants to find magazine and newspaper articles about the global and/or national distribution of goods and resources and of wealth and poverty.
2. Research.
  - a. Ask participants to find data about the distribution of wealth in the world, in the USA, and in their state or community. Have them create charts and diagrams to illustrate the distribution of wealth. Then ask them to generate questions that emerge for them from these data.
  - b. Ask participants to research and write an essay on how the inequalities of distribution relate to another current issue (e.g., AIDS, health in general, the space program, crime, and environmental destruction).
3. Films. Show films about this topic. (See the Appendix for suggested titles.)
4. Writing. Immediately after debriefing the activity, ask participants to write on topics like these:
  - How do wealth and power affect one's ability to enjoy human rights and human dignity?
  - Can poor people really achieve human rights?
  - Describe how you felt about the relative position you achieved in the activity?
  - Are there responsibilities associated with having wealth and power?

## **ADAPTATIONS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN**

1. Younger children may need more concrete items to work for. Instead of using pennies to represent another reward, try using shelled peanuts or small wrapped candies, and tell children that they will be allowed to eat the treats when the activity has been completed. The rewards attached should be designed to be meaningful to the participants playing the game. For example, each penny could signify a certain amount of extra recess or free time in class or a special treat from the teacher. Design the rewards to be valuable enough to make authentic distinctions between the "wealthy and powerful" and the "poor and weak."
2. When debriefing with young children, focus on their views of "fair" and "unfair" and their proposals for making matters more fair. The discussion questions need to be modified for the appropriate developmental level.

*Source: Written by Sherry Kempf and David Shiman, Center for World Education, University of Vermont. Adapted from S. Lamy, et al, Teaching Global Awareness with Simulations and Games, (Denver: Center for Teaching International Relations, University of Denver, 1994).*

## **Media, Advocacy and Organizing Resources**

## Sample Op-Eds

### **Minimum wage raise too little, too late**

**By Holly Sklar**

Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune News Service, July 22, 2008 and Minuteman Media, July 30, 2008. *Appeared in numerous newspapers and online publications.*

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Minimum wage workers have been stuck in a losing game of “Mother May I” with the federal government. Workers step forward when the government says yes to raising the minimum wage. Workers step backward when the cost of living increases, but the minimum wage doesn’t.

Until 1968, minimum wage workers took frequent and big enough steps forward to make overall progress. Since 1968, when the minimum wage reached its peak buying power, workers have taken many steps backward for every step forward.

The July 24 minimum wage raise is so little, so late that workers will still make less than they did in 1997, adjusting for the increased cost of living, and way less than in 1968.

The decade between the federal minimum wage increase to \$5.15 an hour on Sept. 1, 1997, and the July 24, 2007 increase to \$5.85 was the longest period in history without a raise.

Gas prices rose from \$1.23 to \$2.97 a gallon in the same period. Now it’s over \$4.

The new \$6.55 minimum wage is lower than the 1997 minimum wage, which is worth \$6.88 in 2008 dollars, and way lower than the inflation-adjusted \$9.86 minimum wage of 1968. For full-time workers that translates into \$20,509 a year at the 1968 rate, compared with just \$13,624 at the hourly rate of \$6.55.

The minimum wage does not provide a minimally adequate living standard -- and it still won’t when the last scheduled raise to \$7.25 takes place next July.

Workers are constantly choosing what to go without -- “heat or eat,” child care or health care.

Health care aides can’t afford to take sick days. Retail clerks and child care workers depend on food banks. Security guards sleep at homeless shelters.

It wasn’t always this way. Workers used to share in the gains of rising worker productivity.

Between 1947 and 1973, worker productivity rose 104 percent and the minimum wage rose 101 percent, adjusting for inflation. The middle class grew.

Between 1973 and 2007, productivity rose 83 percent and the minimum wage fell 22 percent, adjusting for inflation. Average worker wages fell 10 percent while domestic corporate profits rose 219 percent, and profits in the disproportionately low-wage retail industry jumped 346 percent. More jobs paid poverty wages.

Higher education does not protect you from falling wages. The inflation-adjusted wages of recent college graduates were lower in 2007 than they were in 2001.

There's been a massive shift of income from the bottom and middle to the top. The richest 1 percent of Americans has increased their share of the nation's income to a higher level than any year since 1928, the eve of the Great Depression.

Our modern robber baron age features people like Countrywide Financial CEO Angelo Mozilo. He pocketed \$103 million last year as the subprime mortgage ponzi scheme morphed into the worst financial crisis since the Depression.

Minimum wage workers don't put raises into predatory lending, commodity speculation or offshore tax havens. They recycle their needed raises back into local businesses and the economy through increased spending.

Eight of the "SurePayroll Top Ten States for Small Businesses" in 2008 have had state minimum wages above the federal level. They include Washington, California and Oregon, three of the four states with the highest minimums.

Minimum wage raises are stimulus for an economy tanking from a housing bubble gone bust, sharply higher oil prices, extreme inequality, unsustainable debt, and fraud and speculation crowding out productive investment.

Higher wages benefit business by increasing consumer purchasing power, reducing costly employee turnover, raising productivity, and improving product quality and company reputation. They reinforce long-term success.

Let Justice Roll, a national faith, community, labor and business coalition, which I advise, is calling for a minimum wage of \$10 in 2010.

\$10 in 2010 will bring the minimum wage closer to the value it had in 1968, a year when the unemployment rate was a low 3.6 percent.

It will bring the minimum wage closer to the "minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency and general well-being of workers" promised by the Fair Labor Standards Act establishing the minimum wage 70 years ago.

It will strengthen the foundation under our unsound economy.

Holly Sklar is co-author of *A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and Our Future* ([www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org)) and *Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies That Work for All of Us*.

## **Small boost, big dreams: Minimum wage hike helps lift Georgians out of poverty**

**By Cindia Cameron and Christopher Henry**

*Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 7/24/08*

The federal minimum wage will increase today from \$5.85 to \$6.55 an hour. This amounts to \$28 a week for a full-time worker — less than the cost of half a tank of gas. At this rate, annual wages for full-time work still leave a family of three nearly \$1,000 per year below the federal poverty rate.

A column by Madeline Zavodny in Tuesday's AJC argues that this minimal increase "bodes ill for many workers" ("Wage increase may backfire," @issue). As she did not offer sources for most of her claims, we checked with some local experts.

The Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, in a 2006 report, quotes a letter signed by 650 economists, including five Nobel Prize winners, in support of raising the minimum wage: "We believe that a modest increase in the minimum wage (in the range of \$1-\$2.50/hr) would improve the well-being of low-wage workers and would not have the adverse effects that critics have claimed."

Quishanna Loynes, an assistant grocery store manager, is also an expert in low-wage work. Hired as a fulltime worker for rotating shifts, she was rarely scheduled for more than 30 hours a week. "I never brought home more than \$220 a week," she explains. "After taking out \$12 for MARTA to get to work and paying my baby-sitter \$15-\$20, I put the rest aside for rent and utilities. When there was a fifth Friday in the month, I could buy shoes or underwear for the kids. If someone needed a new backpack for school, that would have to wait till next month."

Quishanna is an "average" minimum-wage worker. The GBPI estimates that raising the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 (over three years) will benefit about 672,000 workers in Georgia. Of these, 84 percent are adults (20 years or older), about one-third are married and one-third are parents. An estimated 413,000 Georgia children will also benefit from the increase.

The Georgia Minimum Wage Coalition, made up of more than 50 local and statewide community, faith and labor organizations, works to raise the minimum wage — both to cover workers not included under federal law and to raise the wage above \$7.25 per hour in 2009. The coalition is guided by a simple principle: Work should lift a family out of poverty, not trap them in it.

By an overwhelming majority, Georgia voters agree. A 2006 University of Georgia poll found that 90 percent believe the minimum wage should be above \$7 per hour. Black and white, rural and urban, Republican and Democrat — respondents said they would be more likely to vote for candidates who commit to make this happen.

Recognizing the call for economic justice at the heart of many faith traditions, more than 130 clergy and faith leaders from across Georgia have signed a letter calling on the General Assembly to increase the state minimum wage.

The recent economic stimulus checks demonstrated that putting money into the hands of working families directly benefits local businesses. Increasing the minimum wage would provide community economic stimulus, as low-wage workers spend every extra dollar for milk, diapers and shoes in their neighborhoods.

The American Dream is built on the promise that if you work hard, you can get ahead. Quishanna Loynes, along with tens of thousands of parents across our state, is doing her part. Through the Georgia Minimum Wage Coalition, leaders of local congregations, unions and community organizations are doing their part to support state and federal legislation to raise the minimum wage to a level that supports a family above the poverty rate.

Cindia Cameron is organizing director for 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, and co-chair of the Georgia Minimum Wage Coalition. The Rev. Christopher Henry is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and a faith-based organizer with the Georgia Minimum Wage Coalition.

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## **Fair wage engenders basic human dignity**

**By C. MELISSA SNARR, Ph.D.**

*The Tennessean*, 4/10/08

The United States first introduced minimum-wage legislation in the midst of the Great Depression. Recognizing the failures of unregulated markets, the nation chose to draw a moral line below which no market economy could fall; desperate people should not be required to work at desperation wages.

Citizen-emboldened politicians understood taking advantage of people's economic vulnerability was morally unconscionable, even amid economic turmoil.

Minimum-wage legislation secured a simple principle for the regulation of markets: A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it. But in the past 40 years, elite-driven politicians eroded this principle as they refused to index the wage with consumer-price demands. The minimum wage will rise this year to \$6.55 an hour, but it would take \$9.70 an hour to reach its buying power in 1968 — the year the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. died supporting Memphis sanitation workers' fair-wage struggle.

The living-wage movement seeks to restore a basic moral principle to the ongoing regulation of markets. People working a full-time job should be paid enough money to secure decent housing, food, transportation and health care for their family. In other words, people should be able to "live" in the most basic way on a minimum wage. In Davidson County, this means Metro government employees would need \$10.36 an hour to avoid choosing between food, rent, electricity or doctor visits for their children (and that excludes savings, dining out and entertainment).

## **Better pay fuels economic growth**

Contrary to common myths, 70 percent of minimum-wage earners in the U.S. are adults, many with families. These are not starter jobs for wealthy suburban teens. Wages are not depressed by undocumented workers but by corporate greed (states with the largest influx of undocumented workers have actually seen increases in jobs for documented workers and comparable stagnation of wages). As the Fiscal Policy Institute and others have documented, the number of small

businesses and overall employment rate actually grew in states requiring wages higher than the federal minimum.

While worker productivity has increased steadily over the past several decades and CEO salaries have skyrocketed, wages have not. This is a moral and economic issue that requires government action.

In 1968, the Memphis sanitation workers carried signs that said simply, "I AM A MAN." They knew living wages were signals of basic human dignity. Working multiple jobs to make ends meet means little time for family, kids, church or community. Homework help, neighborhood watches and volunteering fade under the demands of basic survival. We all lose in that erosion of community.

Finally, as a person of faith, I must note that all religious traditions address the dignity workers deserve. Nations are judged by their treatment of the poor. God even rejects the worship of those who build their wealth on the backs of the poor (Amos 5:10-24).

Created in the image of God, we are called to honor that image in the other ... and that includes what we pay for the work our nation requires.

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## **Businesses back wage raise; state should, too**

**By Lya Sorano**

*Atlanta Journal Constitution, 07/24/07*

In Georgia, one of the reddest of the "red states," one might expect an almost universal denouncement of the raise in the minimum wage. In fact, the opposite is true.

Business owners and managers I've spoken with aren't concerned. They're glad the minimum wage is going up because workers deserve it and they believe it will help our local economy.

The \$5.15 minimum wage has been in effect for a decade, the longest period without a raise since the minimum was established in 1938. Georgians covered by the federal minimum wage will see their hourly pay rise to \$5.85 today, \$6.55 on July 24, 2008, and \$7.25 on July 24, 2009. Those increases are lower than they seem because they lagged so far behind inflation.

Tony McBride, general manager of Cracker Barrel on Highway 53 in Braselton, said his employees who are not servers start at \$8.00 an hour. BB Webb, owner of Carl House in Auburn, believes a minimum wage increase is one of the changing economic conditions business owners need to build into their business plans. Absorbing a minimum wage increase, she said, is "just a part of being a good citizen." And a good businessperson.

Webb says the raise will have a positive effect on the local economy, which would be especially beneficial for businesses serving lower-income markets "because their customers would have more money to spend."

States that have already raised their minimum wages above the \$5.15 federal level have had better employment and small business trends than the other states, according to reports by the Fiscal Policy Institute and other research organizations.

"Higher wages benefit business by increasing consumer purchasing power, reducing costly employee turnover, raising productivity and improving product quality, customer satisfaction and company reputation," a statement by Business for a Fair Minimum Wage explains.

"A fair minimum wage is a sound investment in the future of our communities and our nation," concludes the statement, which I endorsed along with hundreds of business people nationwide, including the owners of Georgia businesses such as Morning Glory Farm in Clermont, North Georgia Woodworks in Toccoa, and Sugar Magnolia B&B, Flyer Candy Bars, Simply Web and Grand Central Pizza in Atlanta.

Georgia's poverty rate is higher than most other states.

A minimum wage that keeps workers in poverty hurts our communities and our state.

The Legislature should raise the state minimum wage above its meager \$5.15 level so that all workers, whether covered by state or federal law, get a long overdue raise.

Lya Sorano is the founder of Atlanta Women in Business and chief executive of the Oliver/Sorano Group, a marketing and public relations firm.

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## **Working poor need a living wage** **By William G. Sinkford and Charlie Clements**

*St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 6/26/06*

Copyright (c) William G. Sinkford and Charlie Clements

There are more than 300 verses in the Bible that express God's concern for the poor. The principle of tzedakah or "charity," is central to Judaism. Zakat, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, dictates that we provide for those in need. Gandhi called poverty the "worst form of violence."

Generosity, charity and basic kindness to others are fundamental tenets of each of the world's major religions, but so, too, is the call for justice. We know that Martin Luther King, Jr., took the inspiration for his call to "Let justice flow like water" directly from the Book of Amos.

Given how universal these principles are, we as people of faith are appalled by the fact that, amidst such plenty, more than 650,000 Missourians live in poverty, nearly 230,000 of them children. These are the working poor, the people who live each day with little hope of getting ahead in the struggle to survive.

We 5,000 delegates of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, having gathered in St. Louis last week for our national convention, are moved to speak to this injustice. For 171 years, Unitarian Universalists have had a congregation in St. Louis bearing witness to the needs and the rights of the city's less privileged

residents. We are proud to give continuity to this heritage with our presence here these past few days.

With the help of our local members, we have had the honor of seeing St. Louis through the eyes of some of its working people. Their energy keeps the economy humming. They are raising the next generation of St. Louisans, yet they live every day in poverty, toiling away for an average wage of \$7 per hour in the hope that their children might share in society's plenty.

We did not acquire our commitment to a just wage when we arrived in St. Louis. UUSC's economic justice program supports the struggle for economic rights from Santa Fe, N.M., to the backstreets of Nairobi, Kenya.

As so often is the case, those who received us in St. Louis have done so as ambassadors of hope. The very janitors and other workers with whom we met are working together with community supporters of the local Jobs with Justice coalition and others as part of an unprecedented effort to help win better wages and health care coverage for workers throughout the St. Louis region. If successful, it could help thousands of low-wage workers in the greater St. Louis area earn a better living for themselves and their families.

This November, Missourians may have the opportunity to vote for a ballot measure that would raise the state's minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.50 per hour. It has been nine years since low-wage workers in the state had an increase in their pay. The current minimum wage is a poverty wage. A full-time minimum wage worker makes only \$10,712 a year. For a single mom with two children, that is nearly \$5,000 below the poverty line. This initiative wouldn't solve all of her problems, but it would give that mother and thousands like her a little more help as she struggles to make ends meet.

In 1964, the UUA adopted a resolution stating that "poverty, in the midst of plenty, [is] intolerable to the religious conscience and incompatible with our principles of economic justice." Forty-two years later, these words are as profound and as central to our articles of faith as they were when they were first stated. As people of faith, it is our responsibility to turn these words into action.

*Rev. William G. Sinkford is president of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Charlie Clements is president of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.*

**For additional op-eds, please see the op-eds featured in Let Justice Roll press room at**

[www.letjusticeroll.org/pressroom.html#oped](http://www.letjusticeroll.org/pressroom.html#oped)

[www.letjusticeroll.org/stateminimumwagecampaigns.html](http://www.letjusticeroll.org/stateminimumwagecampaigns.html).

## Sample Letters to the Editor

For more letters, please see the regularly updated Letters to the Editor Sampler at [www.letjusticeroll.org/pressroom/letterstoeditor.html](http://www.letjusticeroll.org/pressroom/letterstoeditor.html).

### **Shameful wage**

*Lawrence Journal World (KS), 5/8/08*

Food and fuel prices are soaring, eating into everyone's income and hurting the poor above all — and business professor Mark Hirschey considers this an opportune moment to “take a stand” against raising the minimum wage? (Journal-World, April 1) The housing crisis is forcing thousands of full-time workers out of their homes, and Hirschey calls supporters of a minimum wage hike “foolish”? (Journal-World, May 7)

Luckily, that kind of nay-saying did not prevent Congress from passing legislation in 2007 to raise the federal minimum wage in three phases: from \$5.15 to \$5.85 (last July), to \$6.55 (this July), and ultimately to \$7.25 (in 2009).

The positive effects of this legislation will be keenly felt in Kansas, where 240,000 workers — more than one in six from a workforce of 1.4 million — will get raises as a result. That money will be spent instantly and locally. That's why most states have minimum wage levels above the federal level — because they boost the economy, not the reverse.

Kansas has the lowest state minimum wage in the country: \$2.65 an hour. That's shameful. Raising that wage is the only way to bring thousands of full-time workers and their families above the federal poverty line.

*David Smith,  
Lawrence*

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*Sun Chronicle (MA)  
6/2/07*

### **Show me who's getting rich on food donations**

In reference to a letter from Fred Glover ("Show me where US citizens are starving," May 29) about U.S. Rep. James McGovern's 'political spin' of eating on food stamps of \$3 a day. I am the director of food pantries at Hebron Village Outreach Center here in Attleboro. While you are correct that the food stamp allowance is meant to supplement, I invite you to visit us here at the food pantry on a Thursday night and see all the people not able to make ends meet with that supplement, and still need to get extra help from food pantries. We may not have people that die of starvation, but I can tell you a good number of people, working and seniors, are having a tough time making ends meet.

Let me ask you a few questions. Have you tried to rent an apartment recently working on minimum wage? Have you had to pay your utilities, and gas for the car to get to your job, while only making a few hundred dollars a week or on a fixed income that doesn't go up when everything else does? We have seen an increase in clients every month and it doesn't seem to be getting any better for a lot of people.

Congressman McGovern is very concerned with hunger in the state of Massachusetts and I applaud his efforts to get the food stamp allowance raised. We help many people, but in this time of escalating living costs, increasing numbers of people are coming forward asking for assistance.

Michelle Burch  
Attleboro

THIS WRITER is director of food pantries for the Hebron Outreach Center.

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*USA Today*  
2/9/07

### **Wage hike's benefits**

Todd Stottlemyer, president and CEO of the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), reveals total ignorance of business when he claims raising the minimum wage to \$7.25 by 2009 would force business owners to jack up prices by 40% ("Don't kill the golden goose," Opposing view, Thursday).

In my small business, costs include insurance, utilities, taxes, rent, equipment, inventory, maintenance, advertising and outside accounting, banking, legal services and more. Labor is only one part of a complicated cost picture.

Very few small businesses pay every employee minimum wage, so the hike affects only a small percentage of employees for the vast majority of businesses. Even if a business paid every employee the legal minimum, this raise would increase overall costs by a small fraction of what Stottlemyer claims.

And he ignores the benefits of paying decent wages, such as reduced costs and higher revenues produced by lower turnover, higher productivity and increased consumer buying power. Such ignorance is not surprising to those who follow NFIB policy positions.

Business owners should look at the agendas of organizations such as the American Independent Business Alliance, which actually serves independent business people, not wealthy investors and corporate elites.

Lew Prince  
Co-Owner and CEO, Vintage Vinyl, St. Louis  
Signatory, [Business Owners and Executives for a Higher Minimum Wage](#)  
(c) 2007 Lew Prince

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# Educational and Organizing Resources

## [www.LetJusticeRoll.Org](http://www.LetJusticeRoll.Org)

The Let Justice Roll website provides up-to-date action alerts, news, information and resources about

- Raising the federal minimum wage
- State ballot and legislative campaigns for raising the minimum wage
- Local and state living wage campaigns

## Just Neighbors



The newly updated interactive, multimedia **Just Neighbors** Toolkit is designed to educate congregations about poverty and wages and empower people as advocates. **Just Neighbors** allows you to walk in the shoes of working families living in poverty and learn how to help. The following sessions are especially appropriate for Let Justice Roll Living Wage Days:

- Session 1 “**Who Is My Neighbor**”: A video introduction to three working families struggling due to low wages. What should we do about it?
- Session 2 “**Making Ends Meet**”: You are challenged to help the Bond family solve their budget riddle. Two salaries are not enough!
- Session 4 “**Does Working Work**”: Look at three more families who find working for low wages doesn't work.

Designed for adult education, loved by youth, Just Neighbors helps you put faith into action. Each session illuminates the message of Let Justice Roll: A Job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it!

The toolkit can be ordered at [www.justneighbors.net](http://www.justneighbors.net) for a 30-day money back trial.



## **UUSC and Santa Fe Living Wage Network's *La Marcha: Working for Economic Justice***

This 25-minute film, produced by award-winning documentary filmmakers [Miguel Grunstein and Dale Kruzic](#), tells the story of the extraordinary [Santa Fe Living Wage Campaign](#), which emerged through the efforts of diverse community-based organizations to build a grassroots coalition, enlist business allies and illustrate core U.S. values of teamwork, fairness, opportunity, responsibility and respect.

Order at <http://www.uusc.org/info/purchase.html>.

## ***A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and Our Future***

by Holly Sklar and the Rev. Dr. Paul Sherry.

Download the pdf at <http://www.letjusticeroll.org/pdfs/AJustMinimumWage.pdf> or order discount hard copies by calling 800-889-5733 or using the order form on the next page.

### **What people are saying about *A Just Minimum Wage*:**

“Should be prescribed reading for members of Congress. . . who have fallen far short of their obligation to develop a fair and workable economy.”

—*Bill Boyne, Post-Bulletin (MN)*

“*A Just Minimum Wage* has gotten rave reviews from every social justice group that has seen it here in Arizona.”

—*Rev. Trina Zelle, Interfaith Worker Justice of Arizona*

“What a treasure! *A Just Minimum Wage* is a wonderful resource.”

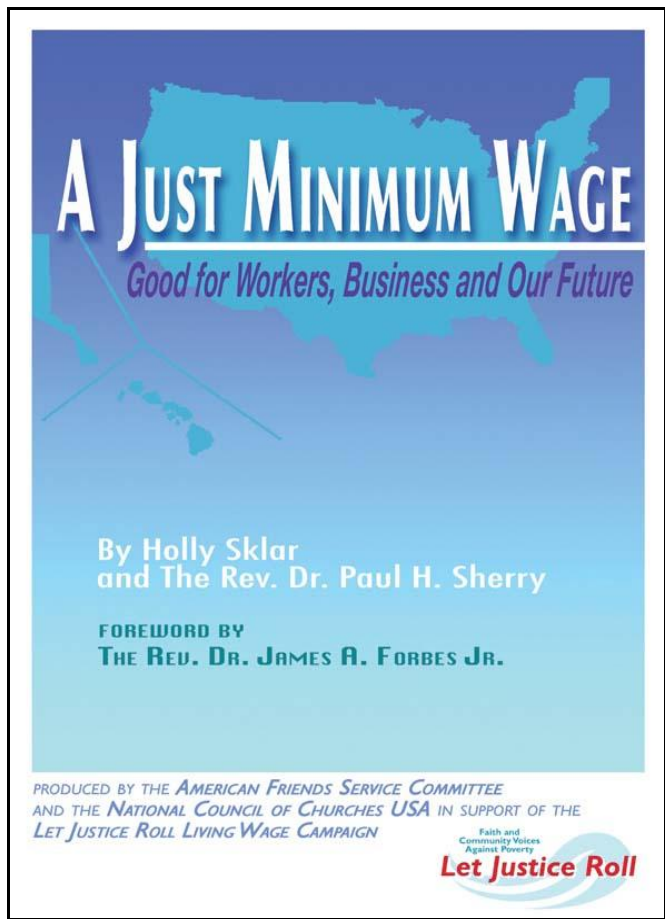
—*Barbara Zelter, North Carolina Council of Churches*

“This report contains a multitude of excellent talking points that strongly support the economic wisdom and moral fairness of raising the minimum wage.”

—[Democracy for New Mexico](#)

“*A Just Minimum Wage* is quite impressive . . . a vital resource in the debate over the minimum wage. . . . The important thing is to get it . . . into the hands of citizens wanting to be informed [and] get pastors and lay leaders using it.”

—[Beau Underwood, Student Ecumenical Partnership](#)



# A JUST MINIMUM WAGE

*Good for Workers, Business and Our Future*

By Holly Sklar

and the Rev. Dr. Paul H. Sherry

Foreword by The Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes Jr.

*A Just Minimum Wage* makes a powerful economic and ethical case for raising the minimum wage and moving the United States from a low-road economy to the high road. It counters all the arguments against raising the minimum wage and offers fresh insight into why the minimum wage is so important.

Shows why raising the minimum wage is an economic imperative for the enduring strength of our workforce, businesses, communities and economy, and a moral imperative for the very soul of our nation.

### Excerpts:

“The minimum wage is where society draws the line: This low and no lower. Our bottom line is this: **A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it.**”

“The minimum wage buys less today than it did when

Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton opened his first Walton’s 5 and 10 in Bentonville, Arkansas in 1951.”

“The minimum wage has become a poverty wage instead of an anti-poverty wage. A low minimum wage gives a green light to employers to pay poverty wages to a growing share of the workforce—not just workers at the minimum, but above it. Workers have not been getting their fair share of the benefits of rising worker productivity.”

“We will not prosper economically or ethically in the global economy relying on low wages, outsourcing and debt in place of innovation and opportunity. We will not prosper in the global economy relying on disinvestment in place of reinvestment. We can’t succeed that way any more than farmers can ‘compete’ by eating their seed corn.”

“Paying your employees well is not only the right thing to do but it makes for good business.” — CEO, Costco

*“Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an overflowing stream.” — Amos 5:24*

PRODUCED BY THE **AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE** AND THE **NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES USA**  
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[ACORN, Cleveland, Ohio](#)

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[American Baptist Churches USA](#)

[American Friends Service Committee](#)

[Arizona Ecumenical Council](#)

[Arkansas Interfaith Conference](#)

[Baylor Students for Social Justice](#)

[Bread for the World](#)

[Business for Shared Prosperity](#)

[California Church Impact](#)

[Campaign for Hoosier Families, Indiana](#)

[Catholic Committee of the South](#)

[Catholics for Democracy](#)

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[Center for Community Change](#)

[Center of Concern](#)

[Central-Southeast Association of Ohio Conference UCC](#)

[Christian Church \(Disciples of Christ\) Office of the General Minister and President](#)

[Church in the World Department, Central Southeast Assoc. of the Ohio Conference, UCC](#)

[Cleveland Jobs With Justice](#)

[Coalition on Human Needs](#)

[Colorado Progressive Coalition](#)

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[Disciples Justice Action Network](#)

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[Faith And The City, Georgia](#)

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[Georgia Minimum Wage Campaign](#)

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[World Hunger Education, Advocacy & Training \(WHEAT\)](#)