

Resources From Various Faith Traditions

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.

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>

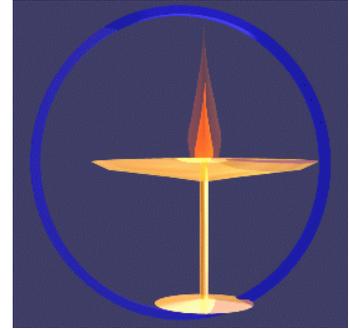
Additional resources from the United Church of Christ

- 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.

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

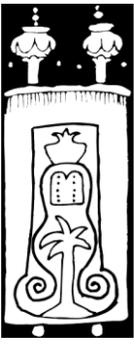
Is the living wage an important enough issue to engage the congregation in years of educating and dialogue? Is the living wage too specific an issue? What I believe wholeheartedly is that **poverty** in the United States is a religious and ethical issue, which threatens the very essence of the way we 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*

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/.

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.



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.

Additional resources

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

www.jufj.org/programs/jobs/TowardALivingWage.pdf.

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

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.

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.

Council-American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), www.cair.com, 202-488-8787; 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, 3rd 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/

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

Additional resources

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship, 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.”¹ 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*.

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

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

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 and click on your state. To find your U.S. representative’s contact information, go to 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).

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.

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).