Praying for Walmart Workers

Thank you for continuing to stand by, and with, Walmart workers who are courageously fighting for their right to a living wage and to be treated with respect and dignity at work.

In early June, hundreds of individuals shared prayers of support, hope and encouragement as Walmart workers and their allies travelled to Bentonville, Ark. for the company’s annual shareholder meeting.

The presence of OUR Walmart leaders in Bentonville blanketed the massive gathering of Walmart executives and shareholders with a spirit of accountability and responsibility to those on whose backs the company’s profits are built.

Earlier this year, OUR Walmart leaders successfully pushed Walmart to begin addressing its immorally low pay and bump workers wages up – a small bit. Without guarantee of hours and full-time, consistent hours, they deserve pay that provides decent lives for themselves and their families. They deserve pay that is a step towards what workers need to provide for better working conditions.

We won’t let big corporations bully workers who are leading the fight for respect and dignity at work. The struggle continues until these workers are reinstated and their cries for justice are heard.

As corporate executives and wealthy shareholders celebrate the “successes” this past year, let us pray for – and act with – courage as we stand with the thousands of Walmart workers who are on the front lines of the struggle for dignity and respect.

Because work is so essential for the well-being of the individual, the family and society, the dignity of work must be protected and the basic rights of workers are to be respected: the right to productive work, to a decent and fair wage, to safe working conditions, to organize and join unions, to private property and to economic initiative.

Labor Day 2015 shows some gains throughout the last few years: more states or cities have raised the minimum wage and passed laws granting workers paid sick time. However, the situation continues to remain dire for far too many working men and women. Millions of workers are struggling to make ends meet and formerly middle class folks are now feeding their families with food stamps. Income inequality has grown significantly in the last 30 years, which has led researchers to conclude that the United States is the most economically unequal country in the advanced world. There is also the problem of wage theft.

Unfortunately, far too often, the debate over economic policy tends to neglect the human, social and moral dimensions of economic life, and that is why the formulation and implementation of solutions to our economic woes cannot be left solely to the technicians, special interest groups and market forces. For what is at stake is not really economic theories or political programs, but human life.

Behind every statistic and chart that seeks to define the problem lie individual tragedies and families trying to cope with unemployment and poverty. Hence, our present crisis is a moral as well as an economic one and must be addressed as such. May Labor Day prompt us to do so.

The Most Rev. Howard Hubbard is the retired bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Albany. He currently serves on the board of Interfaith Worker Justice and co-chairs the NY State Labor Religion Coalition.

This Labor Day let us lift up the dignity and intrinsic value of working people by bearing witness to the struggle for a living wage and for dignity and respect on the job. Take part in this year’s Worker in the Pulpits. To learn how, visit www.iwj.org or email ejunia@iwj.org.
The Pope and Human Dignity

By Adam DeRose

In September, Pope Francis is set to visit the U.S. to address Congress and the United Nations ahead of the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. At IWJ, we’re thrilled the Pope is coming, and we think it’s an important time to amplify his repeated calls to honor human dignity... for all of God’s children.

Pope Francis’ unashamed regard for human dignity and unapologetic disdain for the forces that hinder our ability to thrive on God’s good Earth have been a breath of fresh air and a welcome recalibration of our society’s moral compass.

The Pope’s love for humanity is especially apparent in all his declarations relating to economic inequality and the challenges facing working people everyday. When the Pope calls out the sins of Capitalism, he does so in an effort to challenge a system that creates disparity between the rich and the poor, and by consequence creates a “throw-away culture.” He reminds us that when we advocate against austerity or fight for a living wage, we’re taking down the barriers to a quality of life that gives dignity and hope to all.

As we look forward to the Papal visit, I invite you to continue lifting up the dignity inherent in all people and take special care to advocate for economic and worker policies that allow us all to live well.

The Hand that Feeds: Real to Reel Victory

We are excited to partner with Jubilee Films – the production company behind the critically acclaimed documentary, The Hand That Feeds. The film follows the courageous – and victorious – efforts of New York sandwich-maker Mahoma López to organize her coworkers to fight abusive conditions at a popular New York restaurant chain.

Risking deportation and the loss of their livelihood, Mahoma and her coworkers team up with a diverse crew of innovative young organizers and take the unusual step of forming their own independent union, launching themselves on a journey that will test the limits of their resolve. Through a special program supported by the Ford Foundation, IWJ affiliates can obtain public screening licenses of the film.

If you are interested in hosting a public screening, please contact Cathy Junia at cjulia@iwj.org.

IWJ Interns: Where are they now?

With the support of IWJ allies, donors and partners, we’re excited to welcome another group of summer interns at our national office and with IWJ affiliates across the country.

For more than 15 years, IWJ has been blessed with the opportunity to be part of the formation and development of some of the most inspiring and dedicated leaders in our communities.

It gives all of us great joy to see and hear about all the great work our summer program and our new post as Program Director at the Episcopal Mission Center. The Episcopal Mission Center is an urban retreat and Episcopal social justice center in Philadelphia. Sarah hopes her work will help transform the lives of people of faith through cultivating authentic relationships and learning about important social justice issues.

Sarah is also a candidate for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania and will be ordained this summer. Did you go through IWJ’s Seminary Summer or Summer Internship program? We’d love to know what you’re up to now and how the summer program helped shape your vocation. Please e-mail info@iwj.org to share your story.
Be among the first 10 people to find all 12 words and win a prize!

Take a photo of your completed puzzle and email to info@iwj.org.

Answers and winners will be posted in the next Faith Works.

Answers to puzzle in last issue

Across

2. Mary Kenny O’Sullivan
4. Bill Clinton
11. New York City
12. Seattle
13. Methodist
14. Martin Luther King Jr.
15. Theodore Roosevelt

Down

1. Workers Memorial Day
2. A Philip Randolph
3. Amnesty Day
4. Catholic Worker
5. New York Daily Sentinel
6. New York City
7. Amnesty Day
8. John Lewis
9. A Philip Randolph
10. William Haywood
11. New Jersey

Winner of last issue’s puzzle is Br. Anthony Zuba, Boston, MA!

Living Wage Certification: It’s a GO in Durango!

Maureen Maliszewski is an active member of the Unitarian Universalists Fellowship of Durango, Colo. and the former chair of the Social Justice Committee. She, the Social Justice Committee, and other community activists recently launched a Living Wage Certification program.

In November 2012, Dr. Ron Garst, a fellow congregational member, gave a Sunday service presentation on growing economic inequality in the U.S., an issue on which he’d taught, written and lectured for decades. In their desire to address the issue, the Committee did some research and discovered that in 2008 La Plata County, the county in which Durango is located, had created a “Master Plan” that recommended living wages for workers.

Maureen, her UU colleagues and other community activists formed Thrive! in 2013, a coalition of citizens in La Plata County, Colorado who care about the long-term economic health and social well-being of our community. Thrive!’s mission is to enhance the quality of life in La Plata County through fair and just wages for all.

Long-term, the group is interested in doing away with the state preemption, but it also wanted to do something to make a difference now. It decided to create a living wage certification program, which it calls an “Employer Recognition Program.” Thrive! officially launched its employer recognition program in November 2014.

The coalition, working with the Region 9 Economic Development Council, calculated the 2014 rate, which goes until July 1, 2015, as $12.40 per hour. As of April, 2015, 39 businesses had been certified as paying living wages and two more were “Aspiring Living Wage Employers,” meaning that they want to pay living wages and pledge to move toward living wages during the next year.

On April 15, 2015, Jeff Furman, Center, spoke about the certification program and how paying living wages helped Ben & Jerry’s succeed.

Visit www.thriveplata.org to learn more about the program. To start a program in your community, contact Janel Bailey (Jbailey@iwj.org) and download a free Living Wage Certification Toolkit at http://bit.ly/livingwagecert).

She Walked the Walk

In March, the social justice movement lost a trailblazer and stalwart with the passing of political scientist and social activist, Jean V. Hardisty (69). Along with many others, we mourned the loss of a wise and generous friend and ally.

In her lifetime, Jean wrote numerous papers and gave countless talks of the American right wing. She founded the Political Research Associates (PRA) – formerly Midwest Research – a social justice, right-wing watch group, in 1981 in Chicago. Under her leadership, PRA became one of the foremost critical voices pushing back against systems of oppression and poverty.

Throughout her life, Jean was known to walk the walk and invest in organizations steeped in the struggle for political justice and human rights.

We will forever be grateful for Jean’s wisdom and generosity, and we are committed to honoring her legacy through our work. For more about Jean, visit http://www.jeanhardisty.com/
Many blessings to our friends who are observing Ramadan

Welcome to the IWJ Family!

As the late Bishop H.E. Luccock of the Episcopal Methodist Church once said: “No one can whistle a symphony. It takes an orchestra to play it.” We know we can’t do this important work on our own, and are grateful to every person who chooses to share his or her gifts and talents to help further the mission of IWJ. We’re especially thrilled to welcome these stellar additions to the IWJ Board:

From the depth of need and despair, people can work together, organize themselves to solve their own problems and fill their own needs with dignity and strength.

– Cesar Chavez

IWJ Affiliate Network
For detailed contact information, please visit www.iwj.org

Interfaith Groups

Arkansas Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice – Little Rock, AR
Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLU) – California – Los Angeles, CA
East Bay Faith Alliance for a Moral Economy – Oakland, CA
Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice in San Diego – San Diego, CA
Interfaith Council on Economics and Justice – San Jose, CA
IWJ-Colorado/TREC for Good Jobs and Strong Communities – Denver, CO
Connecticut Center for a New Economy – New Haven, CT
Interfaith Action of Southwest Florida – Immokalee, FL
DuPage Interfaith Worker Justice – Naperville, IL
Community, Faith and Labor Coalition – Indianapolis, IN
Interfaith Worker Justice of Kansas – Wichita, KS

Interfaith Worker Justice – NOLA – New Orleans, LA
Interfaith Worker Justice Southern Maine – Portland, ME
IWJ of Maryland – Baltimore, MD
Massachusetts Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice – Boston, MA
Interfaith Worker Justice – New Mexico – Santa Fe, NM
Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition – New York, NY
Labor-Religion Coalition – Latham, NY
Greater Binghamton Labor-Religion Coalition – Vestal, NY
Beloved Community Center – Greensboro, NC
Cincinnati Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice – Cincinnati, OH
Greater Columbus Jobs with Justice – Columbus, OH
Central Oklahoma Community Forum – Oklahoma City, OK
Religious Outreach Committee/Portland Jobs with Justice – Portland, OR
Springfield Solidarity Network/Jobs with Justice – Eugene, OR
Labor-Religion Coalition of Western Pennsylvania – Pittsburgh, PA
Philadelphia Area Jobs with Justice – Philadelphia, PA

Interfaith Worker Justice of East Tennessee – Knoxville, TN
O.U.R. Vanderbilt – Nashville, TN
Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice of South Central Wisconsin – Madison, WI

Worker Centers

Winning our Wages Worker Center – Birmingham, AL
Arizona Worker Rights Center – Tucson, AZ
Northwest Arkansas Workers’ Justice Center – Springdale, AR
Filipino Workers Center – Los Angeles, CA
Young Workers United – San Francisco, CA
South Florida Interfaith Worker Justice – Miami, FL
Economic Justice Coalition – Athens, GA
Workers Center for Racial Justice – Chicago, IL
Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa – Iowa City, IA
Food AND Medicine/Eastern Maine Worker Center – Brewer, ME
Southern Maine Workers’ Center – Portland, ME
MassCOSH – Dorchester, MA
The Micah Center* – Grand Rapids, MI
Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha – Minneapolis, MN
Greater Minnesota Worker Center – St. Cloud, MN
New Labor – New Brunswick, NJ

* Both an Interfaith Group and Worker Center


Visit iwj.org to get to know other inspiring members of the IWJ board.

Patrick Carolan, Executive Director – Franciscan Action Network
The Rev. Michael Livingston, Executive Minister – The Riverside Church
David Moskowitz, Workers Compensation Attorney, Morgan & Morgan
Marcos Lucio Popovich, Program Fellow – Barr Foundation
Marilyn Sneiderman, Professor and Director of Center for Innovation in Worker Organization – Rutgers University

Damayan Migrant Workers Center – New York, NY
Restaurant Opportunity Center (ROC) of New York – New York, NY
Worker Justice Project – Brooklyn, NY
Tompkins County Workers’ Center – Ithaca, NY
Don Bosco Workers, Inc. – Rochester, NY
Workers’ Center of Central New York – Syracuse, NY
Western North Carolina Workers’ Center – Marion, NC
Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center – Cincinnati, OH
Workers’ Interfaith Network – Memphis, TN
Workers’ Defense Project/Proyecto Defensa Laboral – Austin, TX
Fe Y Justicia Worker Center (formerly Houston Interfaith Worker Justice Center) – Houston, TX
Community to Community Development – Bellingham, WA
Madison Workers’ Rights Center – Madison, WI
Voces de la Frontera – Milwaukee, WI