

Prophetic Preaching in a Divisive Climate: A Guide for Faith Leaders in the Pre-Election Season



Issues that Call us to Speak and Act

The Fight for \$15 Voter Pledge

1. **\$15 and union rights.** No working moms and dads should struggle to provide for their children. Everyone who works needs \$15 an hour and the right to stick together in a union to ensure a better future for our families.
2. **Affordable child care for all Americans.** Nothing is more important than taking care of our kids. Early childhood teachers should be paid fairly for the critical work they do, and child care should be affordable for working moms and dads.
3. **Quality long-term care for seniors and people with disabilities.** In their golden years, our parents deserve quality care in their own home or a nursing facility from caregivers who are paid a living wage.
4. **Addressing the lasting impact of racism toward Black America.** Black people are disproportionately killed in encounters with law enforcement and locked up in prisons and jails. People of color are increasingly shut out of our democracy because of laws created to stop them from voting and discrimination against the formerly incarcerated. It's time for our nation to confront racism, fix our broken criminal justice system, "ban the box," and end shameful voter suppression.
5. **Common sense immigration reform.** Millions of people who do some of the toughest jobs in America came here from another country. They deserve a chance to move out of the shadows and the opportunity to become citizens. We must stop tearing immigrant parents from their children and destroying families.

(Read more and sign the pledge at <https://action.seiu.org/page/s/pledge-card>)



Protecting Non-Profit Status while Engaging your Congregation in the Election

The Three Point System: Congregations and the IRS Guidelines on Advocacy, Lobbying, and Elections - from the Unitarian Universalist Association

The IRS regulations on the activities of congregations can be summarized as follows:

1. **ISSUE ADVOCACY:** Without limits on time, effort and expense, congregations and their representatives may engage in issue advocacy through activities such as educating and mobilizing congregants and the general public. Example: encouraging the public to show concern for global warming by reducing carbon emissions. Please note that issue advocacy is only acceptable if it does not involve political campaign intervention (see below).
2. **LOBBYING:** Within narrow limits on time, effort and expense, congregations and their representatives may engage in lobbying - defined by the IRS as advocating for or against specific pieces of legislation - as an "unsubstantial" portion of an organization's activities. The IRS has not provided a strict rule for what constitutes "unsubstantial," and evaluates on a case-by-case basis. However, courts and the IRS have ruled in the past that lobbying activity constituting 5% or less of total activities is acceptable. "Total activities" includes the total amount of money, staff, and volunteer time that goes into running the organization. While the 5% amount is not a strict rule, it can be used as a guidepost for an organization's lobbying activities. Example: encouraging a city council, state legislature, and/or Congress to pass a particular law to reduce carbon emissions.
3. **POLITICAL CAMPAIGN INTERVENTION:** There is a total limit on partisan activity, which the IRS calls political campaign intervention. Congregations and their representatives can do nothing that advocates for or against candidates for public office or political parties. This includes fundraising on behalf of candidates and donating meeting space, among other things. Example: supporting a particular candidate or party because of their stance on carbon emissions. Election-related activities such as candidate questionnaires and forums may be acceptable if certain guidelines are followed; consult section C., "Political (Electoral) Activities" of this guide for details.

Please Note:

The restrictions on lobbying and political campaign intervention described here apply only to a congregation as a legal entity, or to a person or group speaking in the name of the congregation. A minister or congregation member may freely engage in these activities as an individual. However, if the person(s) are identified by or likely to be associated with the congregation, it may be helpful to clearly state that they are speaking as individuals.

For more information contact socialjustice@uua.org

(Read more at: <http://www.uua.org/action/realrules/107996.shtml>)

Engaging Creatively in Faith-Based Issues Discussion

Adapted from *Voter Education - a guide from United Church of Christ's "Our Faith, Our Vote" campaign*

While it is true that churches as 501(c)3 organizations cannot support or oppose a candidate for political office, this does not mean that congregations cannot engage in dialogue about the issues at stake in the elections - including global security, economic policy, environmental safety, public education and health care policy.

In fact, participating in educational activities that help one to become a well-informed and thoughtful voter is a key responsibility for any citizen. There are many ways that congregations can create forums and spaces for dialogue, discussion and faithful reflection on the issues of the day/at stake in the elections.

In Worship and in Congregational Education

- Address issue concerns in the worship life of the congregation, through prayers, sermons and sacred texts
- Invite members of the congregation with various kinds of expertise to speak about the issues from their experience and perspective - for example, invite public school teachers to talk about public education issues or health care workers to talk about health care issues
- Discuss the issues in light of teachings of holy texts and the resolutions of your denomination

Congregational Education Activities

- Hold a candidate forum at your church
- Visit nonpartisan websites that provide issue background and candidate positions such as the League of Women Voters website
- Sharing the task of finding and gathering issue information makes it easier and more fun! (Gather a group of people willing to be researchers, then have each person take an issue and follow that issue discussion in newspapers, magazines, and on radio and television. Share your findings with each other.)

- Invite Sunday School children and youth to share their hopes and concerns on the issues
- Organize a group from your congregation to attend candidate events and town hall meetings — share your reflections with each other after the event. (You can bring a question or two with you in written form that you have prepared ahead of time.)
- Post issue education material on church bulletin boards and include information in your church's newsletter
- Talk about the issues with family members and friends

(Read more at <http://www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote>)

Issue Nights - an idea from Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism "Get Out the Vote Guide, 2016"

It is our civic duty to educate ourselves about critical issues. Hosting an "Issue Night" is an opportunity to discuss topics of interest to your community, and help voters make informed decisions based upon the issues that speak most strongly to them.

→ Pick an issue that is important to your community and congregation: climate change, criminal justice reform, education, [...] others. Be sure to present the issue objectively, fully and in a non partisan manner.

ICWJ will be happy to provide a staff person or board member to facilitate your "Issue Night" on Worker Justice. Contact: Director@WorkerJustice.org 608-819-4740

→ Include an introduction by a [faith] leader to provide context and explain why the issue is important to the [faith] community, without endorsing one policy position or candidate over another.

→ Invite people to speak on both sides of the issue. Presenters may be local, state or federal advocates, non profit professionals, academics or others with expertise in the policy area under discussion.

(Read more at:

<http://www.rac.org/sites/default/files/Get%20Out%20The%20Vote%20Guide%20Oct%202015.pdf>

Religious Inspiration for Dialogue on Worker Justice and Economic Issues

Our Social Creed - from the United Methodist Church

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind. We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.

From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2012. Copyright 2012 by The United Methodist Publishing House.

(Read more at: <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/our-social-creed>)

A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed - from the United Methodist Church

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace
*to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.*

Today is the day
God cares for the integrity of creation,
wills the healing and wholeness of all life,
weeps at the plunder of earth's goodness.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God embraces all hues of humanity,
delights in diversity and difference,
favors solidarity transforming strangers into
friends.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God cries with the masses of starving people,
despises growing disparity between rich and poor,
demands justice for workers in the marketplace.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God deplores violence in our homes and streets,
rebukes the world's warring madness,
humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God calls for nations and peoples to live in peace,
celebrates where justice and mercy embrace,
exults when the wolf grazes with the lamb.
And so shall we.

*Today is the day
God brings good news to the poor,
proclaims release to the captives,
gives sight to the blind, and
sets the oppressed free.
And so shall we.*

A Muslim Perspective

Workers' Rights: A Cornerstone of Social Justice

Excerpted from text prepared by Hussam Ayloush, for Interfaith Worker Justice's guide
"Labor Day for Workers: Worker in the Minbar"

"O you who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for God in equity...Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty" (Quran 5:8). Some may not think of the theme of labor rights as being of central relevance to religious, or specifically Islamic, teachings. However, it is an issue that affects each one of us, and our deen (faith) offers clear guidance regarding the rights and responsibilities of the worker and employer to each other. If we work for our living, whether as an employee or an employer, we spend a great deal of our time at our work, and it is our duty to understand and uphold the rights of workers.

Labor rights are directly connected to Islam; social justice is a central Islamic theme. The guidance toward social justice in Islam is intended to promote and maintain social order, harmony, balance and general welfare. It is a comprehensive system that balances personal needs with the general good, so that one complements 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 to live in harmony and peace with others, regardless of socio-economic status, race, gender or faith.

The Islamic concept of justice 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.

Fulfill Fair Pay, and Promptly

The worker has the right to expect fair treatment and payment from his or her employer. In Islam, workers' rights are made clear:

"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 clearly agreed upon before a worker commences his or her work, and these wages must be paid promptly. More so, the Prophet Muhammad said, "Give the employee his wages before his sweat has had time to dry." (Ibn Majah collection)

Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be upon him, also said, "I will be the opponent of three types of people on the Day of Judgment," and he listed one of them as "one who hires a worker, but does not pay him his right wages owed to him after fulfilling his work." (Bukhari collection)

Justice and Fairness

In the Qudsi Hadith, it is narrated that God says, "O my servants, I have made injustice forbidden on me and I made it forbidden for you among yourselves, so do not engage in oppression or injustice." Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be upon him, said, "Beware of committing injustice because injustice turns into a punishment of darkness on the Day of Judgment." (Sahih Hadith) It is also required of employers not to give workers tasks beyond their capacity. Employers are accountable for their workers and have to ensure that their workers are justly treated at all times.

Our Role

- Live by the Islamic ethics of compassion, justice, honesty. We must be mindful of them in every situation, including in our roles as employer or employee.
- Be part of the political, economic, and social struggle to defend workers' rights to fair living wages, healthcare, a safe work environment, the right to organize, the right to enjoy religious freedom, and the like.

As Muslims, we know that working towards establishing social justice is a mandate of our faith. The concept of equality in labor laws is prerequisite to attaining social justice.

(Read more at http://files.www.iwj.org/Labor_Day_Resource/2015_Labor_Day/Worker_in_the_Minbar.pdf)

**Adapted from “We Can Mend the Gaps! Mend the Gap Study Guide, Part 2” by
NETWORK: Advocates for Justice, Inspired by Catholic Sisters**

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis calls us to do more than “amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.” Federal policies enacted since 1980 have created vast economic and social divides in our country. These divides are eroding the very fabric of our society.

What Is the Wealth and Income Gap?

To understand how the wealth and income gaps have grown since 1980, we first need to understand the changes in policy that have occurred. What’s happened from 1980 to now? The income of people in the bottom quintile, who on average made \$16,110 in 2014, decreased in value 8.7%. Meanwhile, the income of people in the top quintile, who on average made \$217,021 in 2014, increased in value by 61.04%. That’s only a small piece of the puzzle, though. When we separate out those in the top 5%, who made an average of \$448,489 in 2014, we see that their income increased by 106.64% and those in the top 1%, whose average income was \$1,260,508 in 2014, increased in value by 168.53%.

Overall, it looks like this:

| | 1980 Range <i>(in 2014 dollars)</i> | 1980 Average <i>(in 2014 dollars)</i> | 2014 Range | 2014 Average | % Change from 1980 to 2014 |
|-----------------|--|--|---------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Bottom Quintile | \$0–\$28,459 | \$17,543 | \$0–\$29,100 | \$16,110 | -8.17% |
| Second Quintile | \$28,460–\$47,915 | \$38,190 | \$29,101–\$52,697 | \$40,681 | 6.52% |
| Middle Quintile | \$47,916–\$67,863 | \$57,692 | \$52,698–\$82,032 | \$66,899 | 15.96% |
| Fourth Quintile | \$67,864–\$95,228 | \$80,041 | \$82,033–\$129,006 | \$103,115 | 28.83% |
| Top Quintile | \$95,229 and above | \$134,764 | \$129,007 and above | \$217,021 | 61.04% |
| Top 5% | \$123,943 and above | \$217,044 | \$174,240 and above | \$448,489 | 106.64% |
| Top 1% | \$234,674 and above | \$469,403 | \$423,090 and above | \$1,260,508 | 168.53% |

*Quintile Data Source: US Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/families/>)
Top 5% and Top 1% Data Source: World Top Incomes Database (<http://www.wid.world/>)*

A quintile, or 20% of our population, is a figure used to describe an income bracket (that consists of labor income, business income, capital and capital gains income, and retirement income) of individuals and families within the United States. This unit of measurement is calculated as the average amount of income in a financial household—perhaps a single earner, or two working adults with children, or a household where several people work part time. When the number of people in those financial households are added together, the total accounts for 20% of the entire U.S. population.

Any tax policy change should reduce the income gap, especially the racial/ethnic and gender wealth gaps.

Catholic Social Justice teaches us that every person belongs to a single and interconnected human family. As sisters and brothers, our needs are met in relationship with one another. When making individual and collective decisions, we have a responsibility to consider the good of the whole community over and above the interests of the few. As Pope Francis said, “Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labor is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation.”

The United States tax system is currently based on the interests of the wealthiest in our nation, and it creates strong divisions between those who have much and those who have little. We need a tax system that bridges these divisions and repairs our human family. The U.S. Bishops said, “*The tax system should be continually evaluated in terms of its impact on the poor.*” This attitude will allow us to raise reasonable revenue for responsible programs to support people who have been pushed into poverty. We have a responsibility to use resources in service to the common good, not merely out of a sense of charity, but because the needs of others demands it.

NETWORK recommends the following policy proposals:

- **Raise reasonable revenue to invest in key programs and to reduce the national debt.**
- **Create a fairer tax system by providing mechanisms for low-wage workers to work and save.**
- **Close unjust tax loopholes that benefit America's wealthiest individuals and allow them to pay little to no taxes on their income, including:**
 - Increase tax on income generated through investments.
 - Fully reinstate the estate tax and close trust fund loopholes.
 - Cap individual tax deductions for wealthy individuals.
 - Pass the "Buffet rule" to make sure millionaires and billionaires pay at least as high of an actual tax rate as middle-class families.
- **Insist that large multinational corporations pay their fair share of taxes, including:**
 - Insist that corporate tax reform raise significant revenue over the long term to pay for services and investments that benefit families and communities as well as the corporations.
 - Close tax loopholes that encourage corporations to shift jobs and profits offshore.
 - Levy a tax on financial transactions to reign in Wall Street speculation, encourage productive long-term corporate investment, and generate significant revenue for public investment.
 - End tax subsidies to corporations that fail to promote the common good.

"Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labor is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment. It is about giving to the poor and to peoples what is theirs by right. The universal destination of goods is not a figure of speech found in the Church's social teaching. It is a reality prior to private property. Property, especially when it affects natural resources, must always serve the needs of peoples. And those needs are not restricted to consumption. It is not enough to let a few drops fall whenever the poor shake a cup which never runs over by itself. Welfare programs geared to certain emergencies can only be considered temporary and incidental responses. They could never replace true inclusion, an inclusion which provides worthy, free, creative, participatory and solidary work." -- Pope Francis, Speech at the World Meeting of Popular Movements, 7/9/15

"Tell the rich in the present age not to be proud and not to rely on so uncertain a thing as wealth but rather on God, who richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, ready to share, thus accumulating as treasure a good foundation for the future, so as to win the life that is true life." -- 1 Timothy 6:17-19

National legislation should move from adjusting a minimum wage to creating a living wage.

Supporting a living wage is one of the most effective ways people of faith can uphold the dignity of work. Catholic Social Justice teaches that work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation.

Because all work is valuable, all workers must be properly compensated. NETWORK and Catholic Social Justice support an economy that puts people, not profit, at the center; where each person can find a job that provides for her or his family.

Respecting the dignity of work, we advocate for a living wage that enables workers to meet their needs with one job and reasonable hours. Further, we must ensure that respecting the dignity of work includes acknowledging the importance of leisure. Pope Francis said "together with a culture of work, there must be a culture of leisure as gratification. To put it another way: people who work must take the time to relax, to be with their families, to enjoy themselves, read, listen to music, play a sport." An economy of inclusion allows for leisure as a key component of a living wage.

NETWORK recommends the following policy proposals:

- Raise the minimum wage to a living wage.
- Ensure that any living wage will adjust with inflation.
- Increase the wages of tipped workers to at least the federal minimum wage and link it to inflation.
- Recognize regional differences in cost of living, and enact a living wage that allows all to live in dignity, regardless of where a person lives.

“... to exercise pressure upon the indigent and the destitute for the sake of gain, and to gather one’s profit out of the need of another, is condemned by all laws, human and divine. To defraud any one of wages that are his due is a great crime which cries to the avenging anger of Heaven.” -- *Pope Leo XII, Rerum Novarum, 20*

The needs of women and families should be integrated into federal workplace policies.

Catholic Social Justice teaches that policies, particularly in the workplace, need to respect the needs of every human being to be in community with one another. Catholic Social Justice requires that the people with the most need are given the most attention. The responsibility to uphold the dignity of each person means that we must evaluate our lifestyles, policies, and social institutions in terms of how they affect those suffering from the injustice of poverty. People forced into poverty have the single most urgent claim on the conscience of the nation because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.

Providing family-friendly workplace protections is necessary to build an economy that puts people, not profit, at the center. When we do not provide paid family leave, we are forcing the working members of families to choose between their jobs and their ill family members. Families will function in a healthy way, and their members will have fewer worries when the proper workplace protections are instituted.

NETWORK recommends the following policy proposals:

- Enact paid family leave to allow workers to address a serious health concern for themselves or a loved one, or care for the birth of a new child, adopted child, or foster child, without the burden of lost income or job insecurity.
- Require employers to allow employees to earn paid sick time based on the number of hours worked.
- Protect labor organizing and end wage discrimination.
- Support pregnant workers by clarifying reasonable accommodations, requiring an interactive process between employers and pregnant workers, and protecting workers from retaliation, intimidation, or threats for requesting or using an accommodation.
- Encourage flexible schedules to give employees and employers more tools and resources to create mutually beneficial schedules.
- Provide Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) without overly burdensome hurdles or strict work requirements.

“We have to move from our devotion to independence, through an understanding of interdependence, to a commitment to human solidarity. That challenge must find its realization in the kind of community we build among us. Love implies concern for all - especially the poor - and a continued search for those social and economic structures that permit everyone to share in a community that is a part of a redeemed creation (Rom 8:21-23).” -- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Economic Justice for All,” 365.

(read more and download the guide here: <https://networkadvocates.org/advocacytoolbox/educate/mindthegap/>)

Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All

From the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Social Statement

(adopted by the Sixth Church-wide Assembly of the ELCA, meeting in Denver, CO, August 16-22, 1999):

On Human dignity: Human beings are created “in God’s image” (Genesis 1:27) as social beings whose dignity, worth, and value are conferred by God. Although our identity does not depend on what we do, through our work we should be able to express this God-given dignity as persons of integrity, worth, and meaning. Yet work does not constitute the whole of our life. When we are viewed and treated only as workers, we tend to be exploited.

Employers have a responsibility to treat employees with dignity and respect. This should be reflected in employees’ remuneration, benefits, work conditions, job security, and ongoing job training. Employees have a responsibility to work to the best of their potential in a reliable and responsible manner. This includes work habits, attitudes toward employers and co-workers, and a willingness to adapt and prepare for new work situations. No one should be coerced to work under conditions that violate their dignity or freedom, jeopardize their health or safety, result in neglect of their family’s wellbeing, or provide unjust compensation for their labor.

Our God-given dignity in community means that we are to participate actively in decisions that impact our lives, rather than only passively accept decisions others make for us. People should be involved in decision making that directly affects their work. They should also be free to determine their lives independent of particular jobs. Public policy can provide economic and other conditions that protect human freedom and dignity in relation to work.

Power disparities and competing interests are present in most employment situations. Employers need competent, committed workers, but this does not necessarily presume respect for the personal lives and needs of individual workers. Individual workers depend on the organization for employment as their means of livelihood, but this does not necessarily presume respect for the organization’s interest and goals. Management and employees move toward justice as they seek cooperative ways of negotiating these interests when they conflict. Because employees often are vulnerable and lack power in such negotiations, they may need to organize in their quest for human dignity and justice. When this occurs, accurate information and fair tactics are expected of all parties involved.

We commit ourselves as a church to:

- hire without discriminating on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, disabilities, sexual orientation, or genetic factors;
- compensate all people we call or employ at an amount sufficient for them to live in dignity;
- provide adequate pension and health benefits, safe and healthy work conditions, sufficient periods of rest, vacation, and sabbatical, and family-friendly work schedules;
- cultivate participatory workplaces, support the right of employees to organize for the sake of better working conditions and to engage in collective bargaining, and refrain from intentionally undercutting union organizing activities, or from permanently replacing striking workers.

We call for:

- other employers to engage in similar practices;
- government enforcement of regulations against discrimination, exploitative work conditions and labor practices (including child labor), and for the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively;
- public policies that ensure adequate social security, unemployment insurance, and health care coverage;
- a minimum wage level that balances employees’ need for sufficient income with what would be significant negative effects on overall employment;
- tax credits and other means of supplementing the insufficient income of low- paid workers in order to move them out of poverty.

(Download a copy of the full statement here: <http://goo.gl/2RFbMa>)

Excerpts from a 2014 letter to the U.S. House and Senate from ELCA Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth A. Eaton, advocating an increase to the federal minimum wage.

As the presiding bishop of the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States, I share the convictions stated in our *Social Statement: The Church in Society*, which in part states,

“God works through the family, education, the economy, the state, and other structures necessary for life in the present age. God institutes governing authorities, for example, to serve the good of society. This church respects the God-given integrity and tasks of governing authorities and other worldly structures, while holding them accountable to God.”

In this context, Lutherans have studied and walked with those living and working in poverty. We recognize that the causes of poverty are complex and that a comprehensive solution will include more than a single initiative.

In addition to the economic benefits it will bring to the entire economy, increasing the federal minimum wage affirms both the value of work and the value to society of those who engage in it. Increasing the federal minimum wage will remove barriers that make it more difficult for many to pursue education, training, and/or to attend to the needs of their families—the vast majority of whom are women and persons of color. More desperately for some, an increase will contribute to improved physical health for themselves and their families.

As Lutherans, we believe all of us benefit when those who receive the least for their hard work are better rewarded for their labor and can more fully contribute to the life we share as a nation. As Lutherans, we are committed to a country reconciled to one another in shared service of the common good as our best hope for a more perfect union, for the establishment of Justice and the way to ensure the blessings of freedom for ourselves and the generations that follow us.

(Download the full letter here: <http://goo.gl/T6KD00>)

Intercessory Prayer for Economic Justice

United Church of Christ, Prayers for a Just Economy: Washington, DC, July 24, 2013

Let our prayers surround those who are struggling on the economic margins:

- The ones who have not shared in the great abundance that God has entrusted to our care;
- The ones who have been left behind by the so-called economic recovery;
- The ones who are unemployed or underemployed; and
- The ones who are unjustly employed, working hard and yet living in poverty.

And let us pray for all those caught up in the workings of our unjust economic system -- the workers, the managers, the owners, the policy-makers and the consumers - all of us have a responsibility to help create a faithful economy that values work and honors the dignity of all workers.

Hear now our prayers O God:

We pray today for all those who are seeking employment, those facing a very difficult and uncertain future whether they are experiencing joblessness for the first time today or are among the millions of the long-term unemployed. ***God of justice, hear our prayer***

We pray today for those who are working in low-wage jobs yet remain trapped in poverty -- workers who need fair wages, respect and dignity in their workplace. ***God of justice, hear our prayer***

We pray for children whose parents must work long hours in hard jobs just to afford shelter, food and clothing. And we pray for the moms, dads and family members who struggle with the difficult choice of working long hours and making long commutes, or spending more time with their children, to be able to tuck them into bed each night and see them off to school in the morning. ***God of justice, hear our prayer***

We pray for those who labor in the fields to provide us food each day. For the farm workers who too often work beneath the hot sun without shade and in the deadly heat without water and who do not even make sufficient wages to buy the food they are harvesting. ***God of justice, hear our prayer***

We pray today for our brothers and sisters who work in the shadow of a broken and unjust immigration system -- workers who face discrimination and exploitation and whose rights are too often denied through intimidation and threaten deportation. ***God of justice, hear our prayer***

We pray for all those who labor in restaurants and earn as little as \$2.13 per hour -- the 'tipped wage' which has not been raised in twenty-two years. ***God of justice, hear our prayer***

We pray for ethical employers who share fairly the earnings of their businesses with all their workers; we pray for those who pay living wages and provide benefits sufficient for workers to support themselves and their families. ***God of justice, hear our prayer***

We pray for those employers who have not yet learned to value their workers or recognize their inherent dignity. We pray for CEOs and managers who have hoarded riches and yet denied fair wages to their employees. We pray, God, that you might turn their hearts of stone into hearts of compassion. ***God of justice, hear our prayer***

We pray for our President that he might use the power of his office to guarantee that all workers on federal property are paid a living wage. ***God of justice, hear our prayer***

We pray for all our elected leaders that they might place our brothers and sisters struggling on the margins at the very center of their deliberations. We pray that they will support policies that create good jobs with living wages. We pray that Congress will increase the minimum wage so that no one again would be forced to work full-time and still live in poverty. ***God of justice, hear our prayer***

And finally, we pray that we, members of your faithful community, might use our voices and our resources to build a just economy: an economy of shared prosperity where workers earn living wages and all people live lives of dignity. ***God of justice, hear our prayer.***

God of Justice – we lift up all these prayers to you in the knowledge that you are already at work amid the brokenness of our economic system and that you invite each of us to be a part of your holy work of justice. God we offer to you these prayers today – both spoken aloud and those in our hearts – in the hope that together we might be the people you have called us to be, reflecting your compassion, mercy and justice in all that we do. In your many holy names we pray – **Amen.**

(Read more here: http://www.ucc.org/justice_worker-justice_labor-sunday_worship-resources)

A Jewish Perspective

You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow Israelite or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay out the wages due on the same day, before the sun sets, for the worker is needy and urgently depends on it; else a cry to the Eternal will be issued against you and you will incur guilt. *Deuteronomy 24:14-15*

One who withholds an employee's wages is as though he deprived him of his life.
Babylonian Talmud Bava M'tzia 112a

If the employer says, "I raised your wages in order that you would begin early and stay late," the workers may reply, "You raised our wages in order that we would do better work."
Babylonian Talmud Bava M'tzia 83a

Work, workers and the Jewish Owner

Excerpts from a *Teshuvah* written by Rabbi Jill Jacobs

passed by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly in May 2008

- 2) Jewish employers are obligated to treat their workers with dignity and respect. This obligation should include, but should not be limited to, prohibitions against publicly yelling at, mocking, or otherwise embarrassing workers; forbidding employees from speaking their native languages at work; banning all bathroom breaks; changing work hours or adding shifts without advance notice; or making improper sexual comments or advances toward workers.
- 3) Jewish employers must pay their workers on time, according to an agreed-upon schedule, and may not pay workers with bad checks. Employers must pay workers for the full time worked, including mandatory preparation and clean-up hours. Employers who hire workers through a contractor should make every effort to ensure that these workers are being paid on time.
- 4) Jewish employers may not knowingly put their employees' lives at risk by failing to provide appropriate safety equipment and training, or by knowingly forcing workers to work under dangerous conditions.
- 5) Jewish employers should strive to pay workers a "living wage"... When deciding among the options available, employers should not select a wage level that, while technically considered a living wage (according to a local ordinance, for example), is so low that employers know that workers will certainly need to take on additional jobs, and/or to endanger their health by working an excessive number of hours.
- 6) In most cases, unions offer the most effective means of collective bargaining and of ensuring that workers are treated with dignity and paid sufficiently. Jewish employers should allow their employees to make their own independent decisions about whether to unionize, and may not interfere in any way with organizing drives by firing or otherwise punishing involved workers, by refusing workers the option for "card check" elections, or by otherwise threatening workers who wish to unionize. When hiring low-wage workers or engaging contractors who supply low-wage workers, Jewish employers should strive to hire unionized workers when possible.
- 7) The principle of *dina d'malkhuta dina* obligates Jewish employers to comply with federal labor laws, even when these laws are inconsistently enforced.
- 8) Jewish employees are obligated to work at full capacity during their work hours, and not to "steal time" from their employers. Jewish union leaders should similarly strive to ensure that workers uphold the *halakhic* obligations of employees to employers. The ideal worker-employer relationship should be one of trusted partnership, in which each party looks out for the well-being of the other, and in which the two parties consider themselves to be working together for the perfection of the divine world.

(Read more at <http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/20052010/jacobs-living-wage.pdf>)

