

# Faith WORKS



Newsletter of Interfaith Worker Justice

Summer 2013

## OUR Walmart: Standing Up to Live Better

By Adam De Rose

In early June, nearly 200 members of the Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OUR Walmart), a worker organization of current and former associates, spent a week in Bentonville, Ark. – the home of the retail giant's headquarters – to send a strong and clear message to Walmart's leadership. It was the week of the company's shareholder meeting, and as executives prepared their glossy reports, some of the workers had walked off their jobs for an unfair labor practice strike.

Many OUR Walmart members arrived the weekend before the annual meeting and visited local congregations to worship that Sunday. Many of their brothers and sisters in the pews welcomed them, but some did not. These workers articulately highlighted why they were visiting: to ask executives to stop retaliating against workers seeking to improve wages and working conditions and to create a Walmart that respects the dignity of work, like all religions affirm.

That Monday, they greeted executive staff at corporate headquarters as they arrived for work. For more than an hour, they stood in silence with tape across their lips holding signs telling Walmart to stop trying to silence them. Then, in a roar, they removed the tape and began calling out "Stand up! Live Better!"

During the week, workers organized visits to Walmart stores,

and canvassed local residents and businesses. They planned and led a prayer vigil, prayed for the Walton family and the families of struggling Walmart workers across the country. They visited the Crystal Bridges Museum, which is funded by Alice Walton and is the wealthiest privately-funded museum in the world. Joined by faith and community allies, workers reflected solemnly on the contrast between the extravagant treasures inside and the poverty many associates face each day.

At the company's shareholder meeting on June 6, workers delivered a petition calling on Walmart to stop trying to silence workers.

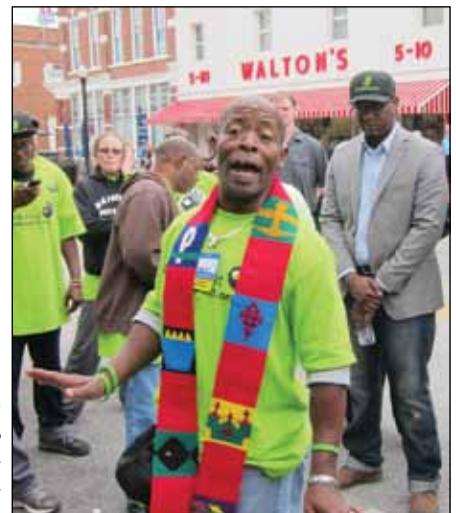
All across the country, people of faith showed their support to striking OUR Walmart members by hold-

ing solidarity events at their local Walmart stores. They delivered letters to store managers, passed out flyers to customers and offered "Thank You" cards to associates. Nearly 50 supporters like you committed to visit local Walmart stores!

The Rev. Stephen Copely from Little Rock, Ark. offered this prayer to the workers: *O gracious God, I thank you for your creation and creating each of us with great dignity and worth. I pray for the Walmart workers that they have strength and courage at this moment. I pray that the executives and shareholders have the wisdom to make decisions that offer life to workers and their families. We pray for your guidance and sense of justice to rule the day. Amen*

Many of the workers who went

on strike have since been retaliated against and fired from their jobs. Walmart workers need people like YOU to support them in prayer and action this year, especially on Black Friday in November. Be sure to sign up for IWJ's Walmart action team to get involved at [bit.ly/Change-Walmart13](http://bit.ly/Change-Walmart13).

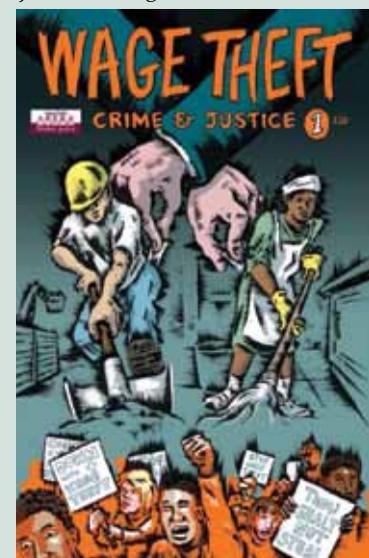


Workers join in prayer outside the original Walton's store in Arkansas



## Meet Your Modern-day Superheroes

Witness how everyday workers stand up to unscrupulous employers and face workplace crimes head-on in the recently released *Wage Theft Comics: Crime and Justice*. A joint project of Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) and IWJ affiliate, Fe y Justicia, *Wage Theft Comics* is an activist comic book that both chronicles the experience of wage theft victims and guides workers and potential allies towards a path for justice. *Wage Theft Comics* was written by IWJ



board member Jeffrey Odell Korgen and illustrated by Kevin Pyle. It is printed in both English and Spanish. Visit <http://bit.ly/WTComics> to view the comic book online. For print orders, email [cjunia@iwj.org](mailto:cjunia@iwj.org).

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Faith Works is produced by IWJ's Communications Department. For questions, corrections and story suggestions contact Communications Director, Cathy Junia, at [cjunia@iwj.org](mailto:cjunia@iwj.org) or call 773-728-8400 x40.

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# Rising to Raise the Minimum Wage

By The Rev. Michael Livingston

It's time. The Minimum Wage hasn't been raised since 2009. It hasn't kept pace with the cost of living. Millions of our nation's workers don't make enough money to support themselves and their families. Even in a two-parent household, if both workers earn just the minimum wage, there is not enough money for housing, health care, food, insurance, utilities, transportation, and even a few meager amenities that make life enjoyable and convenient.

Worse yet, the wage for tipped workers hasn't been raised in 22 years. It's \$2.13 an hour, which means employers don't pay the wages of workers in restaurants – we, the diners, do. Into this breach comes the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013 (S. 460/H.R. 1010) introduced by Senator Tom Harkin and Representative George Miller.

The proposed legislation would raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10 by 2015 in three increments of 95 cents. The bill would also provide for annual increases in the rate in future years to keep pace with the rising cost of living. In addition, the bill would raise the minimum wage for tipped workers from \$2.13 by 95 cents per year until it reaches 70% of the regular minimum wage.

In Washington, Interfaith Worker Justice staff have been working with allies to increase the number of co-sponsors of the bill in the House and Senate. As of press time, the numbers are up to 29 in the Senate and 136 in the House. We have more work to do.

Locally IWJ has provided technical assistance and strategic support for our New York affiliate, the Labor-Religion Coalition of New York State, in their successful engagement of the state legislature resulting in a statewide increase in the minimum wage from \$7.25/hr. to \$9/hr. The increase is to be implemented in stages over the next three years. IWJ is also engaged in Minimum Wage campaigns in New Jersey, Connecticut, and Massachusetts.

State increases in the Minimum Wage will bolster the chances of making it an election issue in the 2014 campaigns, and passing the bills in congress.

Much more work needs to be done to demonstrate compelling support to make passage of the bill a reality in the House of Representatives which has proven hostile to measures that value working people.

Let's rise up to raise the Minimum Wage. Go to <http://bit.ly/MinWage-Congress> and let Congress know that it's time.

Mark your Calendar: join the National Day of Action to Raise the Federal Minimum Wage on July 24. Visit the IWJ website for more information.



The Labor-Religion Coalition of New York State, an IWJ affiliate, is one of many groups that played an instrumental role in the recent statewide increase in the minimum wage from \$7.25/hr to \$9/hr.

## JUST Saying

A Message from IWJ Executive Director Kim Bobo

Earlier this summer, I had the opportunity to meet in Bentonville, Ark. with the leaders of Organization United for Respect (OUR Walmart), the association of Walmart workers that is pushing the company to pay living wages and benefits. What an inspirational and brave group of workers. Many of the leaders have found the courage to step forth and challenge the corporate Goliath out of their faith. Now Walmart has disciplined and fired 25 of these leaders (and we're trying to support the workers and engage board members in stopping the retaliation).

Last year I had purchased a few shares of Walmart stock so I could attend the shareholders meeting, which I did along with OUR Walmart leaders and thousands of associates brought in from all over the world. Despite the millions spent on movie stars, entertainment, travel and scripted messages, the four-hour-shareholders'-extravaganza failed to present anything but rhetoric.

Walmart represents most everything that's wrong with the economy. Walmart is the quintessential low-road employer.

Walmart claims it loves its associates, but it pays poverty wages (\$8.81 per worker on average) and poor benefits.

Walmart's mantra at the meeting was that "If you have talent and work hard, Walmart offers opportunities." Offering opportunities is good, but the richest company in the world can afford decent wages and benefits for associates, as well as opportunity.

Walmart has exacerbated the concentration of wealth in the nation. Six Walton heirs have the same wealth as 42 percent of the American public. This is an obscene concentration of wealth.

Walmart shifts costs to the public sector by not paying good wages and health care. Families who can't make ends meet rely on food stamps and publicly supported health care to survive. We all subsidize Walmart's stinginess.

Walmart could do better. Walmart *should* do better.

This Labor Day weekend, engage your congregation in lifting up the concerns of workers. Reflect on what kind of jobs we need and want in our communities. Use IWJ's Labor Day resources (available at [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)). Consider joining our new Congregational Worker Justice program. And, plan now to participate in the Black Friday actions outside Walmart stores.



# High Five, Hyatt!

By Kirk Laubenstein

As part of our training, my fellow Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) summer interns and I had the opportunity to join Hyatt workers in a rally to elect Cathy Youngblood, a Hyatt housekeeper, to the company's board of directors. With picket signs in hand, we marched outside McDonalds Corporation's Oak Brook complex where Hyatt was having its shareholders meeting.

We chanted and prayed in support of Cathy and other Hyatt housekeepers who were calling for an end to Hyatt's longstanding labor abuses and for much-needed worker representation on the company's board of directors.

A few weeks later, UNITE HERE – the union representing hospitality workers – announced it had reached an agreement with Hyatt that provides contracts and process for workers to join a union. What a win for workers!

The agreement ended the global boycott of Hyatt hotels and opened up avenues for negotiation for better working conditions for the hotel's housekeepers.

At the time of publication, the agreement was up for ratification by Hyatt associates in San Francisco, Honolulu, Los Angeles and Chicago. Pending associate approval, the contract will pro-

vide retroactive wage increased and maintain health care and pension benefits. The proposed contract will be in effect until 2018.

The Hyatt action was a first for some of my fellow interns; for others, it was one in a string of many actions we have been involved with. In the end, we all felt like we were part of the same movement. The Hyatt workers' struggle is ours as well, and from their strength, we draw much inspiration. We join them in celebrating this major victory!

We are ready for a summer of amazing work to make sure all workers are treated with dignity, honor and respect. This summer, my hope is to do work that will "let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream." (Amos 5:24)

To learn more about other corporate campaigns you can support, visit [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org).



IWJ summer interns joined Hyatt workers who rallied outside the company's shareholder's meeting.

## LABOR DAY: Spotlight on workers!

Every worker has a story to tell and through those stories, lives are touched and people are moved to action. On Labor Day weekend, Interfaith Worker Justice urges you to shine the spotlight on workers by bringing their stories to your place of worship.

Honor the sacredness of work this Labor Day weekend. Invite a worker, union leader or worker advocate from within or outside your congregation to talk about the connection between his or her faith and the struggle for justice in the workplace.

Labor Day speakers receive special training and sample reflections to help them develop their presentations. Congregations organize Labor Day services on the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday before Labor Day or special services on Labor Day Monday. Please visit [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org) for resources.

Think creatively about how best to plan a Labor Day service that will provide support to those struggling for justice on the job and lift up

everyone's spirits in the process.

Please join us in highlighting the sacred link of work and faith. Congregations and interfaith groups organizing Labor in the Pulpits will receive all the resources necessary for a successful Labor Day program.

If you have any questions or would like to brainstorm ideas for a Labor Day service, contact Cathy Junia at [cjunia@iwj.org](mailto:cjunia@iwj.org) or call 773-728-8400 x 40.



AFL-CIO Executive Vice-President Arlene Holt-Baker shares worker stories and talks about the power of organizing at a congregation in Miami, FL.

# Let's Make CIR Happen!

In late June, the Senate passed a complicated immigration reform bill that has the potential to create a pathway to citizenship for some of the undocumented 11 million people in our nation.

The bipartisan S. 744 is far from perfect, but it's a start.

Under the S. 744, DREAMers and agricultural workers have the shortest and straightest path, while other low-wage workers face many more arduous obstacles. There are several provisions of the bill that will prove difficult for low-wage workers to meet if they are to travel the complete distance to citizenship.

The bill requires an average income of 125 percent of the federal poverty line if Registered Provisional Immigrants are to progress to legalized status and it requires no lapses of employment in excess of 60 days throughout the 10-plus years of application process.

"Clearly, there are good reasons many are celebrating and equally compelling reasons for caution as the bill now moves to the much more difficult House of Representatives." IWJ Director of Public Policy, The Rev. Michael Livingston said. "A fundamental question each of us has to answer is: Pass even a flawed bill now and work to improve it in the future, or pass nothing now, helping no one?"

What is required is continued engagement in aggressive and principled advocacy as the legislative process shifts to the House and this essential work continues.

We're hoping that in the time it took to print and distribute this issue of Faith Works, the House of Representatives has taken positive strides toward meaningful immigration reform. Please check [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org) for updates.



The Rev. Michael Livingston leading a prayer in front of the Republican National Committee headquarters the day before the Senate vote on immigration.

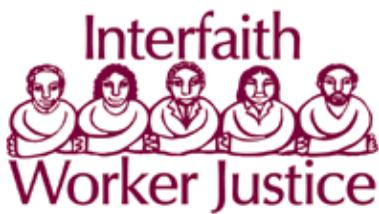
## Transformative Summer in Progress

Sixteen undergraduates, recent graduates, and seminarians from across the nation gathered in downtown Chicago in mid-June for the 2013 IWJ Summer Internship training. Co-facilitated by IWJ Organizing Director Sung Yeon Choi-Morrow and recently retired SEIU organizer Carol Edelson, the training provided our young leaders the practical skills necessary for their summer of working with different faith communities, organizing and advocating for workplace justice.

The IWJ summer internship gives students the opportunity to work alongside seasoned organizers and worker justice advocates on important workplace and public policy campaigns. Students will be at their placement sites throughout the 2013 summer season where they will help strengthen the faith community's engagement in worker struggles.

Often described as a "transformative summer experience," IWJ's internship program has produced a number of worker justice leaders who are making an impact in the communities they serve. Go to <http://bit.ly/FaithWorksSummer> to support IWJ's transformative student programs.





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**Honor a Worker  
this September**

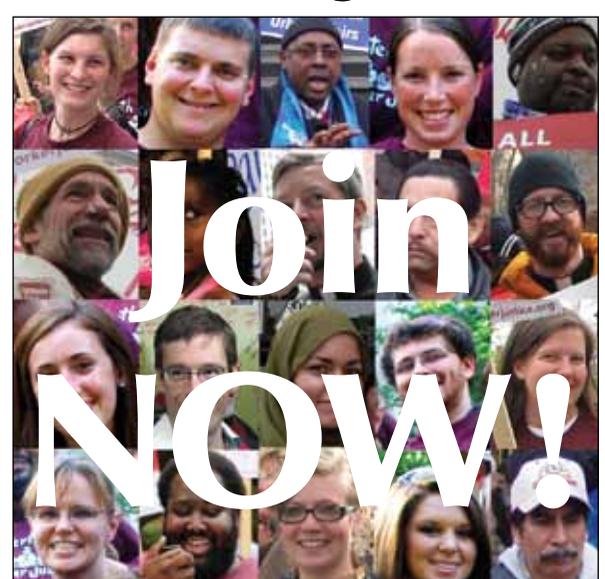
A simple THANK YOU goes a long way! This Labor Day (and for the entire month of September), join us in celebrating the contributions – big and small – of workers around us. Honor a worker with a gift to IWJ and we'll make sure to send them a certificate to let them know how much you value their work. Go to <http://bit.ly/LaborDay2013> to honor a worker today!

## IWJ Launches Worker Justice Congregational Program

*The work of justice  
will be peace.*  
– Isaiah 32:17



What exactly is a Worker Justice Congregation and why should you get yours involved? Worker Justice Congregations are those that value and lift up dedicated workers as well as ethical employers in their communities. They strive to be just employers themselves and advocate a society in which all who are able to work have access to family-sustaining jobs, and learn about ethical businesses and services. They partner with and support IWJ. As a bonus, Worker Justice Congregations are eligible for exclusive discounts at ethical establishments like Costco and union printers. The Worker Justice Congregational program fosters an intentional partnership between IWJ and congregations committed to worker and economic justice. Get your congregation involved today. Visit [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org) for more information.



### IWJ Affiliates

Arkansas Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice – Little Rock, AR  
Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE)—California – Oakland, CA  
CLUE—LA – Los Angeles, CA  
East Bay Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice – Oakland, CA  
Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice in San Diego – San Diego, CA  
Interfaith Council on Economics and Justice – San Jose, CA  
Sonoma Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice – Santa Rosa, CA  
IWJ-Colorado/FRESC for Good Jobs and Strong Communities – Denver, CO  
Connecticut Center for a New Economy-Hartford – Hartford, CT  
D.C. Jobs with Justice—Interfaith Worker Justice of Greater Washington – Washington, DC  
Interfaith Action of Southwest Florida – Immokalee, FL  
South Florida Interfaith Worker Justice – Miami, FL  
Georgia Poultry Alliance – Atlanta, GA  
Interfaith Worker Justice, Atlanta – Atlanta, GA  
DuPage Interfaith Worker Justice – Naperville, IL  
Arise Chicago – Chicago, IL  
Community, Faith and Labor Coalition – Indianapolis, IN  
Interfaith Committee on Work & Community – Bloomington, IN  
Calumet Project – Hammond, IN

St. Joseph Valley Project – South Bend, 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—Metro Detroit – Oak Park, MI  
Workers Interfaith Network – Minneapolis, MN  
Interfaith Worker Justice of Nebraska – Omaha, NE  
Interfaith Worker Justice—New Mexico – Santa Fe, NM  
Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition – New York, NY  
Capital District Labor-Religion Coalition – Albany, NY  
Central New York Labor-Religion Coalition – East Syracuse, NY  
Labor-Religion Coalition – Latham, NY  
Labor-Religion Coalition of Binghamton – Binghamton, NY  
Beloved Community Center – Greensboro, NC  
Cincinnati Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice – Cincinnati, OH  
Greater Columbus Jobs with Justice – Columbus, OH  
Toledo Area Jobs with Justice – Toledo, OH  
Central Oklahoma Community Forum – Oklahoma City, OK  
Eastern Oklahoma Labor Religion Council – Tulsa, 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  
Middle Tennessee Jobs with Justice – Murfreesboro, TN  
Workers Interfaith Network – Memphis, TN  
O.U.R. Vanderbilt – Nashville, TN  
Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy – Richmond, VA  
Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice of South Central Wisconsin – Madison, WI

#### Worker Centers

Arizona Interfaith Alliance for Worker Justice – Phoenix, AZ  
Southside Workers Center – Tucson, AZ  
Northwest Arkansas Workers Justice Center – Springdale, AR  
Pilipino Workers Center – Los Angeles, CA  
Young Workers United – San Francisco, CA  
South Florida Interfaith Worker Justice – Miami, FL  
Economic Justice Coalition – Athens, GA  
ARISE Chicago – Chicago, IL  
Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa – Coralville, IA  
Easter Maine Workers' Center/Food AND Medicine – Brewer, ME

Southern Maine Worker Center – Portland, ME  
MassCOSH – Dorchester, MA  
Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha – Minneapolis, MN  
New Labor – New Brunswick, NJ  
Tompkins County Workers' Center – Ithaca, NY  
Damayan Migrant Workers Center – New York, NY  
Restaurant Opportunity Center (ROC) of New York – New York, NY  
Workers' Center of Central New York – Syracuse, NY  
Western North Carolina Workers' Center – Morganton, NC  
Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center – Cincinnati, OH  
Workers' Interfaith Network – Memphis, TN  
Workers' Dignity Project – Nashville, TN  
Workers' Defense Project/Proyecto Defensa Laboral – Austin, TX  
Fe Y Justicia (formerly Houston Interfaith Worker Justice Center) – Houston, TX  
Madison Workers' Right Center – Madison, WI  
Voces de la Frontera – Milwaukee, WI

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