

Session 4

Hunger No More: The Worker Deserves a Wage

Focus

To explore the justice of wage issues, especially the minimum wage and a living wage.



Preparation

- Photocopy the leaflet, “Hunger No More: The Worker Deserves a Wage” for each participant.
- Review previous sessions to see if there are unanswered questions that relate to wages.
- Prepare the envelopes for “The Monthly Juggle” (pp. 37-43).
- Check the definitions of “minimum wage,” “living wage,” “living income” and “poverty line” on “Hunger and Poverty Definitions” (p. 32). Write the definitions on newsprint, or reproduce them as a handout, so the class can see them throughout the session.



Opening Prayer

When you are ready to begin, invite everyone to be seated. Pray the following prayer or one of your own:

God of justice and wholeness, abundance is a sign of your realm. Help us to understand abundance in your terms. Enliven our hearts to be with those people who struggle to survive. Amen.

God's Story

Form five groups of participants. The size of each group is not important. One group is the early morning workers; one, those who went at nine o'clock; one, those who went at noon; another, those who went at three o'clock; and the last group, those who went at five o'clock.

Explain that when their group is named in the Bible reading, they are to stand or raise one arm high in the air and remain so until the end of the reading. **Read Matthew 20:1-16 aloud.**

Then **invite the participants to turn to Matthew 20:1-16 in their Bibles.** Observe that this story is a parable. By one interpretation, the landowner is a symbol for God, since Jesus told the story as a way of explaining the reign of God.

Invite the group to ponder the meanings of the parable as it relates to livable wages or income for people today. Some questions to help in the discussion are:

- Why did the owner give the last-comers as much as the first?
- Was the owner being fair or unfair?
- What do we discover about God through this parable?
- How does this translate into our understanding of a “fair wage?”



A Composite Story

Distribute the copies of “Hunger No More: The Worker Deserves a Wage” and ask a volunteer to read “A Composite Story” in it. Point out that if the chief wage earner in a family of three only earns the minimum wage (\$5.15 per hr. × 40 hrs. × 52 weeks = \$10,712), the family would still be below the poverty line of \$14,630. Some minimum wage jobs are seasonal or occasional, so many workers cannot depend on year-round employment. Many minimum wage jobs lack benefits, so if special medical care is needed, families have even more difficulty.



The Wage Story

Form four teams or have four persons play “The Monthly Juggle” (pp. 37-43) as others observe. Following the game, invite their observations about what makes negative or positive impacts on one’s income and the ability to survive. Also ask:

- What kind of control did each family seem to have over their income source?
- What feelings accompanied the decisions you had to make?
- What might the long-term effects be of this kind of juggling month after month in each case?



If you have time, **invite participants to read each of the facts** under the wage story. And, review the distinctions between minimum wage, living wage and living income on “Hunger and Poverty Definitions” (p. 32). Discuss:

- Questions or concerns people have about fair wage legislation.
- What beliefs or myths circulate in public discussion?
- How can these be addressed?

Our Story

For most people, gathering cans of food is an easier action to imagine than tackling fair wages or living incomes for everyone. However, hunger will only perpetuate itself if people do not receive adequate pay for the work they do. Joe Short, the former executive director for Oxfam America, tells this little story:

When Oxfam was distributing food rations in Cambodia during the famine, hundreds of people waited quietly for their share. But when fishnets were handed out, the crowd cheered. Fishnets enable people to fend for themselves and not be dependent on the random good will of others.

But sometimes even a fish net, or in the case of many, having a job is not enough. The job does not provide a wage that is adequate to sustain the worker and her or his family. **Invite the group to ponder the need for a living wage**, looking again at the line about it in “The Wage Story.” Use these questions to begin the discussion:

- How does the parable we read earlier fit into this discussion of a living wage?
- What prevents everyone from receiving a living wage?
- How can these difficulties be overcome?

Reflection

If you have a statement from your denomination about a living wage, read part of it to the group. Finally, **pray this prayer**, repeating it three times with silence between each time so the group can offer sentence prayers:

O God, give us – all of us – this day our daily bread.



After the Session

Jot down:

- Unanswered questions or information requests made by the group
- Group comments you want to include in future sessions
- Ideas that have occurred to you as you have reviewed the sessions

What part of this session brought forth the most energy from the group? What information is still desired? How might that information be attained and made available to those requesting it?

