

# CELEBRATING LIVING WAGE WEEK IN YOUR CHURCH



THE CENTRE FOR  
THEOLOGY  
& COMMUNITY



## WHEN?

Living Wage Week 2015 runs from Sunday 1st to Saturday 7th November. We suggest a focus on the Living Wage in Sunday worship on the 2nd. There are activities for members of your church to get involved in [throughout the week](#).

## WHY?

The Living Wage Campaign – started 15 years ago by churches and other religious and civic groups in TELCO (the east London chapter of Citizens UK) has had a huge impact on the lives of low-income families, putting over [£200,000 extra in the pockets of people in poverty and helping at least 45,000 low paid workers](#) and their families. From being dismissed as ‘impractical’ and ‘unrealistic’, it has now grown into a national movement supported by the leaders of all the main political parties, implemented by the Mayor of London, and recognised as having a robust business case by companies such as [Barclays Bank and KPMG](#).

It is important to recognise the central role of faith communities – and in particular of churches – from the very start of the Living Wage Campaign. There would be no Living Wage if it wasn't for thousands of people of faith organising together for change. To say this is not to ‘blow our own trumpets.’ It is important to ensure this story is told honestly and accurately for two key reasons.

First it shows the positive role of Christian faith in public life. Faith communities – and most of all churches – have provided the majority of organised local people who made the Living Wage possible. Christian social teaching is a key motivation for the campaign. The Bible is clear that the earth belongs first of all to God – and that its fruits need to be distributed in a way that ensures everyone has dignity and the material as well as spiritual means to flourish. It is also therefore a central theme in the social teaching of the Catholic Church – and is emphasised in Pope Benedict XVI's his 2009 encyclical on social justice.

Secondly, it is only when we understand what has brought change that we can win more of it. Churches joining hands with other religious and civic groups in Citizens UK made the Living

Wage possible. If we want to achieve real change on other issues – such as affordable housing, a more just asylum and immigration system and a banking system that works for poorer communities – we need to use the tools that have been shown to work.

## WHAT?

### 1. Preach on the Living Wage:

Notes on the readings for Sunday 1st November are below – along with other Biblical passages referring to the Living Wage.

### 2. Get testimony from low-paid workers in your congregation:

There is no substitute for personal experience. Story is the main genre of Scripture – and has always been central to the success of the Living Wage Campaign. Is someone in your church is willing to speak or be interviewed about life on poverty wages, or the positive impact of the Living Wage? Alternatively, a member of your congregation – or a community organiser from Citizens UK – could speak or be interviewed about the stories behind the campaign, and how it has succeeded.

### 3. Say ‘thank you’ to a Living Wage employer:

Community organising involves tension and struggle – but we also recognise and celebrates success. Some employers who were once resistant to the Living Wage have now become powerful voices for its positive impact. Contact your local Citizens UK organiser and find out which local employers your congregation can thank. This can be by sending a letter on behalf of the church – or even getting members of the congregation to write a ‘thank you’ postcard. Experience suggests this can be done most effectively, and quite speedily, while the congregation is still together. Why not distribute postcards – and supply some pens – during the notices? You can collect the cards in and post them in one batch.

### 4. Map low pay in your community:

Think of appropriate ways to engage your congregation in this research – making it as conversation-based as possible – after all, we are keen to build relationships as we go! It could be part of a wider conversation about the impact of the economic

**THE MOST REVD JOHN SENTAMU, ARCHBISHOP OF YORK: “AS THE CHAIR OF THE LIVING WAGE COMMISSION, I’VE SEEN FIRST HAND THE DIFFERENCE THAT THE LIVING WAGE HAS MADE IN THE LIVES OF EMPLOYEES AND THEIR FAMILIES. WE MUST TAKE SERIOUSLY THESE WORDS OF JESUS CHRIST: ‘THE WORKER DESERVES HIS WAGES.’ HE TREATED PEOPLE WITH RESPECT, AND WE MUST DO THE SAME. EMPLOYERS HAVE ALSO GREATLY BENEFITED AS LOYALTY FROM EMPLOYEES HAS RESULTED FROM PAYING THE LIVING WAGE.”**

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crisis on your neighbourhood – in which case you may wish to use the [Centre For Theology & Community’s ‘Money Talk’ resources](#). Find out whether your local council is paying the Living Wage. If so, say ‘thank you.’ If not, ask ‘why not?’

#### **5. Take part in a Living Wage action:**

Despite the success of the Living Wage Campaign, there are still too many families who suffer as a result of low pay. The campaign must continue to persuade, encourage and sometimes embarrass employers to do the right thing and pay the Living Wage. There are plenty of opportunities to do this! [Here are some ideas...](#)

#### **6. Go shopping:**

[Here is a list of Living Wage employers](#). Buy as many products and services as possible from shops and companies that pay their workers fairly. If you can’t see the Living Wage mark in a shop, ask whether it is a Living Wage employer. If it is, encourage the shop to display the Living Wage mark. If it is not, ask why not! This is something you might wish to do collectively in Living Wage week, as a congregation, with other churches or as an alliance of different civil society institutions.

## **CHRISTIAN TEACHING AND THE LIVING WAGE**

### **Lectionary readings for Sunday 1st November**

Many churches will keep Sunday 1st November as All Saints’ Day (this is compulsory for Roman Catholic Churches, and an option for all churches who, like the Church of England, use the Revised Common Lectionary).

The Psalm appointed for All Saints’ Day is Psalm 24. In it we read the following, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” This is a perfect reminder that money doesn’t primarily belong to ‘us’ but to God and as we have seen, He desires that workers should be paid fairly. On the feast of All Saints, we remember the great company of people who followed Christ on earth, and now see him face to face. Some saints are well-known to the whole church; some may have a particular personal significance – inspiring and challenging us; some will be unrecorded lives of faithfulness which are known to God alone. This “great cloud of witnesses” surrounds us as we journey on. It shows us that the power to change our world comes when we act together – one Body, united across time and space. For the power of the saints lives

lay, not in being superheroes, but part of this Body. God calls us to be saints not heroes. We do not stand at the centre of the story. We stand, as members of the Body of Christ, around a story in which Christ is central.

The words of the Beatitudes remind us that God chooses to work most powerfully through the very people wider society ignores, belittles and judges. Those without earthly status are often more aware of their need of God – and of each other. The Living Wage Campaign is an excellent example of what we can do, not by acting as individual heroes, but by harnessing the power of common action. Achievements that would have seemed unimaginable when the Living Wage Campaign began have resulted from a willingness to join hands and act together, both within our churches and beyond their walls.

### **The Bible, wages and family life**

A mature Biblical theology of poverty and the family will have to leave room for the following:

1. General principles that encourage diligence and personal responsibility and challenge laziness and shirking, while protecting the vulnerable.
2. Respecting and empowering the poor rather than patronising and creating dependency. For example [Boaz’s obedience](#) to the [Levitical gleaning laws](#) that did not give grain to the widows and strangers but instead gave them access to the farmland and allowed them to gather what they needed for themselves. Encouraging both proximity and dignity to those being helped.
3. Recognition that systems and structures unfairly disadvantage some so that their circumstances rather than their character have been the predominant cause of their poverty.
4. Recognition that families carry the responsibility to care for their members as well as those that are isolated or excluded from their families.
5. Commitment to a sacrificial but informed generosity.

Find out more about these principles in [The Heart of the Kingdom](#) (Dr Krish Kandiah, p35).

### **Catholic Social Teaching, wages and family life**

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope St John Paul II affirmed a series of human rights relating to family life. They include:

- the right to exist and progress as a family, that is to say, the right of every human being, even if he or she is poor, to found a family and to have adequate means to support it;
- the right, especially of the poor and the sick, to obtain physical, social, political and economic security;
- the right to housing suitable for living family life in a proper way;
- the right to expression and to representation, either directly or through associations, before the economic, social and cultural public authorities and lower authorities;

- the right to form associations with other families and institutions, in order to fulfill the family's role suitably and expeditiously;
- the right to emigrate as a family in search of a better life. In [Caritas in Veritate](#), Pope Benedict XVI wrote that the dignity of the individual and the demands of justice require, particularly today, that economic choices do not cause disparities in wealth to increase in an excessive and morally unacceptable manner. Later in the encyclical, he considers what is meant by the word “decency” in regard to work:

It means work that expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman in the context of their particular society: work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both men and women, with the development of their community; work that enables the worker to be respected and free from any form of discrimination; **work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children, without the children themselves being forced into labour**; work that permits the workers to organize themselves freely, and to make their voices heard; work that leaves enough room for rediscovering one's roots at a personal, familial and spiritual level; work that guarantees those who have retired a decent standard of living.

This is precisely the logic behind the Living Wage. It is calculated to be the level of pay required to enable workers to sustain a personal and family life, and contribute to the wider life of a community, and still have enough money to meet their material needs.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis emphasises that work for social justice needs to begin by listening to the poor. This is the method of community organising – working for justice with and not just for those who are on low wages, and recognising that the Living Wage is about the full inclusion of all workers and families in society:

Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society... A mere glance at the Scriptures is enough to make us see how our gracious Father wants to hear the cry of the poor: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them... so I will send you...” (Exodus 3:7-8, 10). We also see how he is concerned for their needs: “When the Israelites cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up for them a deliverer” (Judges 3:15). If we, who are God's means of hearing the poor, turn deaf ears

**ELAINE BOWES FROM THE PENTECOSTAL CREDIT UNION: “WE BELIEVE IN EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO IMPROVE THEIR ECONOMIC LIVES. WE BECAME A LIVING WAGE EMPLOYER BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE DEMONSTRATE THIS VALUE IN OUR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AND THAT THE PEOPLE WHO WORK TO DELIVER OUR SERVICES ARE PAID A FAIR RATE FOR THEIR WORK. WE ARE A CHRISTIAN CREDIT UNION AND AS SUCH OUR ORGANISATIONAL VALUES ARE ROOTED IN OUR FAITH. WE MUST EXEMPLIFY OUR FAITH AND VALUES IN EVERYTHING THAT WE DO – THEREFORE FOR US BEING A LIVING WAGE EMPLOYER IS A ‘NO BRAINER.’”**

to this plea, we oppose the Father's will and his plan; that poor person “might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt” (Deuteronomy 15:9). A lack of solidarity towards his or her needs will directly affect our relationship with God: “For if in bitterness of soul he calls down a curse upon you, his Creator will hear his prayer” (Sirach 4:6). The old question always returns: “How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods, and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (1 John 3:17). Let us recall also how bluntly the apostle James speaks of the cry of the oppressed: “The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (5:4).

In this context we can understand Jesus' command to his disciples: “You yourselves give them something to eat!” (Mark 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter. The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.

So we urge you to use Living Wage Week to prioritise this vital and growing Campaign in your church. Contact the [Living Wage Foundation](#) for more information. Let us know what you're up to via @theologycentre. Oh, and enjoy yourselves!