

“...I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.”

Matthew 25:40 (CEB)



2014
United Church of Christ
Legislative Priorities

Introduction

Throughout Scripture, we are reminded that when human community is broken by injustice, the relationship of the community to God is broken. Right relationship in human community and with God is reflected in how “the least of these” are treated – the orphans, the widows, the sojourners.

Laws and policies order our common life. They reflect our priorities as a people, including what we value and who we value. In responding faithfully to God’s call for abundant life for all people, in which no one is left behind, we are called to work for just public policies as they are expressed in the legislation debated before Congress, and in decisions made by the President and federal agencies charged with implementing our laws.

Policy debate and decision-making is often dominated by powerful special interests. In contrast, we stand upon the ground of our faith to work for the common good. In order to magnify the voices of our members and our General Synod, the United Church of Christ (UCC) Washington Office has identified several legislative priorities to help guide UCC advocacy work in 2014. We believe these issues offer a significant opportunity for UCC advocates to be a bold public voice for justice in the year to come.



Economic Inequality

Jobs should lift people out of poverty, not keep them there. The unfortunate reality however, is that poor public policies often make it impossible for working people to raise themselves out of poverty. Many Americans who work full-time are not given benefits or paid time off, and are unable to provide for their families.

As United Church of Christ advocates, we understand our responsibility to care for the poor and vulnerable. Our General Synod has spoken repeatedly on issues of economic justice, reaffirming time and again our commitment to raising and keeping people out of poverty.

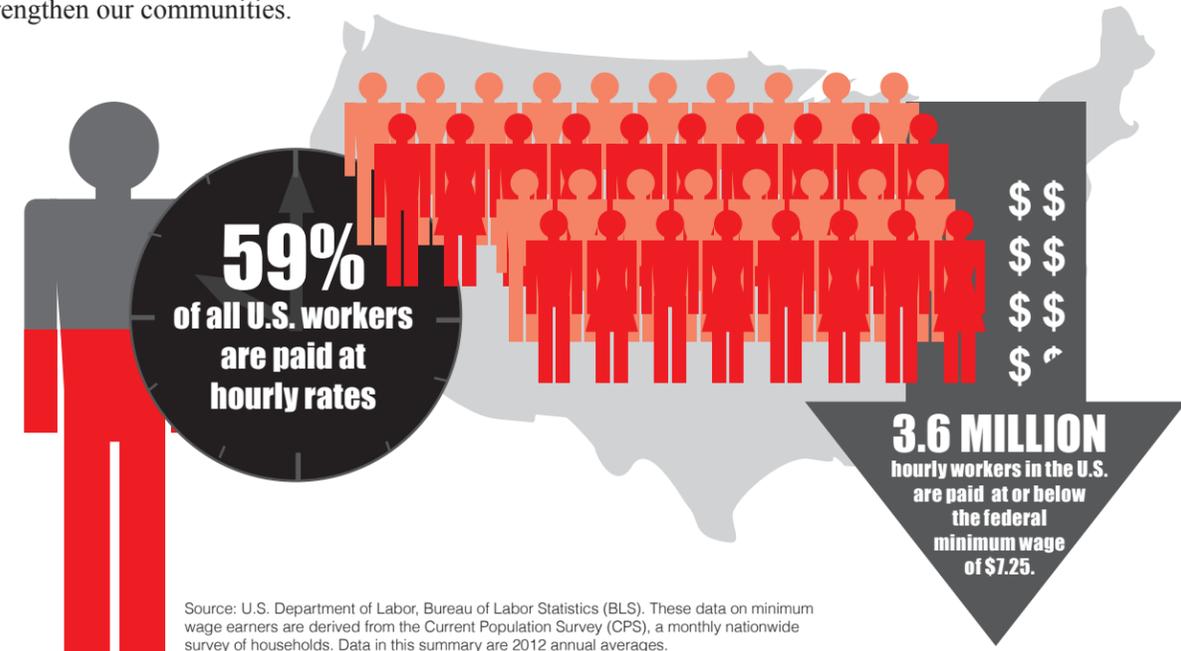
As advocates, we have an opportunity in 2014 to be a voice for policies that reduce inequality and strengthen our communities.

“The federal minimum wage for tipped workers (\$2.13 per hour) has not increased in over 20 years.”

Source: Restaurant Opportunities Center United

“In the past 40 years, the federal minimum wage (\$7.25) has lost more than 30% of its value and would today be more than \$10.60 per hour if it had kept pace with the cost of living.”

Source: Economic Policy Institute



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). These data on minimum wage earners are derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly nationwide survey of households. Data in this summary are 2012 annual averages.

Restoring Voting Rights

Voting is at the heart of the democratic process. It is the most fundamental access point for individuals to engage in the public dialogue and have a voice in the public policy decision-making process that can shape the future of our local, regional, national and global collective life.

Justice cannot be achieved unless the rules for governing the democratic process are fair to all, yet voter rights have been significantly undermined in recent years. We have seen state efforts to restrict voter rights through stringent voter identification laws and rollbacks in early voting, and last year’s Supreme Court decision eliminated key provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

The UCC General Synod has long supported voting rights and addressing obstacles to participation in the electoral process within the broader context of the civil rights struggle. For justice advocates, 2014 will be an important time for us to focus our energy towards restoring voting rights in the lead up to the midterm elections.

“Prior to the 2012 election, 41 states introduced 180 restrictive voting bills, with 19 states passing 27 restrictive measures.”

Militarism and Pentagon Spending

Our federal budget is a moral document. Through it we express our goals and values as a nation. These spending priorities impact the lives of millions.

The issue of military spending is a particular challenge for us as people of faith. We see images throughout Scripture calling us to “beat swords into plowshares... spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4) challenging our inclination to violence and militarism. The Bible calls us to look for and work for God’s peace, God’s promise of transformation in which a “new heaven and new earth” will come in which justice dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

We believe that now is a time when we are uniquely positioned to move forward into a new paradigm by calling on policy makers restrain Pentagon spending and reallocate resources toward humanitarian and developmental needs, conflict prevention and civilian peace-building initiatives.

“The 2014 defense spending budget provides for \$520.5 billion in base military spending, more than \$2 billion more than 2013.”



2014 Legislative Priorities

Justice & Witness Ministries
United Church of Christ

PRIORITY



God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



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