



Combat Poverty With Wages !

What are the facts about poverty and wages?

- In Virginia over 900,000 people live below the poverty line – three out of every twenty-five persons.
- Among the ‘working poor,’ only 47 percent earn the minimum wage of \$7.25/hour, while 53 percent earn *less* than this.
- A worker earning the current minimum wage and working full time, with no holidays or vacation, will earn only \$15,030 per year – less than half of what is needed to keep a two-person family out of poverty as defined in the federal Poverty Guidelines used to determine financial eligibility for federal assistance.
- Statewide, an income of \$21,927/year is required to cover typical expenses for just **one** adult for food, medical expenses, housing, transportation and taxes; for a family of 2 adults and 2 children, \$43,437 is needed to cover these expenses.
- The growth of poverty is largely due to the current minimum wage of \$7.25/hour having less buying power than the minimum wage of 45 years ago.
- If the minimum wage of \$1.60/hour in 1968 had kept pace with the cost of living, the minimum wage today would be \$10.72/hour – providing an income of \$22,297.60, over \$7,000 more than provided by the current minimum wage.
- The failure of our state and nation to keep the minimum wage tied to the cost of living is, in large measure, the reason over 48 million people in the United States now live in poverty.
- In view of the obvious inadequacy of the current minimum wage, 19 states have raised their minimum wage beyond \$7.25/ hour to help struggling workers, boost consumer spending and expand business operations; several other states are considering similar proposals, and 9 states have indexed their minimum wage to keep pace with the cost of inflation. Such policies are helping to lift families out of poverty and strengthen our economy.
- The issue of inadequate minimum wage is an economic justice issue. We must seek to abolish poverty by paying adequate wages so no one is condemned to live in poverty. Policies and systems that perpetuate poverty must be changed.

What does the Bible say?

- Human beings, created in the image of God, have an innate dignity (Gen 1:26-27) and through work exercise their God-given creativity (Gen 2:15); denial of this dignity through oppression is a denial of God’s intention in creation.
- Both the Old and New Testaments emphasize that workers should be treated justly; that wealth and prosperity of society should be shared; that great

- disparities of wealth and poverty should be avoided, and that workers should be paid wages that sustain themselves and their families.
- In the parable of the rich man who does not see the poor and suffering Lazarus at his gate (Lk 16:19-31), those living in prosperity are warned not to be blind to the great poverty that exists beside great wealth.
 - The parable of the last judgment (Mt 25:31–46) teaches that to neglect the needs of the poor, the outcast and the oppressed is to reject Jesus, God made manifest in history.
 - In his commandment, “that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12), Jesus, who regularly took the side of those most in need, calls us to follow him.

What does The United Methodist Church say?



- “Every person has a right to a job at a living wage . . . persons come before profits. We deplore the selfish spirit that often pervades our economic life.” *Social Principles of The UMC Church 2009-2012*, ¶163/C.
- “Since 1908, the church has advocated for a living wage in every industry (1908 Social Creed);”
- “Encourages all employers — and especially United Methodist employers — to share prosperity with workers and seeks ways to reduce disparity between top and bottom wage earners”;
- “Supports efforts in the US Congress to raise the minimum wage to a living wage and index it to inflation” [and] urges United Methodists to engage “in education and advocacy to improve wages, benefits and working conditions for workers in low-wage jobs.” *The Book of Resolutions of The UMC 2008*, 629.

What do You say?

- What you say depends on what you believe and know – keep growing in your faith and becoming more informed.
- Make sure your church deals justly with its own employees and hires only ethical services providers and contractors.
- Commit to stand with persons whose wages are so low they still live in poverty.
- Expose exploitation of low-wage workers in your locality and help them get justice.
- Urge your state legislators to raise the minimum wage to a living wage, indexed to inflation. If you do not know who your state legislators are, or need contact information, visit <<http://legis.state.va.us>> and click on “Who’s My Legislator?”

For additional resources and information visit: Interfaith Workers Justice <www.iwj.org> or contact either Glenn Rowley, Director of Justice and Missional Excellence, <GlennRowley@vaumc.org>; tel: 1.800.768.6040 / 804.521.1100, ext. 143 or Marilyn Heckstall, Eradicate Poverty Chair, Board of Church and Society <mheckstall@comcast.net>; tel: 1.804.426.3373.

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