



Massachusetts Catholic Conference  
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## **The Value of a Just Wage**

### *A Statement of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts*

In its long history, the Catholic Church has consistently supported the right to a just wage for labor as an essential element of a just society and the dignity of every person. Insufficient compensation for labor violates the dignity of the worker and that worker's family. A just wage supports the individual, families, and society as a whole.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has maintained for some time an unemployment rate of around 6.8%,<sup>1</sup> which is higher than the national average. The minimum wage has not been increased in Massachusetts since 2008. At the current minimum wage of \$8 per hour, an average worker in Massachusetts working full time would earn \$16,640 before taxes. This is hardly enough to pay for basic necessities such as food and rent, let alone support a family. Because of this, many families find it difficult to afford basic needs and are forced to pursue multiple low-wage jobs in search of financial survival and a small sense of stability.

The Catholic Church is among the state's largest social service providers. The Church's associated ministries give daily witness to the struggle of those who require assistance with the basic costs of rent, utilities, transportation, and food. Low-wage workers are often trapped in the desperate cycle of poverty. Pope Francis has recently reiterated that "the dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies."<sup>2</sup> Any economic policy of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts should be informed by the inherent dignity of every capable man and woman working for the betterment of their own livelihood and that of their family and society.

It is therefore the position of the Catholic Church and the Bishops of the Commonwealth that the current minimum wage is insufficient to support and uphold the dignity of individuals and families. The Bishops of the Commonwealth speak in one voice on this issue as pastors. We do not pretend to be economists and thus leave it to those more knowledgeable in that area to determine a just wage for the lowest paid workers. In determining that level of compensation, the concerns of small and family-owned businesses must be considered as well. These businesses

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mass.gov/lwd/economic-data/>

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 203 at 160, 2013.

are naturally less able to absorb the costs of such a wage increase, unlike larger businesses that may adapt more readily.

Regardless, the costs for the basic necessities of life continue to escalate year after year. Low income families are the hardest hit by these ever-increasing costs. It is the belief of the Catholic Bishops that a raise in the minimum wage is an important step towards fairness and justice and we urge the legislature to address this growing concern this session.

+His Eminence Seán P. Cardinal O'Malley, OFM, Cap.  
Archbishop of Boston

+Most Reverend George W. Coleman  
Bishop of Fall River

+Most Reverend Timothy A. McDonnell  
Bishop of Springfield

+Most Reverend Robert J. McManus  
Bishop of Worcester

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The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester.