

Supporting a Living Wage and Dignity of Work

As economic inequality grows and the racial wealth and income gap persists, people living in the United States are experiencing immoral levels of inequality and poverty every year. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, low and mid-wage workers faced ongoing financial insecurity. Low wages, especially the inadequate federal minimum wage and subminimum wage for tipped, youth, and disabled workers, perpetuate systemic racism and disproportionately prevent Black and brown workers from earning wages that allow them to meet their basic expenses and save for the future.

Our economic policies serve profit above all else and fail to recognize our solidarity with one another. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, without just wages, millions of workers across the country held two or three jobs just to make ends meet and were one unexpected bill away from financial disaster. Unpredictable scheduling and wage theft caused hundreds of dollars of lost income a month. Now, with job losses and pay cuts from COVID-19, millions of families in the United States are experiencing hunger, at risk of eviction, or unable to pay their bills. Just wages and economic security should be the marker of a fair, functioning, and flourishing economy, rather than the flawed use of the stock market.



Too often, economic insecurity and its resulting stress falls on women, especially women of color. Women of color provide financial stability to their families and communities, but also experience racial and gender discrimination getting jobs and securing a just and equitable wage. If we are to root our economy in solidarity and respect for all workers, especially women of color, we must raise the federal minimum wage, ensure equal pay for all workers, enact federal family and medical leave requirements, and strengthen workers' ability to organize and collectively bargain. A just economy prioritizes human dignity above all. We are called to transform our politics and pass federal policies that ensure all workers are able to meet their needs and the needs of their families.

Answering Pope Francis's Call to Build a Moral Economy

Inequality and the climate crisis have emerged as defining challenges of our generation. Today's wealth is concentrated in just a few hands, fostering a massive imbalance of power and agency to affect change. We need new narratives about the cooperative and altruistic dimensions of our human nature, and measures of economic progress that center the common good.

Over the last year, I have been co-hosting the U.S. Economy of Francesco community, which emerged following Pope Francis's 2019 letter inviting young people around the world to gather in Assisi to "enter into a 'covenant' to change today's economy and to give a soul to the economy of tomorrow."

With the Pope's invitation, many of us felt emboldened to help catalyze a new economic and policy agenda for our economy, rooted in solidarity and care for our common home. We began regular virtual gatherings to explore how our Catholic lineage could animate alternative economic models that support our collective flourishing. We believe that the principles of Catholic Social Thought create a shared ethical ground from which we can discover a new capacity and will to shape a more livable future.

The principle of subsidiarity has focused our efforts to support shared ownership models for enterprises to broaden opportunity. The notion of reciprocity invites us to consider whether and how we care about the wellbeing of the person on the other side of an economic encounter. And an integral ecology (Laudato Si') offers a powerful challenge to the relentless pursuit of economic growth. In truly grasping our deep interconnectedness with one another and the broader ecology, we are compelled to care for and protect all of creation. In short, Catholic Social Thought invites us to a conscious examination of our economic lives – how we spend and invest our money, the work we value, and more. The dismantling of an economy of exclusion begins with our commitment to, in the words of Pope Francis, be "protagonists of this transformation."

Written by Elizabeth Garlow. Elizabeth is the Deputy Director of New America's New Practice Lab and also serves as a Fellow on Faith and Finance.

We Pray

"If a society is governed primarily by the criteria of market freedom and efficiency... fraternity will remain just another vague ideal." - Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, p. 109

God of bounty,

This world is to your glory;

meant to be enjoyed by us, your children.

We are sisters and brothers, each made in your image.

No child has a greater claim on your bounty than another.

We are a wounded family.

It is out of faithless fear that we become tempted to misuse one another as means to an end.

Give us courage, then to honor ourselves, and our sisters and brothers.

When we work, may our work reflect and enhance our own dignity,
and the dignity of who we are as a society.

Embolden us, O God

to affirm that a wage relationship is not simply a contractual exchange,
but a covenant among sisters and brothers.

Let the work transform us,
so that the wages we earn;
the security we nourish;

and the society we build;
are worthy of each of us;
of all of us,
and of your glory.
Amen.

Written by Molly Linehan Belcher. Molly is a member of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia.

Take Action

As you reflect, take action to raise wages and reduce the racial and gender income gap. Call your Representative to help us begin to build a new economy by raising the minimum wage. When you call, here's what you might say:

"Hi, my name is [NAME], I am a member of NETWORK and a constituent from [TOWN]. I am calling to encourage Rep. [NAME] to pass the American Rescue Plan and with it the Raise the Wage Act. The current federal minimum wage is not enough survive and it must be increased as soon as possible. I urge the Representative to support low-income essential workers by giving them the living wage they deserve. Please vote for the American Rescue Plan in solidarity with workers and families in your district. Thank you."

Reflect

- [Listen to Darius's story and testimony](#) about why he strikes for higher wages. What is the importance of workers being able to organize to demand just wages, and what happens when they are prevented from doing so?
- When the Nuns on the Bus [visited New Labor on the 2020 Virtual Tour](#), we learned that workers had trouble securing fair wages because some business build wage theft into their business plan. What are other ways the economy is structured against workers?

