

Our Story

- Read (as a family, as a community) Matthew 20:1-16. Discuss:
 - ◆ What moral standards does the text articulate?
 - ◆ What is “fairness” in wages?
- Discuss what your family would add to or subtract from your daily budget if your income went up or down to \$17,650, the 2001 poverty level for a family of 4. This is a good time to talk with your children about giving to others and the church as part of your budgeting process.
- Check the Economic Policy Institute website www.epinet.org for information and links about the minimum wage and pay equity for women and men; also the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, www.nicwj.org, phone 773-728-8400.
- Find out what assistance is available for persons who are unemployed or unemployable in your community. Ask the staff at an employment or job training center about needs met and not met. Report back to your congregation.
- Pray for the people and their families who suffer from the lack of adequate resources. Pray that all persons in our nation will have enough to meet their basic needs. Pray together as a family, as a community, three times: “O God, give us – all of us – this day our daily bread.”



Uniquely cooperative effort by African Methodist Episcopal Women's Missionary Society, American Baptist Churches USA, Bread for the World Institute, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Department of Christian Education, Christian Reformed Church, Church World Service, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, The Episcopal Church, ELCA World Hunger Program, Franciscan Friars, Maryland Province of the Jesuits, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., Presbyterian Hunger Program, Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Committee on Relief; in conversation with the Islamic Society of North America, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism—Union of American Hebrew Congregations, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



The Worker Deserves a Wage

– Luke 10:7

God's Story

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. [This happened again at noon, three o'clock and five o'clock.]

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first. When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, 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." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

–Matthew 20:1-4, 8-15 NRSV



Tom Williams

Tom Williams is a single dad, a widower with two children, ages eight and ten. His younger child is autistic. He works at a small manufacturing company in the town where he has lived all his life.

As winter approaches, he is worried about the cost of heating his small home. Last winter the heating bill took more than a third of his monthly pay. Heating costs plus the rent, which is nearly one-half his salary, leave little money for food, clothing, and other necessities.

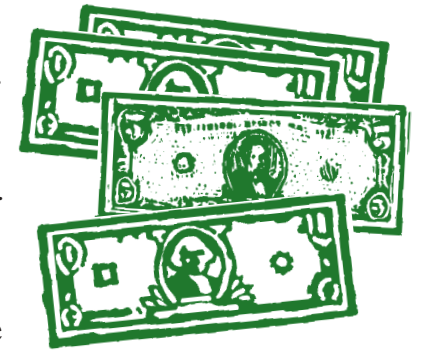
Fortunately, his mother lives nearby and the children stay with her after school and during school vacations. The children qualify for reduced-cost school lunches, but that is little help when school is not in session. Tom worries constantly about how to buy groceries from week to week, never mind the medical expenses that crop up on a regular basis.



A composite of several stories.

The Wage Story

- In 2001, the national legal minimum wage was \$5.15 per hour. A bill before Congress proposed raising it to \$6.65.
- The minimum wage was 24% lower in 2000 than it was in 1979 after correcting for inflation.
- 70% of minimum wage workers are adults age 20 and over. 40% are the sole wage earners in their household.
- In 2000, the national median household income was \$42,148.
- The official poverty threshold for a family of four was \$17,650 in 2001;* \$14,630 for a single parent with two children. The threshold is based on a minimally adequate diet, times three to factor in all other expenses.
- *Living wage* (the wage level necessary for ensuring that a person earns enough to live at an adequate standard of living) campaigns in more than 30 cities propose different amounts, from about \$8 to \$14 an hour.



* Except Alaska and Hawaii.