

Establishing an Ethic for Worker Justice

AN ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR CONGREGATIONS

Let
justice
roll
down
like a
river.

-Amos 5:24

introduction

This assessment tool is meant to help congregations become more attentive to decisions regarding:

- the hiring and treatment of employees;
- investments and banking; and
- contracting and purchasing

to ensure that these decisions reflect the values and beliefs of faith communities. This assessment tool is not meant as judgment on any community. Instead, it is our hope that this tool will help congregations become more intentional about bringing faith convictions to bear on important aspects of congregational life.

how to use this resource:

REFLECTION ON SCRIPTURE

The first section of this resource is a reflection on worker justice based on Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Congregations and committees may share these reflections and choose some references for further prayers and reflection.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

The reflection is followed by four areas related to congregational ethics and worker justice. Each area begins with a series of assessment questions. Committees/congregations should answer “Yes” or “No” to each question. This is not meant as a test that will be scored or graded. It is meant to help congregations assess whether their policies and procedures reflect professed faith values and principles.

RESOURCES

Each question section is followed by a list of resources to help guide congregations in this process. Congregations or committees may want to start with just one or two areas surfaced in the assessment process. No congregation can do everything. The important thing is to begin somewhere.

Scripture Reflection

A basic principle of both Jewish and Christian faith is that religion must be lived out in relationships. Faith is not merely a matter of individual piety. In I John 3:18 we are charged to "...Love not in word or speech, but in truth and action." The book of James is clear that faith without action is empty.

In the Hebrew tradition, God demands of those who have received the mercy of God's own justice, liberation and abundance, that they ensure the same treatment is given to people with whom they would live in peace. Amos 5:24 charges God's people to "Let justice roll down like waters."

It is not always possible to point to specific scripture passages in describing the moral implications of our economic choices. Yet the clear expectation of God in scripture is for fair treatment of others in our employment: "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages...because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt" (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). James 5:4 warns, "The wages of the worker held back in fraud cry out!"

Further, all are to have the opportunity for work to support themselves and their families. This is certainly implied in Jesus' parable

of the workers waiting in the market place (Matthew 20:1-15): The landowner goes repeatedly to find those who are without work, to guarantee their employment.

The God of scripture demands fair treatment of workers. So Malachi 3:5 warns: "I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against... those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts." Jeremiah 22:13-17 indicts those who build luxurious homes for themselves without treating fairly the laborers who build it: "Woe to [the one] who builds [a] house by unrighteousness, and upper rooms by injustice; who makes neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages."

No religious organization would intentionally treat workers unfairly. Yet it is easy to overlook the needs of workers. In the interests of keeping budgets low, there is often a practice of paying church workers less than the "market rate" with an expectation that working for a religious organization is a reward in itself. There is truth in this assumption for many, yet it is still clear that "the worker is entitled to his wages." When we use contractors who may not embrace the values of just compensation, we must be especially vigilant to ensure workers receive an amount providing a decent living for themselves and their families.



I. Hiring & Compensating Employees

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Has the congregation reviewed denominational guidelines regarding just compensation, and other ethical questions regarding the hiring and treatment of employees?
Yes No
2. Is the process for hiring open to everyone who may qualify? Are job openings advertised in the congregation as well as other outlets?
Yes No
3. Is there a consideration in the hiring process for racial, ethnic, and gender balance on the staff? Does the staff reflect the demographics of the surrounding community?
Yes No
4. Is the wage/salary a living wage? How does the wage/salary/benefits package compare to compensation offered for similar positions? Are salaries commensurate with the skill levels needed for the job?
Yes No
5. Do lay employees receive benefits comparable to clergy?
Yes No

RESOURCES TO GUIDE YOU:

1. **FEDERAL and STATE LAWS.** Although the size of many congregations' staff exempts it from most local, state, and federal civil rights laws, these laws can serve as a baseline for congregational ethics to protect workers from discrimination in pay, hours, work assignments, hiring, firing, promotions, layoffs, and other terms and conditions of employment on the basis of gender, race, religion, ancestry and national origin, disability, and sexual orientation. Copies of the federal rules (free) and/or a copy of a Workers Rights Manual for selected states (\$5.00) are available from Interfaith Worker Justice, 1020 West Bryn Mawr, Chicago, IL 60660, (773) 728-8400; www.iwj.org; e-mail info@iwj.org.
2. **NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY.** Congregations may consider developing a nondiscrimination/equal opportunity employer statement. One model for to consider is available from the Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues, 1020 West Bryn Mawr, Chicago, IL 60660, (773) 728-8400.
3. **LIVING WAGE.** Congregations can consult with several organizations for help in determining a living wage. Most living-wage figures are calculated based on the poverty level for a family of four, which is still widely considered to be a minimum starting point. Congregations may sponsor discussions to define an appropriate living wage. Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) has developed a Self Sufficiency Standard that is used in several cities, states, and by coalitions of community organizations. For further information about the Standard, and/or to obtain reports copies, contact WOW at 1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 930, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 464-1596; www.wowonline.org.
4. **OTHER COMPENSATION HELP.** The Clergy Finance Letter is a publication that offers congregations guidelines for developing clergy compensation packages. Contact Clergy Financial Services, P.O. Box 6007, Grand Rapids, MI 49516, www.clergy-financial.com

II. Treatment of Employees

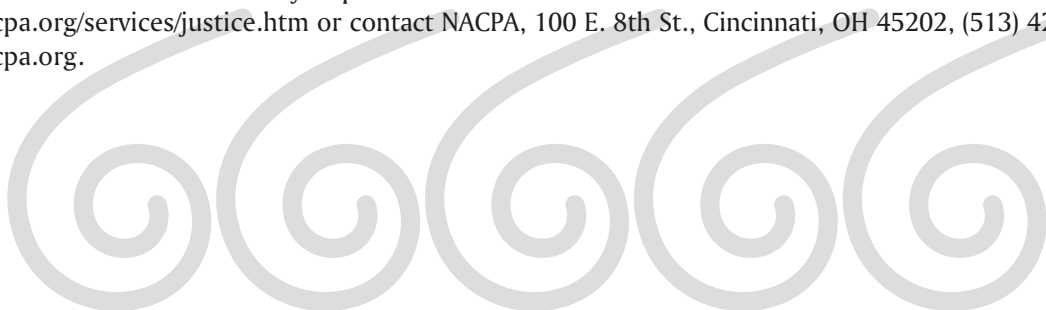
ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS:

1. Has the congregation reviewed its denomination's guidelines as they relate to the treatment of employees?
Yes No
2. Does the personnel committee occasionally review the compensation of wage and salaried employees to make sure that both categories of workers are compensated fairly?
Yes No
3. Does the personnel committee consider both cost-of-living adjustments and regular raises with its annual review?
Yes No
4. If the congregation is having difficulties providing the desired level of salary, does it offer other attractive options, such as work-hours flexibility, additional vacation days, and personal days? Does it have a plan for reaching its salary and benefits goals?
Yes No
5. Has the congregation set policies and procedures for regular employee evaluations, due process of complaints, overtime, and other issues?
Yes No
6. Does the congregation have maternity and paternity leave for employees?
Yes No
7. Does the congregation have a policy regarding family medical leave?
Yes No

RESOURCES TO GUIDE YOU:

PERSONNEL POLICIES. Many denominations have sample personnel policies that can be adapted. In many states, congregation workers are considered as “employees at will,” which means they can be fired at any time for any reason as long as the employer does not violate the Equal Opportunity Commission Guidelines (cf. the CICWI Workers’ Rights Manual if you don’t have denomination policies). However, many faith-based organizations have made a commitment to go beyond the minimum requirements of the law to embrace personnel policies that reflect their religious values about worker rights. A sample policy to consider was developed by Interfaith Worker Justice, 1020 West Bryn Mawr, Chicago, IL 60660, (773) 728-8400, www.iwj.org.

The National Association of Church Personnel Administrators (NACPA) is an organization for clergy, laity and religious who exercise the ministry of personnel administration. For more information visit www.nacpa.org/services/justice.htm or contact NACPA, 100 E. 8th St., Cincinnati, OH 45202, (513) 421-3134, www.nacpa.org.



III. Investments & Banking

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS:

1. Has the congregation reviewed its denominational guidelines regarding investments and banking?
Yes No
2. Does (Do) the bank(s) the congregation does(do) business with have a good rating from the Federal Reserve in compliance with the Community Reinvestment Act? (The Community Reinvestment Act was legislation passed by Congress to insure that banks serve the needs of underserved communities and neighborhoods by making loans available as well as other banking services.)
Yes No
3. Is (Are) the bank(s) a good community neighbor that supports civil and community projects?
Yes No
4. Do the companies the congregation owns stock in conform to the religious values of the congregation? (i.e. Do they treat their workers fairly and with human dignity; do they care for the environment; do the products/services they produce support the values of your community?)
Yes No
5. Is there a committee that regularly reviews investments for appropriateness to the congregation's mission?
Yes No

RESOURCES TO GUIDE YOU:

1. **LOCAL BANKS.** To find out how well your local bank complies with the Community Reinvestment Act, check out the Woodstock Institute's Web site: <http://www.ffiec.gov/cra/ratings.htm>
2. **SHAREHOLDER ADVOCACY.** If the congregation and/or denomination owns stock, it can monitor the practices of companies and offer shareholder resolutions on major social and environmental issues through the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR). Check out its website at <http://www.iccr.org>
3. **SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE FUNDS.** You can invest in the stock market, while still holding to your values and congregational beliefs, through socially responsible mutual funds. These funds screen companies according to different criteria including environmental impact, worker treatment, safety of products, and other concerns. To find out about socially responsible mutual funds for your congregation to invest in, check out the Social Investment Forum, a guide to socially responsible investment services. Contact The Social Investment Forum at 1612 K St. NW, Ste. 650, Washington, DC 20006, (202) 872-5361, <http://www.socialinvest.org>



IV. Contracting and Purchasing.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS:

1. Has the congregation reviewed its denominational guidelines regarding contracting and purchasing?
Yes No
2. Is the contracting and purchasing procedures open to any qualifying business? Does the congregation advertise for bids in a wide circle of potential vendors and/or contractors?
Yes No
3. Does the congregation have any policies about directing some contracts and purchasing to minority and women-owned vendors or contractors?
Yes No
4. Do the congregation's contractors pay workers a living wage? How do their pay scales compare to the prevailing wage in the industry? Do they provide benefits like affordable health care and a pension fund?
Yes No
5. Have contractors ever been charged with unfair labor practices? If so, what was the outcome? For each contractor, does it respect workers' rights to organize and have a voice on the job? Can it provide proof of workers' compensation and general liability?
Yes No
6. Are its workers classified as employees and not as independent contractors? (Some unethical contractors illegally classify workers as "independent contractors" as a means of avoiding paying taxes and insurance on employees.)
Yes No
7. Does the company use subcontractors? If so, can it tell you about the way employees are treated by those firms? Can it answer the above questions in about the subcontractors?
Yes No



RESOURCES TO GUIDE YOU:

1. ADMINISTRATION. The National Association of Church Business Administrators promotes the highest level of professional competence through training, certification, and resources to individuals serving Christ through church denominations. Contact the National Association of Church Business Administrators at 100 N. Central Expressway, Suite 914, Richardson, TX, 75080-5326, 1-800-898-8085, www.nacba.net.

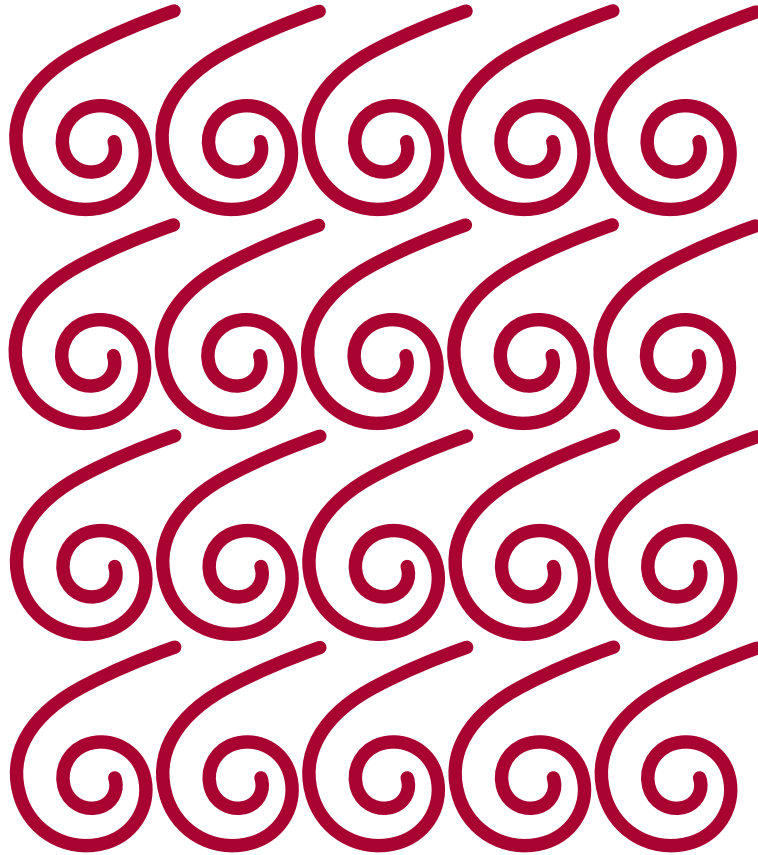
2. HEALTH AND SAFETY. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration(OSHA) offers databases to explore companies' records on unfair labor practices and worker safety violations. Log onto www.osha.gov/oshstats. Choose "Establishment Search" to explore by company name. This service is free.

3. LABOR LAW VIOLATORS. OSHA DATA is a public record service that offers reports of federal regulatory compliance and enforcement data for every business nationwide. Custom hard copy and electronic data extractions are available upon request. The database includes violations of standards in the following areas: OSHA, Wage and Hour Division Violations, National Labor Relations Board Unfair Labor Practices; Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and Equal Pay Act and Age Discrimination in Employment Act. This is a pay-for-service organization, located at www.oshadata.com.

4. FINDING A BUILDING CONTRACTOR. Contact the local building trades council and/or central labor council. If your congregation does not know the appropriate contact, visit www.aflcio.org/aboutus/unioncities for local information. Consider inviting someone to visit the congregation to help answer questions about firms' reputations, and what firms have collective bargaining agreements.

5. FINDING A JANITORIAL SERVICE. Janitors across the country are represented by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU.) Thousands more are currently seeking recognition through the national "Justice for Janitors" campaign. If your congregation does not know the local contact, call the national office of SEIU at (800) 424-8592 or visit www.seiu.org/property/janitors for more information. Consider inviting someone to visit the congregation to help answer questions about firms' reputations, and which firms have collective bargaining agreements.





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updated December, 2007



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