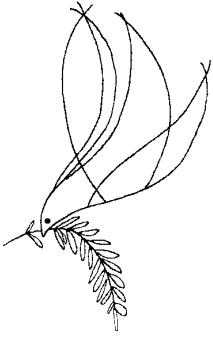


SHALOM: Communities in Action

Spring 2006



The Communities of Shalom Program is an initiative of The United Methodist Church, in consultation with the National Shalom Committee. Individual Communities of Shalom are financially supported through individual community efforts, and also through grants that are funded through the ADVANCE SPECIAL of The United Methodist Church: ADVANCE #742566.

Wages, Work and Well Being

In early March I attended an event in Washington called Ecumenical Advocacy Days. I gathered with other people of faith for workshops and lectures in the "Domestic Track" of the event and the focus of that track was "A Just Minimum Wage." Education is one of the most powerful types of advocacy. Informed people are more likely to make informed decisions.

The theme of the entire event was: "Challenging Disparity: The Promise of God, the Power of Solidarity." There is no greater disparity than between the rich and the poor. There are many debates about solutions and methods to reducing, and hopefully eliminating poverty in the United States. Earning a just minimum wage is one of them.

"The minimum wage has become a poverty wage instead of an anti-poverty wage. A low minimum wage gives a green light to employers to pay poverty wages to a growing share of the workforce--not just workers at the minimum, but above it." These words of justice are from "A Just Minimum Wage," which is a publication of the **Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign**.

The current \$5.15 minimum wage is keeping many working families in poverty and not bringing them out of poverty. Many of these working families live in Communities of Shalom. As both individuals and families struggle to survive on the compensation they receive for their labor they face other challenges: affording quality childcare, buying groceries, paying utilities, affording healthcare, purchasing a home, saving for college. We can all relate to one or more of these everyday concerns. Following consultation with the National Shalom Committee, we will be actively engaging in advocacy on the issues of **work, wages and well being**.

Many of our neighbors **work** for **wages** unable to sustain their **well being** or their family's **well being**. Our faith declares that we be committed to the well being of EVERYONE in our communities. As we live out Shalom let us be advocates with those in our community who seek to **work** at a **just minimum wage** and achieve **well being**. As the prophet Jeremiah says: In our neighbors' shalom we will find our shalom.

As we seek shalom let us be reminded of the words of Amos: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. " Amen.

Shalom,

Barbara Wheeler, Program Associate

THEME

Each newsletter will have a theme that relates to the work that Communities of Shalom are engaged in. This issue focuses on wages, work and well being in communities..

SCRIPTURE

*But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.
Amos 5:24*

CONTACT

Barbara Wheeler,
Program Associate
Alayna Bingham,
Administrative Assistant
Darlene DiDomineck,
Work Study Student

Mailing Address:

General Board of Global Ministries
Communities of Shalom
475 Riverside Drive
Room 1547
New York, NY 10025

E-mail:

bwheeler@gbgm-umc.org
abingham@gbgm-umc.org
ddidomin@gbgm-umc.org

Phone: 212-870-3711

Fax: 212-870-3948

Website: http://gbgm-umc.org/who_we_are/cim/shalom.cfm

Devotion: Faces of Fair Wages

This devotion was written by Darlene DiDomineck, a student at Union Theological Seminary and work study student in the Communities of Shalom Office.

The prophet Amos said to an exiled people fallen away from their God, “but, let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.” A professor of mine said once that the word solidarity in the Old Testament was often mistranslated as righteousness. If we were to apply this principle to Amos how would it change the scripture for us? What is the image we see as we visualize the scripture “but, let justice roll down like waters, and solidarity like an ever flowing stream?” As a woman who grew up seeking the solidarity and justice of a living wage for my family and my neighbors, I see generations of my foremothers and forefathers flowing down a never-ending stream of hope. I see the faces of my father, grandfather, and men and women I have never known, who empowered my hope. Can you see the image in your head, the image of hope?

What do you see? Do you see never ending factory lines flowing with busied hands and repetitive movements? Do you see never ending faces flowing down as they serve you in a cafeteria line? Perhaps you see lines of busboys flowing against an almost indistinguishable wall at the back of your favorite Friday night restaurant? Perhaps, you see lines of cashiers at your neighborhood Wal-Mart?

“What does it mean
for us to form an ever
flowing stream of
solidarity and to let
justice roll down
through us?”

What does it mean for us to form an ever flowing stream of solidarity and to let justice roll down through us? What does that mean for the Jesus who we see as Living Water? If we even for a moment dare to see the Living Water flow through the busied hands and repetitive movements of our sisters and brothers who seek a living wage, how does that transform us? Perhaps, we must dare to see Jesus as the worker standing at the back of that restaurant, on the factory line, in the cafeteria line, as our cashier checking us out. How then does the scripture transform us? If our Jesus is the Living Water rolling down, then we too must stand alongside this stream and drink of it. Are we then called to become the Living Water we are drinking from and work alongside our brothers and sisters? Are we called to stand up and speak up for a just and living wage? Must we then work like that ever flowing stream, in solidarity with our Living Water for his Living Wage?

I have seen the face of this Living Water flow down an endless stream of my ancestors. I have seen the face of Jesus in my father, my mother and my neighbor as they struggle for the right to work with a living wage. I hope you can see it too.

RESOURCES

Interfaith Worker Justice www.iwj.org Interfaith Worker Justice is a network of people of faith that calls upon our religious values in order to educate, organize and mobilize the religious community in the United States on issues and campaigns that will improve wages, benefits and conditions for workers, and give voice to workers, especially low-wage workers.

John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/about_what.asp A university-based research and policy center dedicated to raising the effectiveness of the American workplace by strengthening workforce education, placement and training programs and policies. The Center’s efforts concentrate on both nurturing concrete innovations in workforce practices, as well as addressing broad-scale economic policy changes that ensure Americans receive the education and training they need to be productive and prosperous in the knowledge economy of the 21st century.

Let Justice Roll!

Communities of Shalom are based on the Hebrew concept of shalom: an understanding that there is equal value in individual and collective well being. In the basis of this understanding we can find a motivation for advocacy with the communities we work and live in. An advocate can be a voice for his/her own betterment, but many times the concept is illustrated by one or a few people advocating for many. In the spirit of shalom and the spirit of advocacy, Communities of Shalom are called to participate in the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign <http://www.letjusticeroll.org>.

The campaign is a nonpartisan program of more than 65 faith-based and community-based organizations focused on achieving a living wage for workers. They support federal legislation to raise the federal minimum wage and legislation and ballot initiatives to increase state and local minimum wages. The website has resources to encourage discussion on the issue and current news stories about the campaign for living wages throughout the United States.

In Congress there has been no action on proposals to raise the minimum wage. Specifically, there is a bill in the House of Representatives that would increase the current minimum wage from \$5.15/hour to \$7.25/hour. In order for the House to act on the bill it must be moved out of committee with a discharge petition. Contact your Representatives and ask them to support this petition and fight against low wages and poverty with the passage of the Fair Minimum Wage Act. Below is the body of a letter that can be sent to your Representatives asking them to act now. *Please see the box to the right for additional information.*

Through prayer, education and action Communities of Shalom will continue to make a difference in the lives of neighbors, congregations and communities.

Dear _____,

Greetings from your District! I first wish to thank you for your hard work and service to make our community and our nation a healthier home. I am writing to encourage your support for a just minimum wage. My neighbors and I are concerned that with the increasing costs of housing and healthcare we are working harder and struggling more. As a community we have been utilizing resources by *Let Justice Roll* and would encourage you to review these materials as well (www.letjusticeroll.org).

My neighbors and I believe increasing the minimum wage to a just living wage will foster healthy families and in turn a healthy nation. My neighbors and I believe that fairer wages are better for the economy. When the workforce has a stable, healthy and safe home they are more efficient, and more productive. A more efficient and productive workforce can only be healthy for our economy and our nation.

I urge you to support House Resolution 614 (discharge petition) and encourage your colleagues in Congress to do the same in order for action to be taken on the Fair Minimum Wage Act. The House of Representative's version of the Fair Minimum Wage Act (H.R. 2429), like the companion bill in the Senate, will increase the federal minimum wage from \$5.15/hour to \$7.25/hour.

Once again I urge you to consider supporting H.R. 614 and H.R. 2429 and all just minimum wage bills.

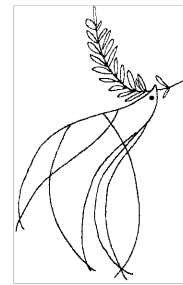
Sincerely,

Name

Visit <http://clerk.house.gov> to see if your representative has signed the discharge petition for the Fair Minimum Wage Act.

To find the contact information for your representative go to <http://www.house.gov/writerep/>

"In the spirit of shalom and the spirit of advocacy, Communities of Shalom are called to participate in the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign www.letjusticeroll.org."



COMMUNITIES OF SHALOM
General Board of Global Ministries
475 Riverside Drive Room 1547
New York, NY 10115

LIVING INTO SHALOM, January 9-11, 2007

Save the date! *The LIVING INTO SHALOM: Theology of Shalom and Communities of Shalom* event will be held in Schaumburg, Ill. (close to O'Hare Airport) next year.

In the past Communities of Shalom have gathered in "Shalom Summits". This event will be similar in that it is focused on networking, education and organizational capacity building. This will be a time to revisit the theology of Shalom that motivates our work in our communities. Our partnership with the Town &Country/Urban Network of the North Central Jurisdiction will increase our network's capacity and give us opportunities to meet new partners in community ministry.

Workshops will be available on Communities of Shalom training, economic development, fundraising, community health, interfaith coalition building, social enterprise, and asset based community development

Speakers to date include Dr. Robert Linthicum, Bishop John R. Schol of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference and Bishop Hee Soo Jung of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference.

To register for the event contact Patsy Coffman at patsy@voyager.net or 989-224-7692. For more information visit <http://www.connectingwithgod.org>. If you have any questions, please contact the Communities of Shalom office.