

'FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD' THE POOR IN OUR MIDST

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, YEAR C

Lectionary Texts: Jeremiah 17:5-10 Psalm 1 I Corinthians 15:12-20 Luke 6:17-26

Focus Text: Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

²⁰Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²²Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. ²⁴But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn... [The LORD] raises up the poor from the dust; [the LORD] lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them [the LORD] has set the world.

I Samuel 2:4-8

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth?

Isaiah 10:1-3

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that [God] has promised to those who love [God]? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

James 2:1-7

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY JOCLEEN MCCALL, ASSIST. PASTOR FOR
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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, FAYETTEVILLE

Jesus Christ. However, on this 6th Sunday in Epiphany, we are focusing on the poor in our midst.

The temptation is to focus on the poor in the world. It is very easy to focus on the starving children around the world and forget about those around the corner. It is very easy to focus on the effects of poverty that we see halfway around the world and ignore those effects that are halfway across town. Sometimes a harsh, straightforward sermon is what is needed to shake us out of our revelry. This is what Luke provides. In what has come to be called the Sermon on the Plain, Luke does not add the spiritual elements that are found in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. Luke is clear that the poor are the blessed group and the rich had better wake up and smell the coffee! The riches that bring you comfort now will not comfort you for long. The satisfaction you now have with life in general will change when we enter into the Kingdom of God.

From the very beginning Luke removes any notion of status. Christ comes down from the mountain to a level place, to a place where all can reach him and all can be healed. He is talking to a mixed crowd, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, allowing this text to be seen as an admonition to the local community as well as a more global community. Once the healings are complete, Jesus settles down to teaching what it truly means to be a disciple of Christ in a world that has very different values. For Luke, being a disciple means dealing with real socio-economic issues, those issues that cause poverty, hunger, weeping and hatred. Being a rich disciple means a drastic change in the status quo and a shift of thinking to stand with God and the poor. In the spirit of removing the log from our own eye before removing it from another's, I submit that this text is encouraging us to pay more attention to those in our midst while we are helping those around the world. Many of us will never have the opportunity to travel around the world to experience the life changing moments that come when you are genuinely engaged in the work of God with the poor. We must keep in mind that many of us do not need to travel around the world to work hand in hand with the poor: the poor are right here with us.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY JOCLEEN MCCALL

Preferences...we all have preferences. Some of us prefer hot over cold, the mountains over the beach, long over short or comedy over mystery. Our preference is our first choice...it is what we like the best, the thing that makes us feel comfortable, content, happy. That is probably why most of us prefer Matthew's words in his version of this text over Luke's. Matthew says "blessed are the poor in spirit," "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," "blessed are those who mourn" and "blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness." These are beautiful words that welcome all of us. Sometime or another all of us have felt "poor in spirit" or have found ourselves "hungering and thirsting for righteousness." Many of us have "mourned" and been "persecuted" because of our righteousness. We can see ourselves in these blessings and we feel comforted, welcomed and reassured.

Luke, however, presents us with a problem. "Blessed are you who are poor." "Blessed are you who hunger now." "Blessed are you who weep now." "Blessed are you when men hate you." Not a whole lot of comfort in these words for contemporary American Christians, nor is there a large measure of welcome or reassurance. Ninety-nine percent of us are knocked out of the "blessed" group before the first sentence is complete. Regardless of what you think of your financial situation, you are not poor. You may be hungry now, but that is because you chose to skip breakfast. If you walked out of here this minute, you could go home and fix something to eat or stop and pick something up along the way. Many of us miss out on the "weeping" versus "mourning" also. We may be sad about something in particular. However, we could hardly say that we are actively and consistently weeping, actions that Luke associates with the status of being poor. And that last blessing..."when men hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man." Perhaps I am a bit cynical, but I don't see many of us fighting to get in that line, either. We want to be liked, perhaps by not everyone, but by most people. Some of us are huge name droppers...it is not enough that we know who we know; we need to make sure that you know who we know and what groups we are affiliated with, all so that perhaps you will like us more, respect us more and want to spend time with us. We pride ourselves on our reputations. If we are honest and view ourselves through Luke's lens, we are probably not getting the blessing.

Not only are we probably not in line for the blessing, we are in line for the "woes." We know there is trouble coming because the first word in the NRSV is "but," a sure sign that we are about to look at the other side of the coin—especially when it follows a verse that begins with "rejoice." We have not seen ourselves in the "blessings;" we really don't want to know if the next part applies to us. Unfortunately, it does. "Woe to you who are rich"...yep, there we are. America is the richest country in the world. Honestly, I have always had a problem with that kind of terminology. What does "the richest country in the world" mean in real terms? Glad you asked! According to the World Bank, in 1998 America was ranked number one with \$40,000 per capita (per unit of population...per person). At the bottom of the barrel is Rwanda at \$5,000 per capita. \$40 vs. \$5. As ambassadors for Christ throughout this world, can anyone honestly tell me that we are not rich? Unfortunately for us, we "have received [our] consolation." "Woe to [us] who are full now, for [we] will be hungry." "Woe to [us] who are laughing now, for [we] will mourn and weep." "Woe to [us] when all speak well of [us], for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets." What does this all mean? What are you trying to say? I am saying that we...the rich, the full, the laughing, the well spoken of...could be in for some real trouble unless we learn to love as God loves.

You see, for Luke, this is what it means to be a disciple. This is the teaching directly from Jesus to the 12 disciples, “a great crowd of disciples” and “a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon” that came to hear and be healed. This is the teaching... blessings for the poor and woes to the rich. It appears that Jesus is addressing a mixed crowd. They are Jew and Gentile, rich and poor. The one thing they all have in common is their desire to hear the Great Teacher. They have waited until Jesus and the 12 descend from the mountain; the evil spirits have been expelled and all who came have been healed. Now they are settling down for this lesson in discipleship. Imagine their surprise when they heard these words. Imagine the joy that must have embraced the poor and the fear that must have overshadowed the rich. The poor have received two blessings, but the rich, who certainly thought they had it made now that there were healed, get a rude awakening! Thank God, for the rich—regardless of the period in time—there is an injunction for those who will listen...love.

We are given numerous examples of loving behavior that all culminate in “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.” Sounds ridiculous to our contemporary ears, doesn't it? It probably sounded equally ridiculous to the people who were hearing it for the first time. Why would I want to love someone who hates me? Why in the world would I let someone hit me once, let alone twice? If someone steals from me, I am not to seek restitution? Ridiculous! Why are we encouraged to “love” in this manner? Because it is the way of God. God loves regardless...regardless of how you look, smell, speak, act or react. God loves you regardless of where you come from, where you were born, what you have done to yourself or to others. God loves and blesses regardless. As children of God, we are obligated to demonstrate this same love. Love that is demonstrated regardless of the circumstances or the situation is the way of God. Love that is demonstrated regardless of person or stature is the way of God. Love that is demonstrated without expectation is the way of God. Love that is demonstrated by the rich on behalf of the poor, expecting nothing in return, expressed sacrificially and solely because it is the Christian thing to do is the way of God.

That kind of love is radical! That is what gets lost in the contemporary spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the radical nature of what he taught. Jesus Christ was hanging out with the outcasts, conversing with women he was forbidden to speak to, eating with known sinners, touching people who were considered dirty. Jesus Christ proclaimed a radical shift in the status quo. If we are to call ourselves disciples and desire to live up to the standard that Jesus set, we are obligated to proclaim that same radical shift.

Admittedly, in our current society, we must work very hard to arrive at this radical shift in our thinking. Do not misunderstand me; there is no crime in being rich. There are rich people throughout the Bible, and nowhere does it say that being rich is bad. The problem occurs when those who are rich think they are set in this life and the next because of their riches. The problem with being rich is thinking that what you have belongs to you and is for your use only. The shift we must make is from “I have made it and now I can keep my immediate family safe” to “I have made it and now I can keep my universal family safe.” If your brother/sister worked at a meat processing plant where he/she were confronted with unsafe working conditions, sexual harassment, intimidation and injury everyday would you sit idly by? If your brother/sister was working two or three jobs trying to keep a roof over their children's heads, clothes on their backs and food in their stomachs yet could not afford their medication, would you stand idly by? No, you would not. You would do something. Some of you would help them find another job. Some of you would pressure the company owners to improve conditions. Some of you would pay for the medication. Some of you would push legislators to provide better medical coverage. Some of you would move to a better neighborhood with better schools. Yes, all of us would do something. But how many of us would choose the way of God that loves and blesses the poor? Getting another job, paying for the medication, moving...those are the easy ways out. These options leave the focus on the rich, favoring our ability to change our circumstances and giving no regard to others who are less fortunate. Those of us who choose the easy way out need a radical shift. We need the mind of God so that we can follow the way of God. Showing God's love means that we fight for better working conditions for everyone because we are rich; we would not work under those conditions, why should our brothers/sisters? Showing God's love means that we fight for better medical coverage for everyone because we are rich and the nature of our wealth gives us the ability to fight against systems that are unfair and unGodly. Showing God's love means that we fight for better educational systems for everyone because we are rich and we know that this generation of students and the next are doomed unless we demand some change. God loves regardless. God loves rich and poor and God will judge rich and poor. The poor will have their standard of measure but, I am afraid, the rich will be judged by what we did with the wealth God gave us as it relates to the poor. Unfortunately, some of us will be greatly disappointed when we realize that the measure we gave will be the measure we will get back.

It is by the grace of God that we are rich and it is by the grace of God that we are rich. I say it twice because the focus changes with each statement. The first speaks to the personal; it is by the grace of God that we were born in this country, to people who were able to provide for us and give us opportunities to succeed. It is the grace of God that has allowed us to progress to this point and that will carry us on until we meet him face to face. The second speaks to the universal; it is by the grace of God that we, in our richness, are able to stand up against those forces of evil that make the rich richer and the poor poorer. It is by the grace of God that we, in our richness, are able to fight for a world where no one goes hungry. It is by the grace of God that we, in our richness, are able to not only wipe away the tears of those who weep, but to eradicate the reasons for weeping. It is by the grace of God that we, in our richness, are able to stand before those who hate us, those who want to exclude us, those who revile us and those who defame us without fear of reprisal because we stand, with God, on the side of the poor. It is by the grace of God that we, with God and in the richness that God has provided, are able to live lives that say “blessed are you who are poor.”

WORSHIP AID – ‘FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD’

RESPONSIVE READING

In a world where we are not always good stewards in caring for God's creation,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your world.

In a world where a few are living off of the abundance of the land, while the many struggle to make ends meet,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children in need.

As globalization makes some wealthier while others join the ranks of the poor,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children who are facing poverty.

While some have more homes than they need and others are condemned to homelessness,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children who have nowhere to lay their head.

While statistics show that people in poverty are more likely to end up in prison than in college,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children who need guidance.

As news reports tell us of people who are eating themselves to death and we turn the page to read of those who are starving to death,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children who come to you in need.

While many of us have taken for granted and squandered the blessings, gifts, and talents you have given to us,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children who do not realize how blessed we truly are.

In a world filled with so many people who have lost their way,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be your light that guides them back to you.
Amen.

(from the Reformed Church in America, Peace with Justice Sunday, www.rca.org/worship/material/peacejustice/index.html)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of Moses and the prophets, God of Jesus and the Church, as we pause to account for who we are and how we live, we find that we are lacking. We confess that we have resisted your demand for justice and domesticated your call to discipleship. We have ignored your persistent cry in the voices of our neighbors. We have refused the mantle of prophecy vaguely hoping that someone else would dare proclaim your shalom. Time and again we've helped to build structures that contain and constrain your transforming power and so trivialize the church's witness in a broken world. Forgive us God. We want to change, God; to start fresh; to be transformed. Grant us vision and voice when we stand stupefied in the face of injustice. Let us taste the vigor and resilience of your Spirit when our spirits are exhausted and cynical. And nourish in us a trust in you that perseveres, until your realm becomes a reality in our midst. We pray trusting in the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen.

(by Noelle Damico, from the University of the Poor School of Theology, www.universityofthepoor.org/schools/theology/prayers/booklet_prayers.htm)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| ✓ | The Church of Christ in Every Age | PH 421/MW 694/NCH 306/CH 475/
BH 402/UMH 589 |
| ✓ | Blest Are They | GA 284 |
| ✓ | The Servant Song | BH 613/CH 490/GA 285 |
| ✓ | Stir Your Church, O God, Our Father | BH 392 |
| ✓ | Does Jesus Care? | AM 442/CM 237 |

w Hymnal Legend w
† UMH – United Methodist
† BH – Baptist Hymnal
† LW – Lutheran Worship
† PH – Presbyterian Hymnal
† TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
† MW – Moravian Book of Worship
† AM – African Methodist Episcopal
† CM – Christian Methodist Episcopal
† CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
† NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC)
† GA—Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic)

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

In the Day of Our Trouble

In the day of our trouble we will call to you, for you will answer us.

When we have done what is wrong and displeasing in your sight,

O Lord, extend your love to correct us.

When we ignore those in need and pretend that all is right with the world,

O Lord, help us to face the truth.

When we turn a blind eye to those who have been stricken with poverty and face the injustices that come along with it,

O Lord, teach us your way.

Enable us to extend your love; and give us an undivided heart, that we may fear your name.

We will praise you, O Lord our God, with all our heart;

and we will glorify your name forever.

Amen.

(edited, adapted from Psalm 86, Reformed Church in America, Peace with Justice Sunday, www.rca.org/worship/material/peacejustice/index.html)

I Dare to Pray

I dare to pray: Lord, let the world be changed,

for I long to see the end of poverty;

I dare to pray: Lord, let the rules be changed,

for I long to see trade bring justice to the poor;

I dare to pray: Lord, let my life be changed,

for I long to bring hope where good news is needed.

In the strength of your Spirit

and inspired by Your compassion,

I make this promise to work for change,

and wait confidently for the day

when You make all things new.

Amen.

(by Peter Graystone, Christian Aid, accessed at the Church of England's Diocese of Portsmouth's website, www.portsmouth.anglican.org)

Help Us to Be Agents of Hope

Our loving God, we admit that we have neglected to remember the poor. Forgive us, we pray. Help us, as followers of Jesus, to work together to pursue justice, be passionate about kindness and walk humbly with you, our God. May our world be transformed in every area by your love. We admit that we have been arrogant as a nation. Forgive us, Lord, we pray. Help us to be agents of hope for and with the poor and to work with others to hold our leaders accountable in securing a more just and merciful world.

Amen.

(adapted from World Vision Australia, Anti-Poverty Sunday, www.worldvision.com.au/resources/files/Micah_Challenge_prayers.pdf)

Deliver Us from a Comfortable Conscience

O Lord Christ, who became poor that we might be rich,

deliver us from a comfortable conscience if we believe or intend

that others should be poor that we might be rich;

for in God's economy, no one is expendable.

Grant us instead the riches of love.

Amen.

(by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, accessed at the Church of England's Diocese of Portsmouth's website, www.portsmouth.anglican.org)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

• QUOTES •

It is not from your own possessions that you are bestowing alms on the poor; you are but restoring to them what is theirs by right. For what was given to everyone for the use of all, you have taken for your exclusive use. The earth belongs not to the rich, but to everyone. Thus, far from giving lavishly, you are but paying part of your debt.

St. Ambrose

Poverty is the worst form of violence.

Mahatma Gandhi

It is a poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish.

Mother Teresa

Wealth and poverty: the one is the parent of luxury and indolence, and the other of meanness and viciousness, and both of discontent.

Plato

Poverty is the open-mouthed relentless hell which yawns beneath civilized society. And it is hell enough.

Henry George

• PERSONAL VIGNETTE •

TOUGH TIMES AFTER JOB LOSS

BY DORIS LONG, EFLAND, NORTH CAROLINA

December 14, 2001 was my last day of work at Nortel Network in RTP after 18 years of employment as a Quality Inspector. My salary had been sufficient to have the things I needed and to pay the bills. I had health insurance and other company benefits. But all of a sudden, all of that changed. I grew up accustomed to hard work. I was raised on a farm in Cedar Grove, the youngest in a family of 10 children. My family raised tobacco. We had chicken, pigs, and vegetable gardens, Although my family was poor, our farm helped us provide a lot of food, and we were able to pay the bills. We were blessed to be raised on a farm. My family never did go without food. We didn't owe anything on the house that we lived in.

After I was laid off from Nortel in 2001, I knew that my life was going to dramatically change financially. I attended Alamaance Community College in Graham in Medical Office Administration in 2002 and 2003. In September 2003, before I finished, I still did not have a job. I prayed and asked God to help me.

As I faced hard times, lonely, sad, and ashamed of my situation, I really had to trust God. My family was no support, nor was my old church. I cried many nights, my pillow wet with tears. It was so hard for me to ask for help from anyone - even my friends, I was so ashamed when I had to go to Social Services and ask for help and see people there that knew me. My heart was heavy many days, and I learned to do without a lot of things. But God has really blessed me now in other ways. Presently, I am a member of the Cedar Grove United Methodist Church - a new family, new friends, good fellowship. I attend Bible study, Sunday School, and Living the Word, and serve as the Acolyte Leader and a Choir Member.

I have worked a lot of temporary jobs since being laid off in 2001. Trying to find permanent, full-time employment with health insurance has been very difficult. At the present time, I am working part-time at Harris Teeter, 24 -30 hours a week. I make \$8.00 an hour, and last month my take-home pay was \$414. I don't have enough to pay my mortgage. I have to trust God that someone will hear my prayer and help me, or I will have to ask some of my friends to help me with my mortgage. After paying for utilities, food, and other necessities, I don't have much leftover.

When I have been hired at jobs in the past, I found ways to encourage my co-workers because many live paycheck to paycheck, just like me. I tell them "Be grateful and appreciate your job, because you never know when your job will end. But God will see you through. God can do anything." As I finish this story, I am happy inside to know that my story can be used so that someone else can see how it is to go through adversity and difficult financial situations.

• CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES •

- W www.nccouncilofchurches.org/areasofwork/issues/economic_justice/economic_justice_issue.html - North Carolina Council of Churches' "Economic Justice" webpage, which includes the Council's focus as well as links to various resources and to the Economic Justice Committee's homepage.
- W www.ncjustice.org – North Carolina Justice Center, North Carolina's leading private, non-profit anti-poverty organization. Its mission is to reduce and eliminate poverty in North Carolina by helping to ensure that every North Carolina household gains access to the resources, services and fair treatment that it needs in order to enjoy economic security.
- W www.ncruralcenter.org - North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc. The mission of the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center is to develop, promote, and implement sound economic strategies to improve the quality of life of rural North Carolinians. The Center serves the state's 85 rural counties, with a special focus on individuals with low to moderate incomes and communities with limited resources. Created in 1987, the Rural Center operates a multi-faceted program that includes conducting research into rural issues, advocating for policy and program innovations, and building the productive capacity of rural leaders, entrepreneurs and community organizations. The Center is a private, non-profit organization, funded by both public and private sources and led by a 50-member board of directors.
- W www.calltorenewal.org – Call to Renewal, a national network of churches, faith-based organizations, and individuals working to overcome poverty in America. Through local and national partnerships with groups from across the theological and political spectrum, Call to Renewal convenes the broadest table of Christians focused on anti-poverty efforts. Together, all work to influence local and national public policies and priorities, while growing and developing a movement of Christians committed to overcoming poverty.
- W <http://nccp.org> - The National Center for Children in Poverty, a non-profit, non-partisan research and policy organization at Columbia University. The Center's mission is to identify and promote strategies to prevent child poverty in the United States and improve the lives of low-income children and families. Its website contains accessible data concerning poverty in the U.S. and individual states.
- W www.economichumanrights.org – Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, an organization committed to unite the poor across color lines as the leadership base for a broad movement to abolish poverty. The Campaign works to accomplish this through advancing economic human rights as named in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as the rights to food, housing, health, education, communication and a living wage job.
- W www.justneighbors.net—Just Neighbors is a comprehensive curriculum designed by Family Promise, which is an interfaith organization committed to achieving lasting independence for low-income families. The Just Neighbors experience is designed to foster a sense of community among the participants. It is an engaging, thought-provoking curriculum offering a wealth of resources and materials along with the flexibility to make the program work in a wide range of settings and organizations.
- W www.faireconomy.org – United for a Fair Economy, a national, independent, non-partisan, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. UFE raises awareness that concentrated wealth and power undermine the economy, corrupt democracy, deepen the racial divide, and tear communities apart. They support and help build social movements for greater equality.
- W www.letjusticeroll.org—Let Justice Roll's Living Wage Campaign is a non-partisan program of more than seventy faith-based and community-based organizations working in support of federal legislation to raise the federal minimum wage and state legislation and ballot initiatives to increase the minimum wage in selected states. The Campaign conducts an ongoing educational program to inform people of the severity of conditions facing low-wage working people and what must be done to bring about constructive change. It is organizing actively at the federal level and in selected states to raise the minimum wage.

KEY FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

- q Over 1 million North Carolinians—over 12 percent of the whole population—live below the Federal poverty guidelines, which are currently \$20,000 for a family of four. In addition, of North Carolina’s 1.1 million families with children, almost 50 percent earn too little to meet their basic needs. Of the nearly 1 million families with children and at least one worker, 45 percent are paid too little to meet bare-bone living costs.¹

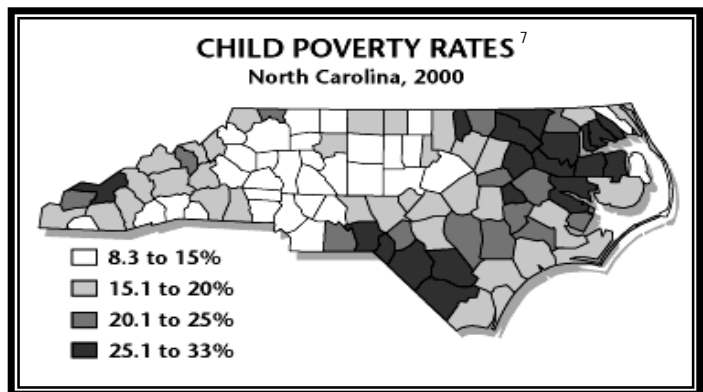
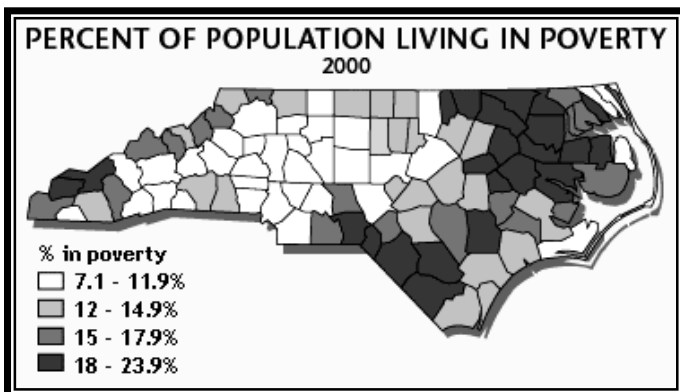
- q Because the Federal poverty guidelines are so low, many more people actually live in poverty than are documented by the Federal government and state agencies. The North Carolina Justice Center calculates that a family of four living in North Carolina needs at least \$40,000 to adequately address its basic needs—more than double the Federal poverty guidelines. This amount only covers the necessities of food, housing, health care, childcare, transportation, taxes and miscellaneous expenses.²

- q North Carolina’s poverty rate is 12th-worst in the nation. Over 15 percent of North Carolina’s children and over 13 percent of North Carolina’s elderly population live in poverty as defined by the Federal government. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of North Carolinians living in poverty increased by 15 percent.³

- q North Carolina’s poverty rate for families with children under age 18 rose from 15 percent in 2000 to almost 19 percent in 2004. Likewise, the poverty rate for families with children under age 5 rose from almost 15 percent in 2000 to over 21 percent in 2004—an increase of almost 50 percent.⁴

- q Warren County is home to the highest poverty level in North Carolina, with 28 percent of the population living below the Federal poverty guidelines. In addition, the poverty rates of many of North Carolina’s far western and far eastern counties’ poverty rate exceeds the state average of 12.6 percent, with Swain at almost 21 percent and Graham at over 18 percent. Many of the families living in these counties lack everyday necessities like indoor plumbing.⁵

- q MANNA food bank in western North Carolina serves more than 115,000 North Carolinians per year with emergency food assistance. Of the households served by MANNA:
 - 25 percent include children under the age of 18;
 - 31 percent have one employed adult in the home;
 - 47.5 percent choose between paying for food and paying for utilities or heating fuel;
 - 31.2 percent choose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage bill;
 - 29.8 percent choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care;
 - 33.8 percent have one household member in poor health; and
 - 26.2 percent receive Food Stamp Program benefits, although many more may be eligible.⁶



1. North Carolina Justice Center, “Falling Jobs, Falling Wages,” www.ncjustice.org/media/library/551_livingincome2005.pdf.
 2. Ibid.
 3. North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, “Income in North Carolina,” www.ncruralcenter.org/databank/datasheet.asp?topic=Income.
 4. North Carolina Justice Center, “BTC Reports: Time to Start Climbing,” www.ncjustice.org/media/library/478_btcrpt09152005census.pdf.
 5. Laura Kleinhenz, “Surviving Rural Poverty,” www.sightphoto.com/sightphoto/Kleinhenz/kleinhenz_warren.html.
 6. MANNA Foodbank, “Hunger in Western North Carolina,” www.mannafoodbank.org/faceofhunger/wncmap/wncmap.html.
 7. North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, “Poverty in North Carolina,” www.ncruralcenter.org/databank/trendpage_Poverty.asp.