

INTERRELIGIOUS WORKING GROUP ON DOMESTIC HUMAN NEEDS

May 27, 2004

Dear

As members of the faith community, we urge you to **support an increase in the minimum wage to \$7.00 an hour**. The signatories to this letter represent faith-based organizations and denominations that have consistently worked to communicate our priorities regarding economic justice to members of Congress. Our faith traditions continually express concern for the most vulnerable members of society some of whom we serve through our health and human service programs and who may also be members of our own communities and congregations.

We believe that employers have a responsibility to treat employees with dignity and respect which is to be reflected in employees' remuneration. It is important to maintain an adequate minimum wage to prevent market forces from driving the wages of the lowest paid workers below a minimum level deemed fair by Congress.

We are very concerned about the growing difficulty experienced by low-wage workers in trying to support themselves and their families. They are struggling to meet their most basic needs. Currently a full-time, year-round minimum wage worker earns almost \$5,000 below what is needed to keep a family of three at the 2004 federal poverty level.

The minimum wage was last increased on September 1, 1997, almost seven years ago. Since 1997, inflation has eaten away 90 percent of the value of that increase. Today the minimum wage is only 33 percent of the average hourly earnings, the lowest in more than 50 years.

An increase in the minimum wage to \$7.00 an hour would raise the wages of 7.4 million workers, or 5.9 percent of the workforce. Almost half of these workers work full time. Seventy-two percent are adults age 20 and older and 61 percent are women.

This increase would raise a full time worker's wage by \$3,800 a year. Combined with the Earned Income Tax Credit and food stamps, it will enable families and individuals to live in dignity.

In 1996-1997 the minimum wage was increased without negative employment or economic consequences. The current proposal is significantly more modest. The 1999 Economic Report of the President said, "The weight of the evidence suggest that modest increases in the minimum wage have had very little or no effect on employment."

We ask you to vote yes on a minimum wage increase to \$7.00.

Sincerely,

Bread for the World
Call to Renewal
Church Women United
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

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