

# “Justice And A Living Wage”

**By Rev. Dr. Corey Walker**

Virginia is a state of contrasts. Birthplace of presidents and capital of the Confederacy. Best state for businesses and worst state for workers.

The recent installation of Kehinde Wiley’s “Rumors of War” monument at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts marked a major step in Virginia’s attempt to reconcile its past.

The current “Raise the Wage” campaign marks an important step for Virginia to reconcile its standing for workers.

The “Raise the Wage” campaign is a coalition of citizens, civic organizations, and unions who support increasing the minimum wage to at least \$15 per hour and removing many of the exemptions for businesses to pay the minimum wage.

The argument for a living wage is not one based on the top 1 percent who possess more wealth than the entire American middle class. Rather, it is about those at the bottom, the least among us – the young, women, people of color – who are among the lowest-paid of the over 82 million – 58.5 percent of all workers – hourly-paid US workers.

The movement for a living wage is not just about economics and income. It is about justice itself. This is why faith leaders from across our nation – Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, and people of good will – support every effort to raise the minimum wage to establish living wages. It is about creating the conditions of possibility for all people to live and labor with dignity.

Nations are not just bundles of economic goods. Nations are diverse communities of citizens who share a common humanity and seek a common good. A living wage is part of the common good. Living with low wages, poverty, and inequality not only



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Rising costs of housing, food, transportation and the evisceration of a social safety net through public policies of austerity and tax policies that benefit the wealthy, work against the most vulnerable in their quest to live, learn, and love with dignity and humanity. The choice we face is not dictated by the logic of a God-like market. Rather our choice is about how we as citizens prioritize

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hinders the cause of justice, it undermines the worth, value and dignity of our common human community.

The movement for a living wage is a call to recognize and affirm the worth, value, and dignity of all citizens. By providing a base level of wage security, people are able to provide for their families and meaningfully contribute to their community in a decent and dignified manner.

Progress is not just measured by the latest increase in the Dow Jones Industrial Average, but rather how we maintain ties of community and strengthen bonds of trust and caring for our fellow citizens. A living wage goes to the very heart of what it means to be a human being and to authentically live in a democratic society.

In a wealthy nation, it is imperative to provide for all of God’s children. No person should go hungry, homeless or helpless in a land of plenty. The costs of a living wage infinitely exceed an economic logic when measured against the worth of human life and the dignity of the human spirit.

and value human worth, value and dignity.

No one should labor and not be able to meet the basic needs for living in our society. This has long been recognized by our political and moral leaders from President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Second Bill of Rights” to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “Poor Peoples’ Campaign” to the “Raise the Wage Campaign” today.

The measure of a nation is not how it treats the wealthy and well off. Rather, it is the care and compassion it gives to those who are vulnerable and least secure – the “least of these.”

To become a true commonwealth and move beyond being a state of contrasts, our elected representatives must pass a bill to raise the minimum wage to \$15 by 2025 and make Virginia a living wage state.

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