

**Northaven United Methodist Church  
CHURCH IN SOCIETY COMMISSION  
Position Paper on Living Wage**

**Introduction:** There is a strong Biblical, ethical, and economic basis for fair wages. If a just economy based on fair wages is a measure of how righteous we are as a people, we fall far short. In the U.S. today, the poor, needy, and marginalized include workers paid the minimum wage. At \$5.15 an hour, they receive just \$876 a month for full time work. This is too little to afford adequate housing in any area of the country. With annual earnings of only \$10,700 a year, minimum wage workers fall \$5,000 below the official poverty line for a family of three, far less than required to support a family. Rev. Bruce Buchanan, director of the Stewpot, estimates that a living wage in Dallas would amount to \$14.00/hour.

The minimum wage was last raised in 1997. Since that time, inflation has eroded its value by nearly 20%. Today, it is lower than it has been in 44 of the last 45 years. To have the purchasing power it had in 1968, for example, the minimum wage would need to be \$8.82 an hour, an increase of over \$3.50.

**The Biblical Basis:**

*"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"*  
-- Deuteronomy 24:14

*"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."* Jeremiah 22:13

*"The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out..."* James 5: 1-6

Jesus' Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard—the laborer who works only one hour is paid the same as the laborer who worked all day. Both need their basic needs met no matter how long they work. (Matthew 20:1-16)

**The Economic Impact:** In contrast to the belief that a raise for low-wage workers will have a negative impact on unemployment, studies of communities where living wage ordinances have passed have actually shown a benefit to the community as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Many states have not waited for the federal government to act and have instituted their own minimum wage legislation. Those who increase minimum wage over the federal level have actually experienced more robust economic activity than states with comparable economies that have not instituted a minimum wage increase.

**The Church in Society Commission calls upon the Northaven community to stand as a prophetic church in advocating for a public policy that assures a living wage for all workers.** The next few months present an opportunity for members of the congregation to urge our elected officials to reflect upon the injustice of our current minimum wage. As a congregation, we can listen to families working at or below the poverty line, in our church home and by going to their communities. We can educate ourselves and explore various policy

options to establish a living wage for all workers.

*Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why do we humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers? Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? — Isaiah 58: 3, 4b, 6*

1. <sup>1</sup> Niedt, Christopher et al 1999. "The Effects of the Living Wage in Baltimore." Working Paper 119. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.