



PURPOSE OF THE VISIT: Call for Congress to raise the federal minimum wage and index it to inflation

WHAT WE SEE:

The minimum wage is too low to live on: The current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour earns a full-time employee an annual salary of \$15,080. If a family includes just one child, that income is below the poverty line (Economic Policy Institute). In no state can a minimum wage worker afford a two-bedroom unit at Fair Market Rent, working a standard 40-hour work week (National Low Income Housing Coalition). In 2011, there were 10.4 million low-income working families, including 23.5 million children (The Working Poor Families Project).

The feminization of poverty: Women disproportionately compose the low-wage/minimum wage workforce. Women of working age (16 and older) are nearly twice as likely as their male counterparts to earn no more than minimum wage, exacerbating gender inequality. A woman-head-of-household in a family of three of earns \$4,000 under the poverty line (Restaurant Opportunities Center United).

Poverty rampant among tipped workers: Congress has not acted to raise the minimum wage for tipped workers in over two decades. The effect of this inaction has had a dramatic effect on the ability of tipped workers, like restaurant employees to make ends meet. Currently tipped workers are 3 times more likely than the rest of the U.S. workforce to live below the poverty line (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

WHAT OUR FAITH TELLS US:

Raising the minimum wage is a moral issue; it is about dignity and it is about justice. More than a century of Catholic teaching places work at the heart of human dignity. Wages are much more than a mere product of economic bargaining. Rather, wages that do not allow workers to support themselves, their families, or the common good demean human dignity.

In writing about minimum wage as a gateway to worker dignity, Fr. Fred Kammer, SJ noted that Catholic teaching disagrees in two ways with those who maintain that the marketplace determines the level of wages and that the market should be allowed to function freely and without interference. First, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states the duty in justice of employers, saying “A just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice. In determining fair pay both the needs and the contributions of each person must be taken into account.” Second, Pope John XXIII explained government’s role in

The [Ignatian Solidarity Network \(ISN\)](http://www.ignatiansolidarity.net) is a national social justice education and advocacy network inspired by the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola. ISN was founded in 2004 and is a lay-led 501(c)3 organization working in partnership with Jesuit universities, high schools, and parishes, along with many other Catholic institutions and social justice partners. ISN’s website: www.ignatiansolidarity.net

protecting human life and dignity, saying, “It can never be right for the State to shirk its obligation of working actively for the betterment of the condition of the workingman (Jesuit Social Research Institute).”

Pope Francis used a metaphor to describe how work, “anoints us with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God who has worked and still works, who always acts; it gives one the ability to maintain oneself, one’s family, to contribute to the growth of one’s own nation (Vatican).”

ABOUT THE FAIR MINIMUM WAGE ACT OF 2013:

The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013, introduced in March by Senator Tom Harkin and Representative George Miller, would increase the federal minimum wage for employees to:

- \$8.20 an hour three months after the law is enacted;
- \$9.15 an hour after one year; and
- \$10.10 an hour after two years.

The legislation would tie the federal tipped wage to 70 percent of the minimum wage and index the minimum wage to the Consumer Price Index to keep up with the rising costs of living.

HOW RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE WILL HELP:

More than 30 million workers would receive a raise. Among them: 88% are adults over the age of twenty, 56% are women, nearly half are workers of color, and over 43% have some college education

The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013 would help restore the minimum wage to its historic level, making up for decades of erosion. The federal minimum wage has lost more than 30% of its value and would be over \$10 per hour today if it kept pace with the cost of living over the past forty years. The long-standing decline of the minimum wage, relative to the cost of living, has contributed to the growth of income inequality over the past three decades.

Bishop Stephen Blaire of the Diocese of Stockton, chairman of the USCCB committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, stated, “Every time Congress or an Administration has suggested raising the minimum wage, the bishops have been supportive simply because it is consistent with our teaching and we see the effects firsthand in the families of our parishioners and our own communities (Jesuit Social Research Institute).”

OUR REQUESTS:

Will the member of Congress support the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013 (H.R.1010; S.460)?

- Raise the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour by 2015, in three steps of 95 cents each
- Adjust the minimum wage to keep pace with the rising cost of living starting in 2016
- Raise the minimum wage for tipped workers to \$3 per hour