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## A LIVING WAGE MANIFESTO

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Remarks were made at the launching of the "Living Wage For All" banner at Plymouth UCC in downtown Seattle.

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For 50 years Plymouth Church has been providing shelter and assistance to the homeless, hungry and mentally ill in our city. But, after committing an enormous amount of time, energy and money, we must admit that homelessness and hunger are as rampant in our community as they were a half century ago. The times demand something more. We are beginning to connect the dots between chronic homelessness, hunger and poverty and the lack of living wages for full time workers.

It is shocking to learn that there are full-time workers who are homeless in our city. There are full-time workers who must make daily decisions between, for example, feeding their children or providing child-care for them. We must face the harsh realities of the consequences to the people who struggle to survive at the bottom of a society marked by extreme income inequality. All the social and economic indicators are telling us that our society is becoming more unbalanced between the rich and the poor.

For example:

- 95% of the economic gains in the recent recovery have gone to the now infamous 1%, while most in the bottom 99% have actually lost ground.
- The gap between CEO incomes and ordinary workers' wages has increased by about 1,000% since the 1950's.

Most of the full time janitors, maintenance workers, hotel workers, and cashiers in Seattle earn less than \$25,000 a year, placing them only a few thousand dollars above the federal poverty level for a family of three, a typical family size for many of these workers, well below the self-sufficiency standard and well below the federal low-income level.

All across this city, thousands of low-wage workers are cleaning office buildings and hotel rooms, bussing and washing dishes, cooking and serving food. Most of these workers toil full-time at hard and sometimes dangerous jobs. Yet their wages are so low, they cannot earn enough to meet their basic needs. Many of them qualify for public assistance programs, such as food stamps. Often they work at two jobs in order to survive. Benefits such as health care are rarely provided for these workers. Without

union representation, most are powerless to protect themselves against arbitrary labor practices.

Jesus during his earthly ministry continually proclaimed the Good News of what he labeled “the Kingdom of God” or “the Kingdom of Heaven.” These phrases summarize the message and passion of Jesus. They refer to in the words of Theologian Marcus Borg, “what life would be like on earth if God were king and the rulers of this world were not.” It is life ruled by love, compassion, and justice. Justice does not mean absolutely equal. But it does mean that everybody is to have the material essentials of life, even if some have more. Christians are called to actively work for and give their lives to this Kingdom of God and to challenge the political and social systems that obstruct it. Why does the God of the Bible care about systemic justice? The answer is disarmingly simple. Again in the Borg’s words, “God cares about justice because the God of the Bible cares about human suffering. And the single biggest cause of unnecessary human suffering throughout history has been and is unjust social systems.”

The times demand the active response of people of faith. The time has come for those who proclaim their allegiance to Jesus Christ to make their voice heard in support of fair treatment and a living wage for workers.

Plymouth Church formally supports the Church Council of Greater Seattle’s Living Wage Principles for all full-time workers. A living wage is simply the compensation for one’s labor that allows one to live a self-sufficient life with dignity and without governmental or charitable assistance. A living wage is a principle of justice for all full time workers.

What does a living wage look like? Specifically, workers should be able to

- Wake up in a safe, affordable home.
- Cook a healthful meal without worrying about where the next meal is coming from.
- Access efficient transit options, including public transit.
- Take their children to a quality daycare or school.
- Go to a job where they are respected, safe and valued.
- Enjoy good working conditions and have a voice on the job, including the right to organize.
- Visit the doctor without worrying, about how to pay for it.
- Have adequate time to spend with family, rest for renewal, and participate in community life.

IF THESE THINGS ARE VIEWED AS NECESSARY FOR SOME OF US, THEY ARE NECESSARY FOR ALL OF US.