

**THIS RESOLUTION WAS ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, ACTING ON BEHALF OF THE GATHERED CONFERENCE, ON SEPTEMBER 20, 2014.**



## **NEW HAMPSHIRE CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST PROPOSED RESOLUTION OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS**

- TITLE:** ***JOBS SHOULD LIFT WORKERS OUT OF POVERTY, NOT KEEP THEM THERE:  
A RESOLUTION OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN SUPPORT OF INCREASING THE  
MINIMUM WAGE (at both the State and Federal level)***
- SOURCE:** The Economic Justice Mission Group of the NHC-UCC  
*Note: This resolution is also being submitted to the Peace and Justice Ministry with a request that this body also recommend the adoption of the resolution by the NH Conference.*
- SUBMITTED ON:** August 29, 2014
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- SUMMARY:** *This resolution declares that **jobs should lift workers out of poverty, not keep them there**. It thus calls upon the New Hampshire Conference-United Church of Christ to support and advocate for a reinstatement of a state minimum wage in NH (set at an adequate level to bring workers out of poverty) and an increase in the federal minimum wage – so that all full-time workers will be able to earn wages that bring them above the poverty line and so that no full-time worker is relegated to a life of poverty despite his or her work effort and ethic.*

### **BACKGROUND STATEMENTS**

#### **Relevant UCC and Faith Community Vision:**

The National Council of Churches, through its *Let Justice Roll* Living Wage Campaign (to which the New Hampshire Council of Churches is signatory) and the national setting of the United Church of Christ have long been on record in support of fair wages and just treatment in the workplace for all workers. This includes vigorous support for an increase in the federal minimum wage (and state minimum wage levels) to keep up with economic reality and to make it possible for all workers to earn full-time wages that enable them to rise out of poverty rather than keeping them living in poverty. In

one of the UCC's signature economic justice documents, "*Jesus Was a Low Wage Worker*," the UCC Office of Justice and Witness Ministries states the following:

- *Jesus was a low-wage worker, just like too many workers in the U.S. today. Nurses aides, hotel house-keepers, farm workers, day laborers, early childcare specialists, fast food workers, retail sales clerks, and custodians are examples of workers who provide needed services but 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 worth more, are not worthy of living wages. But all workers are children of God, made in God's image. They deserve a living wage.*
- *Over one-quarter of all jobs in the U.S. (28%) pay poverty-level wages, so low that a full-time worker cannot keep a family out of poverty. These jobs are more likely to be held by women and people of color, marginal jobs for too often marginalized people. Just like Jesus. Low-wage jobs are less likely to provide health insurance, a pension, or even paid sick leave.*
- *Workers need jobs. If all they can find is a poverty job, they have to take it. But...poverty jobs can be changed into life-enhancing, living-wage jobs if we actively work to make this happen. Low-wage workers are high-value people, created in the image of God. All jobs must provide fair wages, benefits, and working conditions. Workers must be able to support themselves and their families, and live with dignity the life of wholeness that God intends for all. God's reign does not stop at the door to the workplace but extends to all aspects of life including our work lives.*

#### **Relevant Economic Background:**

- The federal minimum wage was first established in 1938 via the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and has since been increased 22 times, in part to keep up with rising prices of basic life necessities, with the most recent increase, to \$7.25 per hour, occurring in July 2009. However, because there have been some extended periods between these adjustments while inflationary increases continue, *the real value (purchasing power) of the minimum wage has decreased substantially over time*, most particularly in the past four and a half decades. (Congressional Research Office, January, 2014)

## **THE RESOLUTION**

#### **RATIONALE:**

WHEREAS, fair treatment for workers and caring for the "least of these" is an important part of the biblical story, and love, mercy and resource-sharing are equally prominent within God's Word and Jesus' ministry, and these themes have a significant presence in the Bible – including:

- In Deuteronomy 24:14 where it is written, "***You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers....;***"
- in Deuteronomy 15, verses 7 and 11, where it is written, "*If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your needy neighbor.... Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land...';"*
- in Matthew 25, verses 44 and 45, where it is written: "<sup>44</sup>...*Lord, when was it that we saw you (in need) and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me;'*"

And WHEREAS, according to the Congressional Research Office and numerous other credible economic studies, *the real value (purchasing power) of the minimum wage has decreased substantially over time* and the peak value of the minimum wage in real terms was reached in 1968 – and to equal the purchasing power of the minimum wage in 1968 (which would be \$10.69 in today's dollars), the

current \$7.25 minimum wage would have to increase by \$3.44 (or 47%) (Congressional Research Office, January, 2014);

And WHEREAS, in 2011, despite a gubernatorial veto, the New Hampshire Legislature voted to abolish the NH minimum wage (and therefore the federal minimum wage rate is the figure that applies in NH);

And WHEREAS, the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, or slightly over \$15,000 a year for a full-time worker, is not enough to lift a household of two out of poverty (as federally defined) and is nowhere enough to lift any size household out of a life of constant economic stress and insecurity;

And WHEREAS, if the minimum wage had grown along with workers' productivity, it would be as high as \$17.19 today (Center for Economic Policy and Research, *No Matter How You Look At It, the Minimum Wage Is Much Too Low*, July 2013);

And WHEREAS, in New Hampshire, the “fair market rent” (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,049 and in order to afford this level of rent and utilities without paying more than 30% of income on housing, a household must earn \$3,498 monthly or \$41,971 annually – and assuming a 40-hour work week, 52 weeks per year, this level of income translates into a necessary “housing wage” of \$20.18 an hour (National Low Income Housing Coalition, *“Out of Reach” Report*, <http://nlihc.org/oor/2014/NH>);

And WHEREAS fifty-one years ago, in August, 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the numerous other faith and community leaders who came together for the *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom* (the occasion of Dr. King’s “I Have A Dream” speech) embraced as a basic tenet of the *March* that the federal minimum wage should be increased to \$2.00 per hour (which would be \$13.39 in 2013 dollars), and we as a state and nation are still far from achieving that basic economic justice objective;

And WHEREAS, a constantly falling *real* minimum wage forges a pathway to poverty and inequality for more and more workers with each passing year;

And WHEREAS, an effort to increase the minimum wage is actively supported by both the UCC Justice and Witness Ministries and the National Council of Churches through its *Let Justice Roll* campaign (to which the NH Council of Churches is a signatory); now therefore

**BE IT RESOLVED** that the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ join its brothers and sisters within the UCC Justice and Witness Ministries and the National Council of Churches’ *Let Justice Roll* campaign in prophetic witness to advocate locally and nationally for an increase in the federal minimum wage and the reinstatement of a minimum wage at the state level, with automatic inflationary adjustments, in order to regain the minimum wage’s lost purchasing power and to achieve a minimum wage level that will bring working families out of poverty.

## **PLAN OF ACTION**

### **IMPLEMENTING BODY:**

The Economic Justice Mission Group of the NH Conference, United Church of Christ will be responsible for supporting and advising the Conference in the implementation of this resolution and in undertaking the plan of action noted below.

### **ANTICIPATED COSTS:**

Resolution implementation will be led by volunteers who will use electronic and written communications, personal witness and testimony, prayer gatherings, and more for the advocacy called for in this resolution. It is anticipated that possibly several hundred letters to policy makers may be sent in regard to this resolution, at a cost of approximately \$540 and that prayer breakfasts or similar gatherings may cost \$200. This cost will be covered by the existing Peace and Justice Ministry advocacy budget (2014) and/or the Economic Justice Mission Group budget (2014 or 2015).

## **PLAN OF ACTION:**

The Implementation Plan will include the following:

- communicating with local churches and church members via the Conference's *Weekly News* to provide meaningful background information on this subject and to invite congregants to join Mission Group members in faith-filled and prayerful witness as policy makers in Concord and Washington continue to consider an increase in the minimum wage (and reinstatement of the minimum wage in NH);
- disseminating information about this resolution to New Hampshire's print and electronic media;
- taking advantage of whatever time may be available at NH Conference-UCC meetings and gatherings (Annual Meeting, Prepared to Serve, Ministry Group meetings, etc.) to convey information and to invite dialogue about this resolution;
- drafting communications about the resolution to be sent to legislative leaders and legislative candidates at both the state and federal level and sharing such communications with NH UCC churches via the *Weekly News*;
- designating one or more Economic Justice Mission Group members to serve as a liaison to New Hampshire's Minimum Wage Working Group (a non-partisan effort convened by the NH Fiscal Policy Institute).