



Stop Wage Theft !

What are the facts about wage theft?

- Most workers expect a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. But this is not the reality for many low-wage workers who are routinely cheated by unscrupulous employers – who pay them less than the minimum wage, compensate them for fewer hours than they worked, issue checks that bounce, refuse to pay overtime, take illegal deductions, steal workers' tips, do not pay them, practice wrongful termination, and who pay in cash and/or misclassify workers to avoid paying payroll taxes, unemployment insurance, workers' compensation coverage, and overtime pay.
- A survey in Fairfax County found numerous violations, including over half reporting non-payment for work done or being paid less than agreed and over one-fourth being issued bad checks. Other studies have found as many as half of all day laborers had been victims of wage theft, and that wage theft in the U.S. affects millions of workers.
- Virginia has been ranked near the bottom among the 50 states on protections provided against wage theft – such as not requiring extra payment for overtime work or breaks for workers, and misclassification is practiced by an estimated one-fourth of Virginia's employers causing the loss of as much as \$28 million in public revenue annually.
- While there are some federal and state laws designed to help protect workers, such as the principle of a minimum wage and laws against discrimination in employment, such laws suffer from laxity in enforcement due to insufficient funds and personnel, and insufficient penalties which make it cheaper for violators to pay nominal penalties instead of just wages.
- Wage theft harms us all – not only the working poor, but also ethical employers who are forced to compete with unethical employers, and our common life together by robbing us of tax dollars needed for transportation infrastructure and public services such as education, health care, police and fire protection.

What does the Bible say?

- You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal (Lev 19:13).
- You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers . . . 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 (Deut 24:14-15).
- 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 . . . Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is this not to know me? says the Lord (Jer 22:13, 15b-16).

- 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 . . . You have lived on earth in luxury and in pleasure . . . You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you (Jas 5:4-6).

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 . . . and continues to support the rights of workers to share fully in the prosperity of society. *The Bk of Resolutions 2008*, 629.
- In its resolution Stop Wage Theft (2011) the Virginia Annual

Conference expressed concern to the congregations of the Conference regarding the ill-treatment of low-wage workers and asked the Board of Church and Society to communicate our concern for this problem to our Virginia members of Congress.

What do You say?

- What you say depends on what you believe and know – keep growing in your faith and becoming more informed.
- Learn about low-wage workers living on the margin in your locality and develop relationships with them.
- Start a study group in your church using *Wage Theft in America: Why Millions of Americans are Not getting Paid – And What You Can Do About It*, and ponder the biblical teachings and United Methodist positions noted above.
- Make sure your church is fair to its own employees and hires only ethical services providers and contractors.
- Organize a community forum on wage theft and workers' rights. Invite workers who have had their wages stolen to tell their stories. Listen carefully and compassionately.
- Commit to stand with victims of wage theft. Expose wage theft in your locality and help workers get justice.
- Contact your state legislators and ask them to strengthen laws to protect low wage workers from exploitation. 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 Worker 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.