

'Just Wages' in the United States

What is a 'just wage'?

A just wage – often referred to as a “living wage” in political organizing – is a level of pay that enables workers to support themselves and their families in a way that is consistent with human dignity, without having to work a second job or rely on government subsidies. Many current proposals, including President Obama’s executive order for federal contractors in 2014, call for a minimum wage of \$10.10 per hour with scheduled increases for inflation.

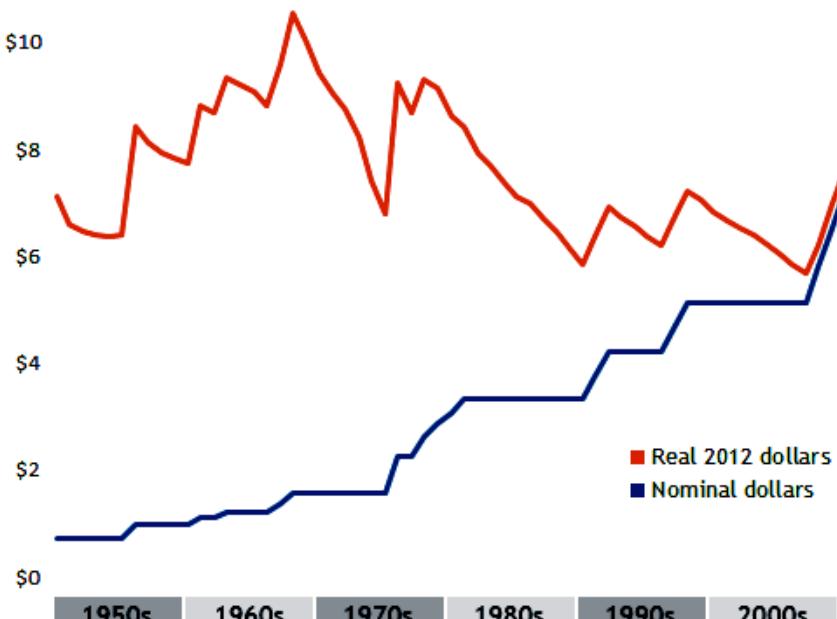
What is the situation now?

The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour. A full-time employee working the entire year at this wage would make \$15,080, which is less than 150% of the federal poverty guidelines for an individual, and well below the poverty level for a family of two or more. A special minimum wage of \$2.13 applies to tipped employees such as waitstaff, though employers must make up the difference if the minimum wage plus tips do not reach \$7.25 per hour.

Who is most affected?

According to the Economic Policy Institute, an increase of the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour would provide a raise to 27.8 million workers. Of these, nearly 88% are at least 20 years old, over a third are at least 40 years old, and over a quarter are raising children.

The inflation-adjusted value of today's minimum wage is far below that of the 1960s.



A Just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice. In determining fair pay both the needs and the contributions of each person must be taken into account. Remuneration for work should guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural, and spiritual level, taking into account the role and the productivity of each, the state of the business, and the common good.' Agreement between the parties is not sufficient to justify morally the amount to be received in wages.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2434

Is there anything I can do?

- **Learn** – Take a class. Attend a guest lecture. Talk with a professor. Read. Research.
- **Act** – Get involved with extracurricular organizations. Form a discussion group. Talk to your elected representatives. Serve in the community.
- **Reflect** – No matter your faith background and identity, put your intentions for the world, its people, and its resources in your prayer and reflections.

Resources

US Conference of Catholic Bishops
usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/labor-employment/

Interfaith Worker Justice
iwj.org

National Employment Law Project
raisetheminimumwage.com

Economic Policy Institute
epi.org

For more on social justice and what you can do, visit Loyola's Social Justice Web Portal at luc.edu/socialjustice