

Wage Justice

Four Covenant Group Gatherings



UUSC

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

www.uusc.org

Introduction

Welcome to Covenant Group Ministries with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

With these resources, UUSC supports members of the UU community in: the search for connection with each other and the larger global community; the quest for meaningful engagement with life's most challenging questions; and the pursuit to engage more effectively with local, national, and global social justice initiatives.

Through the Covenant Group model of intimacy and ultimacy, members will be inspired to take action on human rights issues that affect our global community. Small group worship and community building changes lives and enlivens commitments with purpose and passion. Individuals will find the strength and courage to take simple action steps or lead social justice projects that will ultimately help to change the world.

The Simple Steps for Economic Justice found on the inside back cover will help move your group from sharing and caring into commitment through direct action.

UUSC Covenant Group – The Session Structure

All sessions in this series will follow this simple structure. If you are not familiar with the Covenant Group model, we encourage you to read *The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry: Saving the World Ten at a Time* by Robert L. Hill.

The **welcome** (1 minute) offered at the beginning of each session is an optional statement of purpose. The group may wish to replace this statement with a covenant statement already adopted by the group or read it with the group covenant.

All of the **opening readings** (2 minutes) are taken from the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*.

The **chalice lighting** (2 minutes) is the same at the beginning of each session. This offers a familiar statement to center the group into worship.

The **opening checkin** (30-40 minutes) is an opportunity for creating connections between the members of the group. During this time, all group members are asked to give the gift of active listening, without questions or interruptions.

The **session topic** (5 minutes) or focus is provided through a short reading. Any member of the group can read the selected piece that will focus the group on a topic.

The **reflection questions** (60 minutes) offer the group members direction and center for sharing and dialogue. Share from a personal center of truth and love while other members listen from the heart. Refrain from debating, questioning, or judging other members.

During the **checkout** (10-15 minutes), the facilitator asks each person for a word or phrase that says something about how she or he is feeling as the meeting draws to an end. Group members can answer these questions: How are you feeling as we close this session? What has been most meaningful to you? What are you hoping for?

The **closing readings** (2 minutes) are taken from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

The chalice flame is extinguished with a brief reading during which the group participants symbolically become the **ambassadors of the light** (1 minute) who will carry our prophetic faith into action.

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Wage Justice

The Right to a Living Wage

Gathering One

Welcome and statement of purpose

We gather as a Covenant Circle to deepen our sense of meaning and community. In this spiritual community, we seek to better care for one another and to work together toward creating a kinder, more compassionate, and just local and global community.

Opening words: #418

Come into the circle of love and justice.
Come into the community of mercy, holiness, and health.
Come and you shall know peace and joy.

— Adapted from Israel Zangwill

Chalice lighting

We light this chalice to symbolize our living tradition
Let this flame symbolize our passion
 To bring our faith into action
Let this flame symbolize our commitment
 To bringing our prophetic voice to the people.
May this our passion and commitment
 Serve to advance human rights and social justice
 around the world.
So that all may live in the spirit of light and love.

Checkin

How is your spirit this evening? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here?

Reading

An excerpt from “The Right to a Living Wage,” a sermon by David Riley

The federal minimum wage, broadly and with some exceptions, says you can’t pay a person less than a certain amount per hour. Various states, including the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, have set higher minimum wages than the federal statute requires. Some cities have set higher standards, too, many of these for those who do business with the city government but, at least one, Santa Fe, sets a higher wage for nearly every employer.

A living wage isn’t a particular formula or concept we can objectively work out on a whiteboard. It is, instead, a result of a complex conversation among various groups — labor, workers, business owners, community activists, human services providers, and others — about what it honestly takes to live in a community.

What it takes to live in Tulsa is surely different than what it takes to live in Manhattan.

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But most importantly, a living wage is an expression of the idea, the powerful and important idea, that a person who works full time is entitled to live a life consistent with human dignity. That a job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it.

What does a living wage mean in real, human terms?

For one mother, perhaps, it means she can quit the part-time job she holds in addition to her full-time job and actually have dinner with her daughter. For one couple, perhaps, it means that one of them can work part time and attend school so that both of them can, eventually, have better lives. For one family, perhaps, it means no longer choosing between health care and heating bills.

Hope. Family. Dignity. A future. Those are the end results and those are fundamentally religious and moral outcomes.

Reflection questions

1. What is stirred in your heart when you hear that there are people working full time who still live in poverty?
2. Where do you meet and receive services from this group of people? How does it feel to interact with people who work hard yet continue to live in poverty?
3. How does this issue speak to the religious values you seek to live by?

Checkout

How are you feeling as we close this session? What has been most meaningful to you? What are you hoping for?

Closing words: #561

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has.

— Margaret Mead

Ambassador of the light

Although we extinguish this flame,
the spirit of life and love lives on
in our search for truth and justice.

May our actions be an expression of our commitment
to creating a more just society for all of
humanity.

So may it be. Amen.

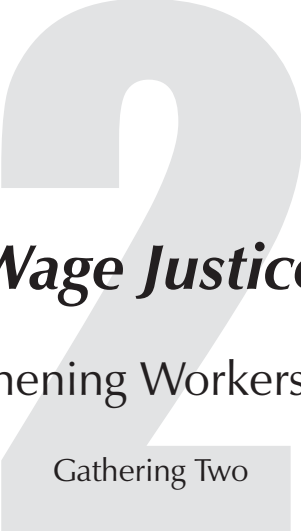
To learn more about UUSC's work advancing economic justice, visit www.uusc.org/economicjustice.

This Covenant Group series was created by Carie J. Johnsen, Harvard Divinity School, MDiv. III, and the Rev. Dr. Ellen Johnson-Fay.

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Wage Justice

Strengthening Workers' Rights

Gathering Two

Welcome and statement of purpose

We gather as a Covenant Circle to deepen our sense of meaning and community. In this spiritual community, we seek to better care for one another and to work together toward creating a kinder, more compassionate, and just local and global community.

Opening words: #429

Come into this place of peace
and let its silence heal your spirit;
Come into this place of memory
and let its history warm your soul;
Come into this place of prophecy and power
and let its vision change your heart.

— William F. Schulz

Chalice lighting

We light this chalice to symbolize our living tradition
Let this flame symbolize our passion
 To bring our faith into action
Let this flame symbolize our commitment
 To bringing our prophetic voice to the people.
May this our passion and commitment
 Serve to advance human rights and social justice
 around the world.
So that all may live in the spirit of light and love.

Checkin

How is your spirit this evening? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here?

Reading

Strengthening Workers' Rights

Realea and Marcelino both work in a poultry processing plant in Mississippi. Realea is single African-American mother in her 30s from Carthage, Miss. Marcelino is 22 and Mayan Mam. He was forced to leave Guatemala after trade policies opened the market to import cheap, subsidized U.S. grain, making it impossible for him to earn a living on his family's land.

Realea separates livers from gizzards in the largest poultry processing plant in the United States. She tries to ignore the stabbing pain in her forearms that gets worse by the day, a result of repetitive motion and the unwillingness of supervisors to implement rotation on the line.

Up the line, Marcelino spends his days hanging live chickens by their feet — a staggering 50 birds per minute. He favors his right arm, since he sustained a severe injury to his left arm when his smock sleeve

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was pulled into the blades of the slaughter room's unprotected fan.

Working with UUSC program partner MPOWER, marginalized workers like Realea and Marcelino are coming together and building bridges among workers of diverse backgrounds. Realea is taking Spanish classes and using her skills to help injured coworkers find doctors and health care. Marcelino has been able to obtain legal advice following his injury. UUSC supports these workers' rights in Mississippi, and we're working to expand it to other regions and industries.

Reflection questions

1. What resonates in your spirit as you read this story? Where do you hear the hope?
2. Are you surprised to learn that workers are being exploited and made to work in dangerous conditions in this country?
3. What emotions surface toward your country, immigrant workers, or corporations in the United States when you read this story? What responsibility do you share as a consumer?
4. How might this knowledge affect your future actions as a consumer?

Checkout

How are you feeling as we close this session? What has been most meaningful to you? What are you hoping for?

Closing words: #501

Spirit of Community, in which we share and find strength and common purpose, we turn our minds and hearts toward one another seeking to bring into our circle or concern all who need our love and support...

We are part of a web of life that makes us one with all humanity, one with all the universe.

We are grateful for the miracle of consciousness that we share, the consciousness that gives us the power to remember, to love, to care.

— Frederick E. Gillis

Ambassador of the light

Although we extinguish this flame,
the spirit of life and love lives on
in our search for truth and justice.

May our actions be an expression of our commitment
to creating a more just society for all of
humanity.

So may it be. Amen.

To learn more about UUSC's work advancing economic justice, visit www.uusc.org/economicjustice.

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Welcome and statement of purpose

We gather as a Covenant Circle to deepen our sense of meaning and community. In this spiritual community, we seek to better care for one another and to work together toward creating a kinder, more compassionate, and just local and global community.

Opening words: #432

If someone would scatter seed on the ground
 And would sleep and rise night and day,
 The seed would sprout and grow.
 The earth produces of itself
 First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.
 When the grain is ripe, the harvest has come.

— Mark 4

Chalice lighting

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 To bringing our prophetic voice to the people.
 May this our passion and commitment
 Serve to advance human rights and social justice
 around the world.
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Checkin

How is your spirit this evening? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here?

Reading

“Interfaith Delegation Visits Nicaragua to Understand Importance of Fair Trade”*

As part of the UUSC Coffee Project, four Unitarian Universalist activists accompanied UUSC staff, representatives of the fair trade company Equal Exchange, and representatives from other faith communities in February 2003 for an eight-day visit to coffee cooperatives. The UUSC activists who participated were able to witness the importance of fair trade and its human rights implications.

Coffee is the second most heavily traded commodity in the world, after oil, and it is a critical component of the economic well being of small coffee farmers in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. A severe coffee crisis in Central America in which coffee prices have dropped to historic lows has forced many small farmers to go into debt and lose their farms. Many are unable to provide for their families’ basic needs such as food, clothing, medicine, or education.

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Delegation members discovered that the crisis had hit home in Central America's coffee producing regions as it has in other regions of the world, but that fair trade is making a big difference in the lives of many. Fair trade guarantees the small farmers a fair price for their products, ends the cycle of debt, and enables farmers to provide for the basic needs of their families. It also promotes sustainable coffee growing environments through an additional premium for organic products.

Al Benford, a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church in Manchester, Conn., said, "We saw how receiving a fair price for their coffee enabled these [fair trade] cooperatives to flourish. They created their own quality control lab, staffed by a young man described as a 'product of their youth movement.' They were diversifying their crops," he explained.

"They were able to educate their children... [and] they were making preparation for hosting ecotourists as a way of making their community less dependent on agriculture. They were well organized, enthusiastic, and optimistic about the future of their community and their families."

In contrast, explained Benford, when they met coffee growers who were not involved in fair trade, "there was a completely different atmosphere. Much deeper and more pervasive poverty was evident, and these farmers did not appear to have much hope for even their immediate future."

**Adapted from www.uusc.org/news/Interfaith043003p.html.*

Reflection questions

1. How do the opening words relate or speak to your relationship with the coffee growers in Central America?
3. What resonates in your spirit when you read Benford's experience of the differing work environments for coffee growers and workers?
4. Share your feelings about why you do or do not drink fairly traded coffee. Share your feelings about the possibility of your actions having an impact upon another person's life.

Checkout

How are you feeling as we close this session? What has been most meaningful to you? What do you hope for?

Closing words: #494

The prayer of our souls is a petition for persistence; not for the one good deed, or single thought, but deed on deed, and thought on thought, until day calling unto day shall make a life worth living.

— W. E. B. Du Bois

Ambassador of the light

Although we extinguish this flame,
the spirit of life and love lives on
in our search for truth and justice.

May our actions be an expression of our commitment
to creating a more just society for all of humanity.
So may it be. Amen.

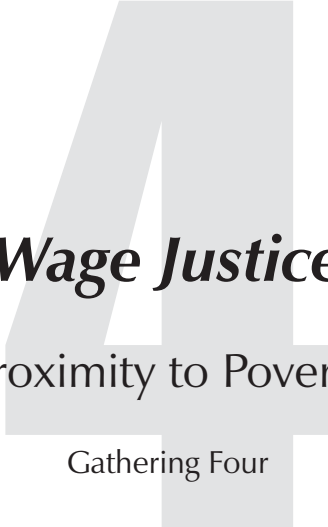
To learn more about UUSC's work to promote fair trade, visit www.uusc.org/fairtrade.

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Wage Justice

Proximity to Poverty

Gathering Four

Welcome and statement of purpose

We gather as a Covenant Circle to deepen our sense of meaning and community. In this spiritual community, we seek to better care for one another and to work together toward creating a kinder, more compassionate, and just local and global community.

Opening words: #431

O Spinner, Weaver, of our lives,
Your loom is love.
May we who are gathered here
be empowered by that love
to weave new patterns of Truth
and Justice into a web of life that is strong,
beautiful, and everlasting.

— Barbara Wells

Chalice lighting

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May this our passion and commitment
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Checkin

How is your spirit this evening? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here?

Reading

An excerpt from “Saving Souls,” a sermon by Joanne Giannino

We lack proximity to the poor. . . . The “social location” of the affluent Unitarian Universalist has changed; we are no longer “with” the poor, and they are no longer with us. The middle-class church doesn’t know the poor and they don’t know us. Wealthy Unitarian Universalists talk about the poor but have no friends who are poor.

I’ve been talking about this sermon with a lot of colleagues, friends, and family lately. I have struggled with it for precisely the reason Wallis writes about: my social location has changed. Some of you might identify with this reality. Some of you may not have changed social location, perhaps you were always here where many of us are now.

I grew up poor. Not poorest. We were working class. And we were poor. My mother will admit that now. So I too can say it out loud. My father was the son of immigrants who came here for a better life than they had in Italy. My dad finished eighth grade and then

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went to work. He served briefly in the army. And when he got out, he became a truck driver, first for Morgan Memorial, a charity group that accepted and then distributed furniture and other goods to the poor and needy. We got a lot of our furniture from Morgie's, as it was affectionately called.

Eventually, Dad got a position in a union shop and became a Teamster. He drove a truck for 31 years until he died. My mother worked as a nurse's aid, then studied nights to become a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) and years later, when I was an adult, went to college to become an RN.

Both my parents worked hard for everything that we had. We lived in various apartments throughout Boston, including the projects and a cold-water flat when my sister and I were very young. When I was six, they bought their own home in Brockton, Mass. That was quite an accomplishment. They were very proud of that fact.

I never really knew how hard it was for my parents. People who are poor try to keep that from their children, and even themselves. They can even be somewhat successful at what UU theologian Thandeka calls "class-passing." That's when the poor, the working class, and the middle class manage to appear "richer." We did that by buying things on credit: Cars, clothes, even food.

Reflection questions

1. What resonates in your heart when you hear that Unitarian Universalism, the "middle-class church doesn't know the poor and they don't know us."

2. What is your perception of "social location?" What privileges do you reap from your social location? How would this be different if you lived in poverty?
3. What feelings surface when you hear about this idea of "class-passing?" Do you appear "richer" than you are?

Checkout

How are you feeling as we close this session? What has been most meaningful to you? What are you hoping for?

Closing words: #434

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations, and inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to this community and to each other.

— Anonymous

Ambassador of the light

Although we extinguish this flame,
the spirit of life and love lives on
in our search for truth and justice.

May our actions be an expression of our commitment
to creating a more just society for all of
humanity.

So may it be. Amen.

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Simple Steps for Economic Justice

The right to a living wage

- Watch and discuss the DVD, “La Marcha: Working for Economic Justice,” the extraordinary story of the Santa Fe Living Wage Campaign. Order the DVD by calling UUSC at 800-388-3920 or online at www.uusc.org/store. Download the study/action guide at www.uusc.org/programs/econjustice/pdf/lamarcha_studyguide.pdf.
- Create a living wage worship service using interfaith resources that tie together economic justice, the right to a living wage, and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. *Let Justice Roll: Resources for Living Wage Worship and Community Events* is available at www.uusc.org/programs/econjustice/pdf/lw_resourceguide.pdf.
- Sign on to UUSC’s Wage Justice initiative at www.uusc.org/wagejustice.

Strengthening workers’ rights

- Learn more about UUSC’s work strengthening workers’ rights. Visit: www.uusc.org/economicjustice.
- Invite a UUSC speaker to visit your congregation to share more about this work. Visit www.uusc.org/rightsaloud.
- Read and discuss UUSC’s statement, “Immigration, Economic Justice, and Human Rights.” Visit www.uusc.org/programs/econjustice/pdf/ej_immigration.pdf.

Fair trade

- Learn how UU purchases of Equal Exchange products enable UUSC to support economic justice and fair wages through the Small Farmer Fund. Visit www.uusc.org/fairtrade.
- Encourage your youth group to do a fundraiser selling Equal Exchange fairly traded products. For this and other ways to support fair trade, visit www.uusc.org/fairtrade.
- Read more about UUSC’s work advancing economic justice on our blog, www.uusc.org/blog, keyword: workers’ rights.

Proximity to poverty

- Order resources and educate yourself about class cultures, class identities, and classism at www.classmatters.org.

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