

# Congregational Study Guide

## For *Wage Theft in America*

Congregations are encouraged to use *Wage Theft in America* as an adult study program. Below is an outline designed for four 50-minute discussion periods, a common time frame for adult education programs. If you have fewer sessions, or more time during each session, adjust the schedule accordingly. A longer time period, such as 1½ hours per session, is preferable for discussions, guest presentations, and reflection.

### Leader Preparation

- Publicize the study program in congregational communication vehicles and recruit people personally to participate.
- Order books for participants. Books are available from Interfaith Worker Justice and The New Press. Books will be available from major booksellers, including Amazon and Powells Books (a union bookstore) by Spring 2009.
- Research your denomination/faith body's positions on work and wages. See Appendix E for selected resources. Make copies of appropriate statements, if available. (Statements on living wages and economic justice are appropriate for Session I. Statements on unions and the rights of workers to organize are appropriate for Session II.)
- Recruit people to lead opening and closing prayers or reflections. Urge those who would like prepared responsive readings or prayers to look on the Interfaith Worker Justice website at [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org).
- Inquire among the congregation's members to see if there are workers who have had their wages stolen. If the congregation has workers in low- and moderate-wage jobs, it should not be hard to locate someone who has had wages stolen. If the congregation is more affluent, talk with young people who have had jobs at restaurants to find someone who knows about wage theft. Having someone from the congregation who has had wages stolen will reinforce the book's point that wage theft is all around us.
- Contact a local worker center or union leader for participation in Session II. (Many workers centers and legal clinics are listed in Appendix D.)
- Visit the book's website at [www.wagetheft.org](http://www.wagetheft.org) to view speaker suggestions, additional resources, and comments from other congregations for improving the study.
- Write each session's outline on a board or newsprint sheet before each session.
- Only Session I suggests introducing each person, but be sure to welcome new participants who join in later sessions.

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## Session I: The Crisis of Wage Theft

Participant Preparation: Read Chapters 1–4.

Opening Prayer/Reflection (5 minutes)

Introductions (5 minutes)

Questions and Discussion: (25 minutes if there is a guest or 35 minutes if there is no guest)

Do you believe the nation faces a wage theft crisis? Did you know workers' wages were being stolen?

What surprised you most about how unethical employers steal wages?

Did you agree with the arguments about why unethical employers steal wages? Are there other reasons?

What could be done to make the laws simpler for employers and workers alike?

What religious principles (and faith body statements if available) address these issues?

Worker from the Congregation – optional: (10 minutes)

Ask the worker to share experiences about getting paid.

Next session's assignments: (2 minutes)

Read Chapters 5 and 6.

Talk with three friends about wage theft and see if they know of people who have experienced problems.

Closing prayer/reflection (3 minutes)

## Session II: Unions and Workers Centers

Participant Preparation: Read Chapters 5 and 6

Opening Prayer/Reflection (5 minutes)

Questions and Discussion: (20 minutes if you have a guest or 40 minutes if there is no guest)

What happened when you talked with friends about wage theft? Had anyone you know had a problem or heard of problems with wages getting paid?

Have you ever had any experiences with unions? Do you think they are a vehicle for stopping wage theft? Why or why not?

Are there any workers centers in your community? If not, should there be?

What religious principles (and faith body statements if available) support workers rights to organize? How are congregations in your community supporting workers centers or unions that are trying to improve working conditions for workers in low-wage jobs?

Guest from a Workers Center or a Union— optional: (20 minutes)

If either a leader from a workers center or a union can join the session, ask the person to share his or her experiences with wage theft and how either the workers center or union fights wage theft.

Next session's assignments: (2 minutes)

Read Chapters 7 through 10.

Read the labor law posters at your office. Are they clear about what the law is and what you should do if you have a problem.

Do you know anyone who tried to organize a union? If so, ask the person what happened.

Closing prayer/reflection (3 minutes)

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## Session III: The Department of Labor

Participant Preparation: Read Chapters 7–10.

Opening Prayer/Reflection (5 minutes)

Questions and Discussion: (40 minutes)

Did you find the labor law posters at your office? Were they clear?

Did you talk with anyone who had tried to organize a union? What was the experience? (Be careful not to let this question take up too much time, because the real focus of this session should be on government's responsibility in fighting wage theft.)

Had you ever heard of the Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labor before reading the manual? Do you know anyone who has ever filed a claim with the Department of Labor? What was the experience?

What do you think are appropriate ways to honor and recognize ethical business leaders?

What do you think should be the government-imposed punishments and disincentives for employers who steal wages from workers?

Next session's assignments: (2 minutes)

Read Chapters 11 and 12.

Talk with a few workers in your community who work in industries known for wage theft, such as restaurants, residential construction, or car washes. Ask the workers about their working conditions and if they ever have problems getting paid all their wages. If you talk with home health aides, ask if they think they should be covered by overtime laws. (Make sure not to ask the questions in a public setting or in front of their employers.) Even though it may seem awkward to ask workers you don't know about their working conditions, you'll be surprised how readily most workers will talk about their situations if they are comfortable and have time.

Closing prayer/reflection (3 minutes)

## Session IV: What You Can Do

Participant Preparation: Read Chapters 11–12.

Opening Prayer/Reflection (5 minutes)

Questions and Discussion: (35 minutes)

Did you hear anything interesting in talking with workers in your community?

Why is fighting wage theft good for America?

What could your congregation do to fight wage theft? Who do you need to talk with to make this happen? Clarify who will follow-up.

What will you commit to do to help stop wage theft?

Evaluation (5 minutes)

What did you like about the study?

What changes in the study would you recommend?

Closing prayer/reflection (3 minutes)

Follow-up: Please type up the evaluation notes and post on the book's website at [www.wagetheft.org](http://www.wagetheft.org). Thanks.