

**GA-1326**  
**(Sense-of-the-Assembly)**  
**RESOLUTION CONCERNING WAGE THEFT**

**Adopted by the General Assembly**

**WHEREAS**, the Bible commands employers to “pay [workers] their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it;” (Deuteronomy 24:15); and

**WHEREAS**, the Bible also warns: “Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice, who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages” (Jeremiah 22:13); and

**WHEREAS**, our Lord, Jesus Christ, preached compassion and commitment for the poor; and

**WHEREAS**, working people are entitled to all of the wages they have earned; and

**WHEREAS**, wage enforcement policies express the moral values of the public, including our valuation of honest work and honest pay; and

**WHEREAS**, private and public economic enterprises are responsible for and need to be held accountable for paying workers all that they are due; and

**WHEREAS**, some employers seek to minimize labor costs, by withholding wages from workers or committing payroll fraud; and

**WHEREAS**, wage theft occurs when workers are not paid all their wages, denied minimum wage or overtime pay they are due, or are not paid at all for the work they perform or exploited by employers wage theft among low wage workers is a well-documented epidemic<sup>1</sup>; and

**WHEREAS**, in their events, congregations, ministries, organizations and institutions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have significant purchasing power in sectors that are rife with wage theft such as hotels, restaurants and catering firms;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in Orlando, Florida, July 13-17, 2013, invites and encourages

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<sup>1</sup> A 2009 survey of low-wage workers in New York, Chicago and LA revealed that 1 in 4 workers were not paid the minimum wage. Of those who worked overtime 76 percent were not paid for it. The survey also found that 10 percent of tipped workers have their tips stolen. The average low-income worker loses approximately \$2600 per year in unpaid wages \$2634, out of total earnings of \$17,616. Center for Urban Economic Development, UIC National Employment Law Project, UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment:  
[http://www.unprotectedworkers.org/index.php/broken\\_laws/index](http://www.unprotectedworkers.org/index.php/broken_laws/index).

all Disciples congregations, organizations, ministries and institutions - including seminaries and divinity schools - to address issues of wage theft biblically, theologically and ethically; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that all members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are encouraged to support national, state and local legislation that provides means of protecting workers from wage theft and prosecuting wage thieves.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that all members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) consider ways that they might unknowingly participate in wage theft by purchasing goods or services produced or provided by workers who are cheated of their wages.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are encouraged to support movements that address wage theft and cooperate with workers, employers, labor unions and organizations that are working to secure greater justice in this area; and

**FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED** that all congregations, ministries, organizations and institutions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will diligently strive to see that the businesses and/or individuals with whom they contract are ethically treated and justly paid.

Pilgrimage Christian Church, Suitland, Maryland

## **BACKGROUND**

Wage theft occurs when workers are not paid all their wages, denied minimum wage or overtime pay they are due, or are not paid at all for the work they perform. In any economic climate this creates a difficult and unjust burden on the worker. In our current recession, the burden becomes almost impossible. Every year in the United States, billions of dollars in wages are taken from millions of workers. Each of these workers is the victim of wage theft.

Various academic surveys have found that far from being a small, contained issue, wage theft is a national epidemic. A 2009 survey of low-wage workers in New York, Chicago and LA revealed that 1 in 4 workers were not paid the minimum wage. Of those who worked overtime 76 percent were not paid for it. The survey also found that 10 percent of tipped workers have their tips stolen. The average low-income worker loses approximately \$2600 per year in unpaid wages \$2,634, out of total earnings of \$17,616. (*Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers: Violations of Employment and Labor Laws in American Cities*, 2009) Wage theft does not only affect low-wage workers. Many middle class workers are victims as well.

Christians and other people of faith are concerned about wage theft for several reasons. First, we recognize that "Thou Shalt not Steal," applies to both workers and employers.

Workers should be loyal and trusted employees, and thus should never steal from their employees. Employers should treat workers with respect and dignity, including paying them for all their work.

Second, given the widespread nature of wage theft in America, we recognize that stopping wage theft will help alleviate poverty and inequality.

Third, our congregations are filled with many ethical business leaders. They pay people fairly and legally. Stopping and deterring wage theft makes sure these ethical business leaders are not undercut by businesses that cut underpay workers.

Fourth, we care about the economic health of the nation. There is no better and more direct way to stimulate the economy than to put more money into the hands of low-wage workers. Stopping and deterring wage theft will do just that.

There are many ways congregations can learn more about wage theft. If the congregation has an adult study group, they can use the Congregational Study Guide in the appendix of *Wage Theft in America* to learn more about the issues.

Across the nation, states and local municipalities are figuring out how to strengthen outreach to workers about their rights and enforcement of wage laws. Congregations can partner with enforcement agencies and workers centers to reach out to low-wage and immigrant workers. Congregations can also advocate strong policies for enforcing wage laws with appropriate local, state or national leaders.

Although it is impossible to be a completely ethical consumer, some ideas include:

- Look for union-made products and services. Unions are one of the best vehicles for stopping and deterring wage theft, so a union-made product is generally a safe bet in terms of good worker treatment. Visit [www.unionlabel.org](http://www.unionlabel.org) for a searchable website on union products;
- Support co-ops. Community and worker run co-ops usually treat workers legally and fairly;
- Check ethical business guides. A few communities have developed ethical eating guides or living wage certifications. Seek such a guide or work with community allies to develop one; and

People of faith can advocate laws in the city, county, province, state or nation that:

- Expand coverage of those protected by wage laws (for example farmworkers and homecare workers are excluded from many labor protections);
- Ensure penalties for those who steal wages, especially for repeat violators;
- Increase the number of enforcement staff;
- Strengthen penalties against employers who retaliate against workers who file complaints.

Other resources include:

2012: Clean Cars Dirty Work: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-full-report-clean-cars-dirty-work-20120921,0,5106074.htmlpage>

2012: Houston Wage Theft Report: <http://downwithwagetheft.org/resources/houston-wage-theft-report>

2012: Behind Kitchen Doors: Survey of Various Cities Restaurant Industry: <http://rocunited.org/research-resources/our-reports>

2011: NJ Wage Theft Report: <http://rocunited.org/research-resources/our-reports>

For a collection of sources:

[http://wagetheft.org/wordpress/?page\\_id=525](http://wagetheft.org/wordpress/?page_id=525)