

ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE
Reflections
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Working for Justice

“God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” -- Micah 6:8

When the North Carolina-based textile manufacturer Pillowtex declared bankruptcy, it shut down five NC factories and laid off 5,500 people. Without notice, workers lost their incomes and health insurance. Some faced foreclosure on their homes. Many laid-off workers could not find comparable jobs in their area.

The ripple effects of the plant closures devastated local economies. But the effects did not stop there. Local churches were impacted as well. Congregations wanted to help. Prayer services, food, and emergency funds were generously offered. But everyone realized these efforts were inadequate. Congregations could not provide families with health insurance or on-going mortgage payments. Nor could they restore lost jobs to a hard-hit community.

Economic hardship is not a rare event. Around the country, millions of people are unemployed and millions more work part time when they need and prefer full-time work. One-quarter of all jobs pay a wage so low that a full-time worker cannot keep a family of four above poverty. Some 45 million people, predominantly low-wage workers and their families, lack health insurance.

What is the role of the church in the midst of unemployment and joblessness? When jobs pay too little? When housing, childcare, and health care are too expensive?

The church is called by God to act with kindness, to care for those in need. Congregations respond faithfully by feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and helping workers who lose their jobs.

But God’s people are also called to do justice. The Biblical vision of justice requires us to move beyond charity and works of mercy. We are called to create the economic conditions and institutions that will begin to put an end to the hardships God’s people face.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to care for the immediate needs of the unemployed and to lobby Congress for better international trade policies and an improved unemployment insurance system. We are called to give food to the food pantry and to ensure that every worker has a living wage. We are called to reconfigure social programs to provide a wholesome life to those who rely on them. We are called to care and to help. We are called to be informed, to demonstrate, to organize, to lobby, and to vote.

Workers need jobs with good wages and benefits. Everyone needs health insurance and affordable housing. The country needs a strong safety net to provide income, retraining, and other services for the unemployed. Let us be about the work of living into God’s reign. With God’s help, may we create a new, more just society within in the midst of the old one.

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