

# Economic Justice Covenant Program



United Church of Christ



**Economic Justice Covenant Program**

## WEB-BASED AND PRINT VERSIONS

The complete Economic Justice Covenant Program is available online at:

[www.ucc.org/justice/ejcp](http://www.ucc.org/justice/ejcp)

Hard copy is available upon request from Justice and Witness Ministries.

Contact JWM at [jwm@ucc.org](mailto:jwm@ucc.org);  
call toll-free at 1-866-822-8224, ext. 3700;  
or write to JWM,  
700 Prospect Ave. East,  
Cleveland, OH 44115-1100.

This booklet provides an overview of the Program only and does not contain many resources that are available online.



## INTRODUCTION

*As Christians we sing the hymns of justice, equality, and unity; we pray for the well being of all God’s children; and we continue our activities to feed the hungry and house the homeless. But all the while we watch the gap between rich and poor in our own nation and in the world become ever wider, with many millions left in*



Habitat for Humanity wall-raising,  
United Church of Chapel Hill (NC)

*poverty. Some of the causes are benign, the result of differing natural resources and patterns of cultural development. Some of the causes are the result of the global economy and the incessant desire for corporate profits. Some of the inequities are the result of longstanding and systemic racism,*

*sexism, and xenophobic fear of the stranger. Others are simply rapacious, not unlike Amos’ searing prophesy [Amos 8:4-6]: unconscionably low wages, exploitation of workers with no recourse, unfair pricing of many necessities, the luring of the poor into unbearable debt, and the pillaging of the earth’s resources.*

*The United Church of Christ and its predecessor church bodies, along with many Christians around the world, have received Christ’s summons to call our churches and our societies toward the blessed vision of God’s Realm, including justice in our economic life.*

*An Economic Justice Covenant*

The resolution that included these words was approved by General Synod XXVII in 2009, establishing the Economic Justice



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Covenant Program. The resolution encouraged each setting of the UCC to become an Economic Justice Setting, draft and adopt an "Economic Justice Covenant," study economic injustices, and engage in actions to promote economic justice. The resolution also called for a task force to put together an Economic Justice Covenant Program to support and assist all the settings of the UCC in reaching these goals.

This is that program, designed primarily for a local church, but easily adaptable for the needs of other settings. Composed of nine parts, it begins with this **Introduction**, followed by **Getting Started**.

The next four sections can be used by a local church or other setting to discern whether to become an Economic Justice Setting:

- **Engaging Our Faith** includes resources for corporate worship and Bible study.
- **Engaging the Issues** offers information about numerous economic injustices.
- **Engaging the Community** provides materials that encourage congregations to engage in experiential learning.
- **Engaging the Spirit** offers resources for personal spiritual exploration.

**Writing and Approving the Covenant**, which follows **Engaging the Spirit**, guides the congregation or other setting as it writes an Economic Justice Covenant to express its commitment and lay out a general plan of action. The final section, **Living Out the Covenant**, includes **Ways to Engage**, a list of ways to get involved in working for economic justice.



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### ECONOMIC JUSTICE TASK FORCE

The task force worked for nearly a year to plan, write, and oversee the development of this program. Members of the task force are:

Diana Burdett, Rhode Island Conference  
Hiawatha Demby, Southern Conference  
Rev. Michael Denton, Pacific Northwest Conference  
Rev. Stan Duncan, Massachusetts Conference  
Mittie Davis Jones, Ohio Conference  
Gail Kinney, New Hampshire Conference  
Rev. Lynne Smouse Lopez, Central Pacific Conference  
Carmen Flores Rance, Illinois Conference  
Rev. Guillermo Marquez Sterling, Florida Conference

Edith Rasell, Minister for Economic Justice, Justice and Witness Ministries, staffed the task force.

### GETTING STARTED

The process of becoming an Economic Justice Church or other setting begins with a call. It may be a gentle nudging or an insistent demand that cannot be ignored. It may be heard in one person's heart or by a social justice or mission committee. The congregation may be new to such a call, or it may have been engaged with issues of economic justice for years.

No matter how the call begins or the type of setting where it begins, this Economic Justice Covenant Program offers a number of resources, information, and useful tools to go deeper. There are as many ways to become an Economic Justice Church (or other setting) as there are churches and settings. What follows here are guidelines and resources that may be helpful, especially if they are modified and adapted for each particular situation.

Once someone or some group with the church feels called to explore becoming an Economic Justice Church, they will probably need to gain the support of some key people before moving forward. The pastor should be consulted, and possibly the moderator and governing body. If the go-ahead is given, the next step might be to set up a planning committee to shepherd the discernment process. This committee could be part of an existing social justice group or a new entity established just for this purpose.

Making a public commitment to work for economic justice, to covenant with each other and with God to engage in this ministry, will take reflection and preparation, through worship, prayer, study, and exploration of the community within and outside of the walls of the church. The planning committee, in consultation with the pastor, programming bodies, Christian educators, worship planning team, and others, can begin to plan



a time of discernment. Expect it to take about a year or maybe longer.

A process of discernment may look like this:

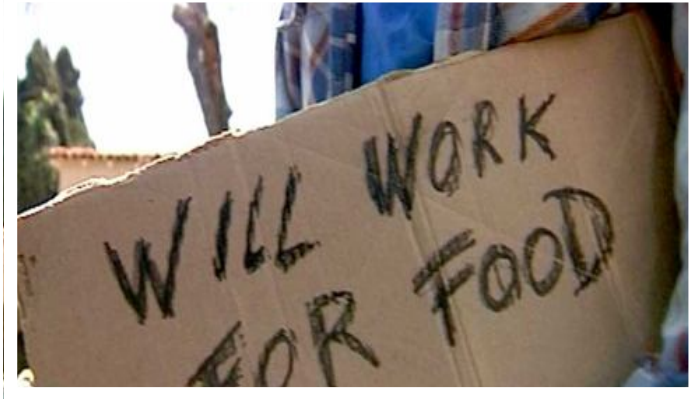
- Start with one, or a series, of Sunday morning worship services. Resources for these services are located in **Engaging Our Faith**.
- Follow the services with small-group study opportunities to learn about various issues of economic justice. Learn more about those topics in **Engaging the Issues**.
- Then groups from the congregation could explore the community, both within and outside the walls of the church. See **Engaging the Community**.
- While these group activities are underway, individuals and families can be deepening their personal spiritual journey using the resources in **Engaging the Spirit**.
- **Writing and Approving the Covenant** and **Living Out the Covenant** can guide the conclusion of the process.
- **Ways to Engage** (available online) provides numerous resources, organizations, and ways to get involved in working for economic justice.

Each congregation or setting is unique so the planning committee can establish a program that comprises various elements that meet the needs and interests of the members of the congregation.

At the end of the process, the congregation or other setting makes a public commitment to work for economic justice, to covenant with each other and with God to engage in this ministry. The congregation or other setting becomes an

Economic Justice Church (or Conference, Association, Seminary, etc.).

One congregation, the United Church of Chapel Hill in North Carolina, has been through this process. Their story and covenant are posted on the Economic Justice Covenant Program website. As churches and other settings write and approve covenants, they can also be posted on the Economic Justice Covenant Program website.



### ENGAGING OUR FAITH

The resources in this section are intended for use in Sunday worship or for group Bible study. Traditional faith practices, including corporate worship and group study and reflection, are necessary for any congregation considering a new commitment or re-commitment to economic justice. The resources here facilitate individual and congregational moments of discernment and learning, and provide a solid biblical, theological, and liturgical foundation from which social action and public witness may emerge.



The resources include Bible studies, sermon seeds, prayers for justice and peace, a list of Scripture passages, and hymns with justice themes. All these resources are available on the Economic Justice Covenant Program homepage ([www.ucc.org/justice/ejcp](http://www.ucc.org/justice/ejcp)). They can assist people of faith to gain an increased awareness of the scripture's treatment of economic justice issues and provide resources for worship and sermon preparation on issues of economic justice and action.

### BIBLE STUDIES

These four Bible studies available on the Economic Justice Covenant Program homepage can be used in lay- or clergy-led adult education groups, a Lenten study series, or other

occasions. Each study includes a reflection on the text and discussion questions.

### **Don't Worry** *Matthew 6:25-33*

We are invited to wrestle with questions of scarcity and abundance in a society where many live with fear and worry.

### **Lazarus and the Rich Man** *Luke 16:19-31*

Each of us has characteristics of Lazarus and the rich man.

### **Jesus and the Rich Young Man** *Mark 10:17-22*

We examine Jesus' encounter with the rich young man who asks what he must do to inherit eternal life and explore the challenge of living faithfully with wealth.

### **At the Foot of the Cross** *John 19:25-27*

At the foot of Jesus' cross, we stand in a community of equals bearing witness to the suffering world.

## SERMON SEEDS

These sermon preparation aids (available on the Economic Justice Covenant Program homepage) are designed for ministers seeking to preach on economic justice. They offer helpful contextual commentary and questions for further reflection. These scriptures could be used for a sermon series or individually, or could be used in a clergy-led Bible study.

### **The Sabbath and Jubilee Traditions** *Exodus 20:8-11* and *Deuteronomy 5:12-15*

### **Liberation and Empowerment** *Isaiah 61:1-11*

### **The (Previously) Dishonest (Fund) Manager** *Luke 16:1-8a*

### **The Parable of the Mortgage Renegotiation Lobbyist** (The "Unjust Judge") *Luke 18:1-8*



**OTHER WORSHIP RESOURCES** (available on the Economic Justice Covenant Program homepage)

**Scriptures on Justice and Advocacy** This lengthy listing of Bible passages illuminates a number of economic justice issues, including caring for the poor, defending the rights of others, engaging in stewardship of creation, and eliminating hunger and poverty.

**Prayers** These prayers center on issues like global economic justice, workers, and persons oppressed by globalization and poverty.

**Hymns from *The New Century Hymnal*** The hymns relate to economic justice. Some are in Spanish.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

**JustFaith** is a 30-week experience focused on discipleship and the call to be about God's dream of justice and compassion in a world scarred by poverty. Meeting weekly, small groups of 10-15 people employ books, videos, discussion, prayer, retreats and hands-on experiences to deepen their faith and thirst for justice. <http://www.justfaith.org/programs/justfaith.html>



### ENGAGING THE ISSUES

As a congregation discerns whether to become an Economic Justice Church, it can be helpful to learn about some of the economic injustices that millions, even billions, of people face every day. Or, once a congregation decides to be an Economic Justice Church, it may want to explore various topics to discern the justice work it is being called to do.

This section of the Economic Justice Covenant Program is intended to give readers small amounts of important information about a number of economic justice topics. Don't be overwhelmed. Browse through these issues and see what touches your heart, what touches the heart of the congregation. What are you being called to work on at this time?

Each section provides links to more resources and suggestions about ways to get involved and begin to change unjust conditions. In addition to the resources and organizations found in these links, there are probably local or state-based organizations working on these issues closer to your church. You may prefer to work close to home through these groups.

### ECONOMIC JUSTICE

*Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages; who says, "I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms," who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and painting it with vermillion. Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him.*



*He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord. Jeremiah 22:13-16*

Scripture reveals that the struggle to achieve economic justice for all is an imperative of the Christian faith. The Bible contains many passages related to the poor and matters of economic justice. It makes clear God's deep concern for the last, the lost, and the least. As illustrated in the Gospel stories where Jesus and the disciples feed thousands of people with just a few loaves of bread and fish (Matt 14:13-21; 15:32-38), God's economy is a gift of grace that is not for sale in the marketplace. God's economy of life provides abundantly for all God's people.



We are called to share with our neighbors out of the abundance that God gives to the world. The poor and marginalized are special members of God's community and we are called to put justice for "the least of these" at the center of the community of life and the mission of the church (Matt 25:40). The Bible tells us that rules devised to benefit some segments of society should not stand if they also disadvantage or harm the poor. "Hear this," warns Amos (8:4) "you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land..." For people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we might hear a warning that exploiting the poor or relying on markets to supply everyone with what they need are violations of the vision of God.

**The UCC General Synod and Economic Justice**

The General Synod has repeatedly spoken about the need for economic justice. Two Synod pronouncements are especially informative:

*Christian Faith: Economic Life and Justice* (<http://www.ucc.org/justice/economic-justice/pdfs/Christian-Faith-Econ-Life-and-Justice.pdf>), approved by General Synod XVII in 1989, saw the struggle to achieve economic justice for all as an imperative of the Christian faith and made a commitment to a guaranteed national minimum income level, universal health care, full employment, affordable housing, and quality education for all.

*A Faithful Response: Calling for a More Just and Humane Direction for Economic Globalization* ([www.ucc.org/justice/pdfs-1/A-Faithful-Response-Calling-for-a-More-Just-Humane-Direction-for-Economic-Globalization.pdf](http://www.ucc.org/justice/pdfs-1/A-Faithful-Response-Calling-for-a-More-Just-Humane-Direction-for-Economic-Globalization.pdf)), approved by General Synod XXIV in 2003, describes the impact of the past 25 years of “neo-liberal” economic globalization and calls for fundamental changes in the rules and institutions that shape the process of globalization.

Important resolutions include:

*Affirming Democratic Principles in an Emerging Global Economy* (<http://uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/AFFIRMING-DEMOCRATIC-PRINCIPLES-IN-AN-EMERGING-GLOBAL-ECONOMY.pdf>) (GS XXI, 1999) calls us to support unions, and advocate for just, democratic, participatory, and inclusive economic policies.

*For the Common Good* (<http://www.ucc.org/justice/public-education/pdfs/Resolution-for-the-Common-Good.pdf>) (GS XXV, 2005) calls for fair taxes, public institutions and services, full employment, living wages, adequate income for each



person, affordable housing, and public transportation. All General Synod resolutions and pronouncements that address economic issues since 1999 and selected ones before that date are posted here: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/economic-justice/Resolutions.html>

You can find more about the issues below on the Economic Justice Covenant Program website:

- The U.S. Economy
  - Poverty in the United States
  - Worker Justice in the United States
- Economic Globalization
  - Global Poverty
  - Fair not “Free” Trade Debt in the Global South
  - Privatization
  - Water
  - Food and Land
  - Sweatshops
- Racial Justice
- Immigration
- Economic Justice and the Environment
- Public Education

**BOOK STUDY**

Some congregations find a book study useful to begin learning about issues of economic justice. Here are three suggested books and one article that may suit your congregation’s needs. Others are listed on the Economic Justice Covenant Program website.

*The Heart of Christianity* by Marcus Borg, Harper Collins, 2003. Being a Christian means loving God, and loving who and what God loves. Thus, we are called to do justice.



*God's Politics* by Jim Wallis, Harper Collins, 2005. A call for churches to get involved in struggles for justice and peace.

*World Hunger: Twelve Myths*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. by Frances Moore Lappe, Joseph Collins, and Peter Rosset; Grove Press, 1998.

"*The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity*." This article by UCC theologian Walter Brueggemann appeared in *Christian Century* in 1999. It is still a very good place to begin a conversation about economic justice. [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=533](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=533)



### ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

*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

*For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me...Inasmuch as you have done this for the least of my brothers and sisters, you have done it for me.* Matthew 25:35-40

### BIBLICAL CALL TO JUSTICE

In the Hebrew Bible, Micah and all the prophets were clear: God wants society to be just, to be fair. According to Micah, God "requires" us to do justice. Similarly, the New Testament shows that Jesus cared deeply about economic justice. His parables relate extensively to this issue. Most of his ministry was among the poor, marginalized, and outcast.

As people of God who are called to love all our neighbors, we are also called to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. What does this look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century United States?

When millions around us are poor, we are called to engage in works of mercy, acts of kindness to feed, house, clothe, and care for the immediate needs of people. Congregations and individuals within congregations respond to these needs. We understand our Christian faith calls us to donate money, food, clothes, and our time to those in need. Our churches serve as hosts to non-profit organizations, programs for people struggling with addictions, food pantries, and soup kitchens. We have missions committees in the church, which are tasked with funding and providing volunteers to charitable organizations locally, nationally, and internationally.

### THE NEED FOR JUSTICE

We are also called to do justice. God's vision for hungry people is not a soup kitchen, not even a warm, inviting, friendly soup kitchen serving great food. Charity, even in the best circumstances, is demeaning. People who could be taking care of themselves and contributing their talents to society are, instead, forced to rely on others for their most basic necessities. Can we



doubt that God's vision is to put the soup kitchens, clothes closets, and homeless shelters out of business, to make them unnecessary in a world of justice. God's realm, which we seek "on earth as it is in heaven," is a place where all people

are valued and respected, and where everyone has an opportunity to fulfill their God-given potential.

We are called to be co-creators, with God, of this new world. We are called to create a place where each person has all he or she needs to be the whole person God intends him or her to be. In this new world, every person has a way to contribute to society as well as to receive what he or she needs. Let us be co-creators of a world where justice flows down like water and washes away the need for charity.

In the United States and around the world, inequities embedded in the rules, laws, and customs that govern our lives – called structural injustices – create poverty and oppression for some and opportunities for fulfillment and economic plenty for others. Doing justice means reshaping unjust structures and working to



break down barriers to opportunity. As UCC theologian Walter Brueggemann has written, "Justice is to sort out what belongs to whom, and return it to them."



If we are not affected by structural injustices, these barriers may be invisible to us. When everything in my life is going well, it is easy to believe it is because I am doing everything right. I can easily fall into the trap of thinking my good fortune is the result of my hard work, my abilities, my "playing by the rules," my persistence. But when things go wrong – when I lose my job, when my house is in foreclosure, when I can't pay off my credit cards – then I face the question, what did I do wrong?

Maybe nothing. Maybe I have just been caught up in a system that is unjust.

Our good fortune and our bad fortune are dependent upon much more than our own abilities and hard work. Many additional factors influence these outcomes such as the country in which we were born; who our parents were; our genetic makeup; our educational opportunities; our physical, mental, and emotional health; the state of the economy at the time we left school and got our first job; our appearance; even our birth order. Economic justice is a society in which these factors do not hinder anyone's opportunity for abundant life.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO: INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A CONGREGATION

In the previous section, **Engaging the Issues**, the focus was on “head” learning about various economic justice issues. This section encourages experiential learning in two ways:

1. by encouraging members of the congregation to share their individual stories with others and listen to others’ stories in small groups and
2. by exploring the community around the church or other setting in ways that may be new.

#### Keeping a Journal

As you engage your community both within and outside the church you will be on a journey of discovery. You may meet new people and get to know old friends in new ways. You will learn new things and encounter new sights, smells, and even tastes. Like many travelers, you may find it useful to keep a journal to record your experiences, impressions, and insights. The journal could be an individual one, or it could be a joint project, growing out of regular times of group discussion.

What is important is that, as you move forward on this journey of engaging the community, you reflect on your experiences, holding them in the light of faith. This question may help you in this process: What is God’s will for the people we meet, for our community, and for our ministry in this time and at this place?

#### Within the Congregation: Small-group Conversations

The planning group may want to host two (or more) sessions of deep sharing for the congregation: “Reflecting on Our Community” and “Sharing Our Stories.” These conversations could occur fairly early during the discernment process or later in the journey.



Each of these conversations might begin with introductions and prayer. Then the leader provides an overview of the hour-long session. The leader should either give out copies of the questions or have them written on a flipchart for all to see.

#### *Week 1: Reflecting on Our Community*

The purpose of this session is to share information and insights about the community around the church or other setting, to get to know each other at a deeper level, and to plant seeds about the need for, and ways to engage in, economic justice. These questions don’t have right or wrong answers but are intended to get you thinking.



#### Economic Issues

1. What economic issues most affect our community? (For example, the lack of affordable housing, hunger, unemployment, low-wage work, lack of affordable child care, health care, all of the above)
2. What is the root cause of these issues? (For example, changing economic structures, plant closings or openings, population shifts, long-term changes in the economy, etc.)
3. Why are some workers paid very little while others make quite a lot?
4. Can people be working and still be poor? Why?
5. What is the difference between a minimum wage and a living wage? (The *minimum wage*, set by Congress or a state legislature, is the lowest amount an employer can legally pay except in special circumstances. In 2011 the federal minimum was \$7.25 an hour, or \$290 for a 40-hour week. States could

set a higher level. A *living wage* is the wage necessary to support an adequate but meager standard of living, usually estimated to be \$10 an hour or more. See Let Justice Roll (<http://letjusticeroll.org>)

6. Does every worker deserve to be paid at least a living wage?

### Poverty

7. In our community, who are the people on the margins, the ones who Jesus called “the least of these”? Are they members of our church?
8. Do people feel comfortable seeking help from food pantries or other charities? How would you feel if you had to seek food at a soup kitchen or food pantry?
9. How do you feel when you see people in the grocery store checkout line using food stamps? Today, food stamps are often provided through debit cards. Does this make things easier? Why? Should people be able to buy whatever they want with food stamps?

### Working for Change

10. Are you comfortable working in a soup kitchen or clothes closet? Why or why not?
11. Are you comfortable working to bring more fundamental change in the economic system so people would not be poor? Are you comfortable participating in a protest march or visiting your elected representative to discuss an issue of concern?
12. Do you see justice issues as “political,” outside the range of topics and actions that the church should get involved with? Or are they tightly woven into our call to be Christians?



Churches are legally allowed to support or oppose particular issues or legislation through activities like educating and informing people, participating in demonstrations and rallies, lobbying members of Congress, calling talk shows, writing letters to the editor, or getting people at Coffee Hour to sign petitions. Churches are not legally allowed to support candidates, urging people to vote for or against a particular person.

For more information, see “Guidelines for Congregations and Clergy on Political Action” ([www.ucc.org/ourfaithhourvote/pdfs/guideline2pp.pdf](http://www.ucc.org/ourfaithhourvote/pdfs/guideline2pp.pdf)).

**Week 2: Sharing Our Stories** We can learn about the world and support our neighbors just by hearing their stories. One way to initiate a deeper immersion in one’s community is to hear the stories of people whom we think we know. In the United States today, over half of the population lives in poverty at some point in their lives. Some of our friends and neighbors may live in poverty or may have done so at an earlier time. Others may be without health insurance or may have lacked it in the past. Some may use food stamps or live in public housing, either now or previously. By sharing these stories we can educate each other about what it means to live on the margins. We can also share a little of the pain that people experience in these very difficult circumstances.

Sensitive issues may surface during this conversation. It is important for the pastor to be aware this conversation is taking place. He/she may want to be present to provide pastoral support, if needed.

As we approach a time of deep sharing, it is good to begin with centering. Say a prayer asking for soft hearts and listening ears. Express the desire to hear each other’s stories with love and

gentleness. Before beginning, discuss the need for confidentiality to assure speakers that the conversation will be held in confidence.



The goal of this session is to understand how pervasive the conditions of poverty and injustice really are, including among folks in your congregation. Joblessness, poverty, shortage of food,

inability to pay bills, foreclosure, and even homelessness are not far away from most of us. Any or all of these tragic situations could result from a long (or even short) spell of unemployment, a serious illness, divorce, or other adverse circumstance. In many cases, people who are poor are just like us. In some cases, they are us. In a world filled with God's abundance freely given, in a fabulously rich country, there is no need for poverty. But structural injustices create poverty and keep people impoverished. What does it feel like to be poor, to be dependent on charity, to worry about providing food for one's children and oneself?

### Questions for small-group sharing

1. How have I been affected by the economic upheaval of the past few years?
2. How have other members of my immediate and extended family or friends been affected?
3. Will my children and grandchildren have the opportunities I have had? How do I feel about that?



4. Will my children and grandchildren enjoy the same economic security?
5. Do I have economic security now? How do I feel about this?
6. How do the experiences of the past couple of years illustrate the power of unjust structures?
7. Have I been unemployed, not knowing where or when I would find my next job? How did that make me feel?
8. Have I or my family or friends ever been "food insecure" with limited or uncertain sources of food? Have I used food stamps? How did I feel in these situations? How did others treat me?
9. Was I ever homeless or forced to move in with family or friends to avoid homelessness? What was/is that like? How did/do I feel? How did others respond to me? Have I ever had the utilities turned off because I couldn't pay the bills? How did I cope? How did it feel?

After the sharing, some may feel the need for healing, for putting balm on old or fresh wounds, or for offering support to each other. We may discover that interventions are needed to relieve the suffering that has been shared.

Close with prayers. Pray for those who are suffering and for those who have suffered, pray for everyone who has shared their pain, pray for a world where every person has all they need for the whole and holy life God intends for each of us, pray for God's reign to come on earth, as it is in heaven.

### Outside the Congregation: In the Community

By getting to know our neighbors, especially those who are poor and marginalized, we may more fully begin to discern what God is calling us to do in our communities. Too often we do not know our neighbors, especially those who are different from us in terms of race, socio-economic class, or ethnicity. We don't know their stories or the barriers they face every day. In our ignorance, we may too readily come to believe stereotypes and myths.

One option for getting to know our neighbors is to visit and intentionally interact with people in a soup kitchen, homeless shelter, or clothes closet, possibly in a location where members of the congregation are already serving. But beware: when we engage with people in locations and situations where charity is given and received, a definite hierarchy is present. The recipients are receiving the charity of others. This is disempowering.



Recipients of charity, in the moment, are often intimidated and ready to accept and internalize others' views of them. They may carry with them the legacy of years, even a lifetime, of oppression.

Another way to engage with unfamiliar neighbors is to arrange a visit through an organization specifically working to bring greater justice to marginalized people. (See "Opportunities for Exploring Your Community" below.) Through such visits, we can hear from people who have found their voice and can describe the oppression they encountered. They can also tell us how they are acting to liberate themselves, what they are doing to end the



oppression of others, and how we can help. These stories of transformation can transform the listeners.

**Opportunities for Exploring Your Community** Every community has organizations and groups of people working for justice. What groups have you read about in the paper? Who is actively engaged in the struggles of workers or in strengthening civil rights for people of color, for Muslims, for people of all sexual orientations? Who is working to preserve needed safety net services and save programs from budget cuts? Who is speaking out at meetings of the city council, visiting legislators in the state capital, or sending letters to the editor of the paper in solidarity with people on the margins?

Many if not all of these organizations would be very happy to respond to your request for more information about what they are doing and the needs they are addressing in your community. Make a list of the ones you read about in the paper or have heard about in some other way and then reach out to one or more of these groups. Invite the group to share with you about what they are doing.



Or seek to visit them and learn about their work directly. Hear the stories of why they are engaged, what they have accomplished, and what they hope to do.

After you visit with one of these groups or hear about its work, come together to discuss what you have learned. What do you think of their work and their message? Why do they do this work? Are they making a difference? Is their work needed in the community? Why? Would you or others in the congregation want

to explore joining them in their work? Why or why not? What would Jesus think of their work?

If you need help finding appropriate organizations in your community, you might start with the list of national organizations below. They may have local affiliates that are active in your location.

*Religious-Labor Coalitions:* Two national networks bring local labor organizations and religious congregations together into religious-labor collaborations to support the struggles of workers, especially low-wage workers:

Interfaith Worker Justice ([www.iwj.org/](http://www.iwj.org/)) “calls upon our religious values in order to educate, organize, and mobilize the religious community on issues and campaigns that will improve wages, benefits, and working conditions for workers, especially low-wage workers.” Nationwide, some 40 local coalitions of labor and religious organizations are “building a strong movement for worker and economic justice.” Find local coalitions at [www.iwj.org/template/page.cfm?id=182](http://www.iwj.org/template/page.cfm?id=182)

Jobs with Justice ([www.jwj.org/](http://www.jwj.org/)) engages workers and religious and community allies in “campaigns to win justice in workplaces and in communities where working families live.” Jobs with Justice coalitions of labor, religious, student, and community organizations share a vision of “lifting up workers’ rights struggles as part of a larger campaign for economic and social justice.” Jobs with Justice has local coalitions in more than 40 cities in 25 states across the country. You can find them at [www.jwj.org/about-us/our-network](http://www.jwj.org/about-us/our-network)

*Congregation-Based Community Organizing:* Congregation-based community organizing (CBCO) is community organizing rooted in faith bodies that come together in answer to God’s call to love our neighbors, stand with the marginalized, and work with God



for a more just society. Local CBCO coalitions of congregations work together to address the needs and injustices present in their communities. Pastors and church members report that participation in CBCO can be a transforming experience for congregations, individuals, and communities.

Find more information at [www.ucc.org/justice/cbco/](http://www.ucc.org/justice/cbco/) and in *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing* by Dennis A. Jacobsen (Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001).

*The Labor Movement:* Union members reside in every state and almost every community in the nation. Union members are teachers, firefighters and first responders, police officers, airline pilots, flight attendants, nurses and other health care workers, construction workers, utility and telecommunications workers, manufacturing and production workers, writers, actors, musicians, athletes, truck and bus drivers, municipal, county, state and federal workers, and so much more.

Union members teach and care for our children and for the disabled, infirm, and elderly in our midst. They sort and deliver our mail, build our nation’s infrastructure, and keep our water clean and our electricity flowing. They are on the front lines of tapping and processing the energy resources that keep the nation going, and rank and file union members are often the first on the scene in natural disasters or other individual or community emergencies.

Unions exist as a result of the voluntary and democratic coming together of workers in a workplace or industry who seek to secure a voice on the job; bargain collectively over wages, benefits, and working conditions; and ensure a safe, healthy, and fair workplace in which workers are treated with dignity and their contributions toward workplace productivity and quality are valued and respected. Unions care about both union members and non-union workers and retirees.

Unions within the local community, along with other community partners, are often at the forefront of local economic justice struggles such as efforts to secure family-sustaining wages and safe and decent working conditions for all workers. Unions are especially concerned about supporting and providing protections and a collective voice for the most vulnerable or low-wage workers in the community.

By connecting with the labor movement in our region or state or with one or more local unions in our community, we can learn more about current worker struggles and explore how local workers and our faith communities can become stronger together in our shared quest for economic justice.

Members of the congregation or other setting may know of unions or other labor groups you can contact. Or use these websites to find local labor groups:

AFL-CIO ([www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org))

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees ([www.afscme.org](http://www.afscme.org))

Local or regional Central Labor Council: find one in your area by googling "Central Labor Council"

Service Employees International Union ([www.seiu.org](http://www.seiu.org))



### ENGAGING THE SPIRIT

As we engage in any form of ministry and consider how to live our lives more faithfully, we recognize the need to feed our



souls and to continually seek guidance from the Holy Spirit. Justice advocates, like all Christians, are strengthened and receive wisdom when we frequently, intentionally, and deeply seek the presence and will of

God. When we are involved in the struggle for justice, we remember that our spirit fuels our work and therefore needs feeding.

To be justice people in a world overflowing with injustice is not an easy journey. We live in North America, a place of affluence for some, economic insecurity for many, and poverty for too many. In the world, the huge majority of people have fewer material resources than we do and lack things that we take for granted. Our economic position in the United States and the world prompts us to think carefully about what God is calling us to do and how God is calling us to live.

**Engaging the Spirit** provides resources for individual faith practices. The practices described below are intended to deepen both our inner journeys to greater communion with God, and our outer journeys to greater commitment to and work for justice. These practices can inspire, feed, and encourage a



deeper spiritual communion with God and commitment to our justice work. Keep in mind that what is listed here are just some of the many spiritual practices and resources that could be helpful.

### SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

*Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.* Isaiah 40:31

Regularly engaging in spiritual practices more firmly roots our thoughts and actions in God's strength and truth. We gain insights and are aided in discernment. We become clearer about the way forward. We grow stronger physically, emotionally, and spiritually, able to carry on even when the powers and principalities are aligned against us. Many of these practices are rooted in ancient traditions but they provide the same spiritual foundation today as when they were first practiced. The practices are a way for our wise and loving God to give us the guidance, strength, and compassion we need to be people who seek and work for justice.

#### Centering Prayer

This ancient practice has been "rediscovered" in the last 20 to 30 years. Using centering prayer can help us deepen our relationship with God. Put simply, centering prayer is silent prayer that prepares an individual to experience God's presence from within. It also invites that presence and facilitates our movement toward God.

Additional information and resources are available at [www.contemplativeoutreach.org](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org). More information can be found in the many books written by Thomas Keating and others. Some suggested titles are listed at the end of this section.



### Fasting

Fasting is another ancient practice that can be beneficial today. Traditionally, fasting meant abstinence from food. But today, in a world where we hunger and burn with desire for many things such as the latest electronic gadgets, clothes, big houses, and fancy cars as well as food, we can benefit from many different kinds of fasts. Fasting helps us sort out our needs and desires, and puts our abundance in perspective.

Fasting allows us to develop a greater appreciation for what we have and feel greater compassion for those who have less than we do. Doing something that is hard, that stretches us, means moving beyond our will power. To remain steadfast requires us to rely on God, to seek God's strength and power. The mystics also tell us that as we empty ourselves of things and desires, we create more space for God to enter, allowing God to shine forth from within us bringing love and justice, peace and comfort.

In her book *Soul Feast*, Marjorie Thompson writes, "Completing a fast I have set for myself is not always easy. I may need to call on God's help to accomplish my goal. But by engaging in a regular practice of fasting, "things" begin to lose their hold over me. I see more clearly both my own abundance and other's lack of abundance. I more clearly can distinguish my needs from wants, and may become a better steward of my money, time, and talents."

Besides fasting from food (or certain kinds of food) or other material goods, we might also fast from shopping, watching TV, using social media or a cell phone, using the car, or from anything that we think has us too much in its grasp. If anyone decides to fast from food, make sure the fast does not endanger your health in any way. Never fast from water.



### Sabbath

For many Christians, the Ten Commandments are our most fundamental ethical guidelines. "You shall not steal." "You shall not murder." It doesn't get more basic than that. "Honor your father and mother." Yes.

But "observe the Sabbath Day and keep it holy"? What? Is this just a reminder that we are supposed to go to church on Sunday? The commandment does not say to go to church, to worship God with your friends and neighbors once a week. It says to keep a day holy. Why is this so important as to be one of the big 10?

The Sabbath is a day to put God first in our lives, a day to abstain from our usual hectic pace. It is a day to turn aside from all the things that distract us, that seek our attention and tell us that they are the most important things in our lives.

Our answers to the following questions may help clarify the importance of Sabbath in our lives:

- What am I called to do on the Sabbath?
- In my life, how can I act in ways that put God first?
- On this very important day, how should I use my time in a way that puts God first?

### Spiritual Retreats

Spiritual retreats are journeys in faith that deepen our spirituality and can lead us to transformational living. Whether the retreat is designed for an individual or a group, it can profoundly inspire and renew. A retreat can be a time of discernment, guiding a participant in his or her calling as a faithful disciple. Retreats can provide a source for the energy to transform the life of a congregation, an individual, or the world.

A retreat can be structured for a group and follow an agenda or can be totally unstructured with space for individuals or groups to follow where the Spirit leads. Many online sites list retreat opportunities and locations:

Retreat Finder: [www.retreatfinder.com/](http://www.retreatfinder.com/)

Retreats Online: [www.retreatsonline.com/](http://www.retreatsonline.com/)

Find the Divine: [www.findthedivine.com/](http://www.findthedivine.com/)

All About Retreats: [www.allaboutretreats.com/](http://www.allaboutretreats.com/)

### Resources for Spiritual Practices

Chittister, Joan, *The Rule of Benedict*, Crossroads Publishing Co, 2004.

Keating, Thomas, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, Continuum Publishing Co., 2005 (20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition).

Keating, Thomas, *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Contemplative Prayer*, Crossroads Publishing Co., 2009.

Keating, Thomas, *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation*, Continuum Publishing Co., 1994.

Muller, Wayne, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, Bantam Books, 1999.

Thompson, Marjorie J., *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.

Vennard, Jane, *Praying with Body and Soul*, Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998.

### FAITHFUL CONSUMPTION

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6: 19-21*

*Riches prick us with a thousand troubles in getting them, as many cares in preserving them, yet more anxiety in spending them, and with grief in losing them.* G. K. Chesterton

The journey toward good stewardship is a journey toward loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. It is the journey toward embracing God's plan for who we are, while turning our backs on corporate America's plans for us.

This journey toward God and away from the temptation of over-consumption can be one of the most difficult things we will ever



undertake. In the highly materialist U.S. culture, frank discussions within a community of seekers who are on a similar path can be supportive. Regular spiritual practices that bring us into the presence of the living God will give us courage and

strength. Face-to-face personal encounters with those who have too little, listening to their stories, and allowing ourselves to be touched by their truth can give us renewed energy for the struggle.

We can live out our commitments to economic justice by taking steps to live more simply, engage in responsible purchasing, and practice responsible investing.

### Living Simply

Living more simply is a way to engage the spirit in everyday life. Moreover, in a time of diminishing resources and climate change, when billions of people are living in poverty, it is a very concrete way to love our neighbors and creation. For centuries, Christians have chosen to live as simply as possible in community or alone. For them, the primary motivation may have been spiritual



development and nurture. We can still seek those goals today, while also recognizing that voluntary simplicity has also become a way to live out the call to economic justice by using fewer resources and focusing on the importance of community. The first step for many individuals, families, and congregations is honesty about assessing what we *need* versus what we *want*. Next is the need to determine one's priorities and values. What type of lifestyle is faithful to our Christian values? Lifestyle changes are often easily identified, but the long-term commitment to make these changes can be difficult. Small groups that meet regularly to discuss their commitments and share their progress can be very helpful.

The Northwest Earth Institute (<http://nwei.org/>) in Portland, Oregon, has created several curricula for use in small groups that speak to a variety of ways to live more simply, more justly, and on better terms with creation. Although the curricula are secular in nature, there is a spiritual base and they are easily adaptable to a church community. Two courses that deal with simplicity and sustainability are:

*Voluntary Simplicity*, <http://nwei.org/discussion-courses-2/voluntary-simplicity> (Currently out of stock; previous edition available. Cost: \$12.00)

*Choices for Sustainable Living*, <http://nwei.org/discussion-courses-2/choices-for-sustainable-living> (Cost: \$21.00)

Each can be used to begin conversations about what simple sustainable living might mean to each individual and what a commitment to follow the words of Francis Moore Lappe "to live simply so that others may simply live" might look like.

### Responsible Purchasing

Every day we make choices about whether to buy and what to

buy. These often casual decisions have enormous consequences for people around the globe and for the natural world. These questions for self-reflection can assist you in examining your personal purchasing values:

- Does this purchase add positive value to my life, my home, or my community?
- Does this purchase harm or help the natural environment?
- Could I do without this purchase?
- How else could I spend this money? Could I save it for the future or give it to someone else who needs it more than I do?
- Is this purchase justified based on my faith-based values of economic and environmental justice?

There is useful information, suggestions, and resources in *Our Money, Our Values: Building a Just & Sustainable World* by Holly Hewitt Ullrich and Catherine Mobly (Pilgrim Press, 2010).

**Avoid buying products made in sweatshops.** Nearly all retail stores carry goods made in sweatshops. In fact, most apparel is made in sweatshops. You can avoid buying sweatshop apparel by purchasing union-made clothes or those certified to be sweat-free. These guides can help:

The Green America Pages: [www.greenpages.org](http://www.greenpages.org)  
SweatFree Communities' Shop with a Conscience Consumer Guide: [www.sweatfree.org/shopping](http://www.sweatfree.org/shopping)

Also check out No Sweat ([www.sweatshops.org](http://www.sweatshops.org)), Green America's program to end sweatshop labor.



**Buy fairly traded goods.** Fair trade is an equitable exchange between the people who make products and the people who buy them. It empowers low-income, disadvantaged, and marginalized producers around the world. It eliminates many of the "middle men" and directly pays artisans, farmers, democratically run cooperatives, and other producers a living wage for their products, appropriate for their country and location. It encourages producers to engage in environmentally sustainable practices; respects cultural identity; and provides healthy, safe, and humane working conditions. Most important, it is a form of economic development, empowering poor communities and giving them the resources to improve living conditions.

The UCC Coffee Project ([www.ucc.org/justice/coffee-project](http://www.ucc.org/justice/coffee-project)) with Equal Exchange ([www.equalexchange.coop](http://www.equalexchange.coop)) is one way to participate in fair trade.

An excellent source of more information is the Fair Trade Resource Network ([www.fairtraderesource.org](http://www.fairtraderesource.org)).

**Use consumer and shareholder activism to drive better corporate practices.** Multinational or other large corporations often contract with other, usually smaller firms, for products. These products obtained from subcontractors may be ready to be sold to consumers (such as clothing or food to be sold by a retail store) or may be used by a multinational manufacturer in the production of another product (like parts to be used in the making of a car). Even though the large multinational company may pay its workers a living wage, provide good



fringe benefits, and treat the environment responsibly, its suppliers may not.

Large corporations need to take responsibility for the behavior of the suppliers in their supply chain. They have the opportunity and power to require their suppliers to operate in a just, humane, and sustainable manner. Many corporations set the terms of their contracts with suppliers even to the point of specifying, in great detail, the materials and production processes to be used. But typically these contracts are silent regarding labor and environmental practices.

Consumers and shareholders who are concerned about workers and the environment are engaged in pressuring corporations to establish codes of conduct for their suppliers to specify the standards that must be met. Independent monitors then observe the suppliers to ensure their compliance.

In the absence of laws to prevent abuses, consumers need to become more knowledgeable and responsible. These organizations provide more information on using shareholder activism, public witness, and our purchasing dollars to drive better corporate practices:

International Labor Rights Forum: [www.laborrights.org](http://www.laborrights.org)

Student Labor Action Project: [www.studentlabor.org](http://www.studentlabor.org)

Green America: [www.greenpages.org](http://www.greenpages.org)

### **Socially Responsible Investing**

Many individuals, congregations, and other faith-based institutions have significant savings and investments in endowments and pension funds, for example. These funds can be, and many people argue they should be, invested in ways that are consistent with the values of the investor.



The Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR; [www.iccr.org](http://www.iccr.org)) is a membership organization of some 275 faith-based institutional investors, including national denominations, religious communities, pension funds, and endowments, with a combined portfolio worth of \$110 billion. ICCR is a leader in the corporate social responsibility movement, pressing companies to be socially and environmentally responsible. Each year, ICCR members sponsor over 100 shareholder resolutions on major social and environmental issues, calling on corporations to improve their practices.

The UCC Pension Boards and United Church Foundation are members of ICCR and engage in socially responsible investing. ([www.pbucc.org/interior\\_default.asp](http://www.pbucc.org/interior_default.asp))

### **PUBLIC WITNESS AND ACTION**

*Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Defend the rights of the poor and needy. Proverbs 31:8-9*

*It is not possible to remain neutral in the face of poverty and the resulting just claims of the poor; a posture of neutrality would, moreover, mean siding with the injustice and oppression in our midst. Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation*

Throughout the Bible, God is seen acting for justice: freeing the Hebrew slaves, and providing manna in the wilderness where everyone is told to take an equal amount and had all they needed (Ex. 16:16). The prophets challenged the powerful calling for God's justice to be done. Jesus was a person of justice, of inclusion for all, who called on the rich to give to the poor.

Biblical Foundations for Advocacy offers an overview of what the Bible has to say about justice. ([www.ucc.org/justice/advocacy\\_resources/jwm-bible-studies.html](http://www.ucc.org/justice/advocacy_resources/jwm-bible-studies.html))



Christians today are called to continue the work of justice, to continue striving with God to build God’s reign “on earth as it is in heaven.” To be silent, to fail to act is to participate in the status quo, and to support a nation and world disfigured by poverty and economic oppression.

Slightly modified, an oft-told story illustrates our Christian responsibility:

When I arrive at the pearly gates, St. Peter will not ask me whether I was like Moses, leading released captives out of Egypt. He will not ask whether I resisted a dictator’s oppression like Bonhoeffer or led a peaceful rebellion to overthrow imperialism like Gandhi. No, I will be asked whether I worked to change economic and other injustices in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Let us get ready to answer “yes!” Acting, witnessing, and working to change unjust structures and laws is an important part of our calling as Christians. Working for justice is a spiritual practice that strengthens and deepens our relationship with God.

See suggestions for what you can do at **Ways to Engage** on the Economic Justice Covenant Program homepage.

**Resources for Public Witness and Action**

Birch, Bruce C., *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991.  
 Blank, Rebecca M., *Do Justice: Linking Christian Faith and Modern Economic Life*, United Church Press, 1992.  
 Borg, Marcus J., *The Heart of Christianity*, Harper Collins, 2003.  
 Borg, Marcus J. and Tim Scorer, *Living the Heart of Christianity: Putting Your Faith into Action*, Harper Collins 2006.  
 Chittister, Joan, *Cry Justice, Cry Hope*, Benetvision Press, 2010.

**WRITING AND APPROVING THE COVENANT**

*Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.* Habakkuk 2:2b - 3

How to go about writing and approving the covenant will depend on each congregation. Some congregations are more formal and procedural while others are more informal. The following process is a suggested method. Either use it as is or adopt it to incorporate what will best work with a particular congregation’s culture and style of operation.

**1. Provide time for learning and discernment on the issues of economic justice:** This phase could take some months and should not be rushed. Members will engage in worship, prayer, and Bible study on these topics. They will embark on new experiences and friendships that cross lines of class and race. They will explore personal choices and lifestyles that impact economic justice.

In a materialist culture where the economy is dependent on consumption, this journey will take many members of the congregation into unfamiliar territory. Some may need time to reflect, consider, and live into new ways of seeing and living. Some will want to explore new thoughts and feelings within a supportive group environment. The idea of working to change economic structures may be threatening to some. Fears, doubts, and questions must be addressed before the congregation can make a decision about its future.

**2. Move to the writing phase:** Once the issue of economic justice is addressed through worship, learning, and discernment,

the planning committee can request the church governing body to approve the writing of an economic justice covenant.

**3. Seek input on what being an Economic Justice Church will mean for the congregation:** Simultaneously, the committee must provide opportunity for the congregation to explore what becoming an Economic Justice Church might mean. What will be different if the decision is made to be an Economic Justice Church? What will the congregation commit to do if this decision is made?

The focus of conversation may already have started to shift from “Should we become an Economic Justice Church?” to “What would it be like if we were an Economic Justice Church?” Ultimately, before making a decision, the congregation must consider this question: “What will it mean to be an Economic Justice Church in this place, at this time?”

These steps can help to facilitate these conversations:

- Host a series of conversations about this topic before or after worship with everyone invited to attend at least once.
- Ask existing groups – the women’s and men’s groups, committees, youth and young adult groups – to add this conversation to the agenda for their gatherings.
- Make sure that the suggestions that result from these conversations are recorded. They can be incorporated into the covenant.

**4. Write the first draft of the covenant:** The planning committee can write the covenant itself, or select a writing committee. The covenant can be a revision of one that already exists or entirely new. In either case, base it on your congregation’s insights and concerns. Include the ideas that have



surfaced in the conversations about what this will mean for the future work of the church.

The covenant could be short or long, detailed or more general. You might want to write a covenant that is timeless, as applicable in five or 10 years as it is today. If so, the covenant might express the congregation’s commitment to write and approve a more specific statement, a “work plan,” each year or two about how the covenant will be implemented over that time period.

Other elements that might be included in the covenant:

- A key scripture passage or passages that the congregation found meaningful during the discernment period and a short commentary on the passage.
- An acknowledgment that the church is called to do justice, particularly economic justice, in a world of abundance where so many are poor.
- Stories, facts, and information that make the case for taking action on economic injustices.
- The brief history of the congregation’s prior and ongoing involvement with issues of economic injustice and previous actions and stances taken by the congregation.
- A description of the congregation’s “call” to get involved in this issue in a new or deeper way.
- Policies for dealing with the salary and benefits paid to the church’s employees and the way contractors are hired and treated.

- A statement of the congregation's commitment to be an Economic Justice Church.
- Statements defining what this will mean going forward – how will the life of the church and the lives of members be different as a result of this decision.

Finally, once all the essential elements of your covenant are included, short and simple is probably better than longer and more complicated.

You can view covenants of congregations that have become Economic Justice Churches on the Economic Justice Covenant Program website.

### 5. Share the early drafts with key leaders and the congregation:

Take the first draft to key people (pastor, moderator, others), ministries, and committees in your church for review. Once their comments are incorporated, a second draft can be widely circulated for input from members of the congregation and all church committees and bodies.

Go to the meetings of the youth and young adult groups to get their input. Visit the junior and senior high Sunday school classes. Go to meetings of the women's and men's groups to get their feedback. Visit with the missions committee, trustees, and deacons. Share it with other special groups and committees.

Incorporate comments received into a final draft.

**6. Seek approval for moving forward:** At this point, the draft covenant is near its final form. In some congregations you might want to seek approval from the church governing body one last time and obtain its consent to move toward a decision on whether to become an Economic Justice Church. Select a tentative date when the congregation will make its decision.



**7. Share the final draft with the congregation and make a decision:** Widely disseminate the final version of the draft covenant. It can be printed in the Sunday bulletin on a number of Sundays, and in a monthly newsletter. Copies can be available in the fellowship hall and narthex.

Then engage the congregation in conversation about it. This could happen in you-all-come gatherings before and after worship or during the evening. Seek out places to share the covenant and the plans for what it will mean for the congregation and its work in the world.

At this point, hopefully, the content and form of the covenant should be set and changed only for reasons of grammar or editing improvements. But if substantive changes are needed, another draft can be created and again shared for feedback.

Alert the congregation to the date when the decision will be made to become an Economic Justice Church. This decision could be taken by voting, consensus, or whatever decision-making method the congregation typically uses. On the Sunday selected for the decision, gather in a congregational meeting. Collectively read the covenant. Then a motion can be made to adopt the covenant and the decision taken.

### 8. After the decision, celebrate!

### 9. Identify your church as an Economic Justice Church:

Plan to post the covenant in a prominent and highly visible location. Also add the designation "An Economic Justice Church" to signage, church letterhead, the Sunday bulletin, and other places both as a witness to the world and to remind the congregation of the commitment it has made.



The planning committee has two more things to do as its last official acts. First, be sure that a group is elected or appointed to begin implementing the actions called for in the covenant. See **Living Out the Covenant** below. Second, share with Justice and Witness Ministries the news that your congregation is an Economic Justice Church and send a copy of your covenant to Justice & Witness Ministries by e-mail at [jwm@ucc.org](mailto:jwm@ucc.org) or call (toll-free) 1-866-822-8224, ext. 3700. The covenant will be posted on the Economic Justice Covenant Program website.

One congregation has already been through this process, United Church of Chapel Hill in North Carolina. Read their story on the Economic Justice Covenant Program website.



### LIVING OUT THE COVENANT

Congratulations on becoming an Economic Justice Church!

Your congregation has been on a journey of discernment. You have engaged with our faith, the Holy Spirit, and with the community both within and outside your walls, and you have learned about issues of economic justice. You have covenanted with God and with each other to be a congregation working for economic justice. And you have given some thought to what this will mean for the life of the congregation going forward. You are now ready to live out that faith-based commitment to being a congregation that seeks economic justice.

We hope the covenant you adopted will be posted in a prominent and highly visible location. Please consider adding the designation “An Economic Justice Church” to signage, church letterhead, the Sunday bulletin, and other places both as a witness to the world and to remind the congregation of the commitment it has made.

We join with you in hoping that the covenant will become part of the ongoing life of the church. Making the commitment to be an Economic Justice Church means the congregation’s witness and work in the world will be different going forward. To ensure that, there are some steps you can take.

### Implementing the Covenant

To implement the goals that are outlined in your congregation’s covenant, consider creating an economic justice committee or task force. This could be a totally new body within the church or it could be an existing body (such as a social justice committee) that takes on this new ministry.

The committee/task force's first task would be to carefully read the covenant in order to clearly understand the congregation's intentions for the covenant going forward. Then the group can construct a one- to two-year plan of implementation that includes a range of activities focused on economic justice such as worship and prayer, study, and activities – both advocacy and “on-the-ground” engagement – in the local community, the nation, or world. The draft implementation plan could be shared for review and comments with the governing body and others within the church, then distributed to the congregation.

Don't forget to begin at home. Churches must work to ensure their own employment guidelines are fair, equitable, and humane. If policies and practices within the church are unjust, how can the congregation engage with integrity in economic justice work in the wider community? A thorough reflection on internal practices and values should always precede external actions.

For a list of General Synod resolutions that address issues of economic justice within the UCC, see <http://www.ucc.org/justice/economic-justice/Resolutions.html>

There are many organizations and resources that can support and facilitate our ministries of economic justice. Many of these are gathered together in **Ways to Engage** on the Economic Justice Covenant Program website.

### Keeping It Fresh

Each year the congregation can mark the anniversary of the decision to become an Economic Justice Church by re-reading the covenant together during worship and engaging in activities to re-commit to and celebrate the decision. At that time, events and activities related to the commitment that happened during the previous 12 months can be lifted up and celebrated.



Justice and Witness Ministries invites you to share what you are doing with the wider UCC. As you worship, pray, study, and work on issues of economic justice, Justice and Witness Ministries invites you to share your experiences by posting stories and pictures on the Economic Justice Covenant Program website.

### Ways to Engage

There are many ways to engage in ministries of economic justice. The lengthy list of options in **Ways to Engage** are just some of them. These suggestions can be used as they are or adapted to fit the needs of your congregation, community, and area. You may also already have ideas for what your congregation will do as an Economic Justice Church. Be led by God and by the interests and gifts of the congregation to determine the work you are called to do.

### Sustaining the Struggle

At some point, the members of the committee or task force assigned to lead the work of being an Economic Justice Church may hit an emotional and spiritual wall, either individually or as a group. The issues will seem too big. It will seem like conversations need to be repeated over and over. Work may come to a standstill or the group may meet resistance in the church or elsewhere. Group members may feel anxious or maybe even embarrassed about what seems like a lack of progress. Or they may feel angry, sad, or powerless at this moment. As a group or individually, you may wonder if this is the time to quit or quietly fade away.



Anyone who has been involved with social justice work for any length of time has had an experience like this at one time or another. There's not a way to skip this experience. It's a normal and natural result of hard work and honest assessment. However, there's another side to this, too. These feelings often come to us right before a significant breakthrough. These moments can be an invitation from the Spirit to go deeper. Here are four very simple things to do to accept that invitation:

**1. Take some Sabbath time:** Sabbath is a time to rest and to get some perspective. It's a time to realign ourselves with God, reflect on deeply held values and beliefs, remember "who we are and whose we are," and remember the stories that inspired us to do this work in the first place. Sabbath is a time to focus on some of those things we are most thankful for. Whether Sabbath time is taken individually or with a wider group of folks from your church or other churches, it can be a good way to renew dedication and commitment.

**2. Intentionally listen:** The initial plan decided on by the committee or task force may no longer be working. It may not have been as successful as it could be, or maybe it moved few people to a deeper place. So take a breath. Step back. Take some time to intentionally listen to folks within your church and community. Assess where they are and hear where they think the church may be called to go. Nobody promised we would get everything right the first time.

**3. Celebrate what's working, let go of what's not:** Sometimes we get so focused on a *way* of doing something that we lose the "why." One size does not fit all and situations change along the way. Make sure the members of the committee/task force are intentionally working to balance out hopes and expectations in a way that the goals you have are reasonable, doable, and effective for the "why" you're working towards.



**4. Remember that not everything can be perfect but everything can be better:** Although this faith walk of ours sometimes has some large leaps in it, most of our progress will be made in small steps. Honor each step your community takes towards living into the calls for economic justice. The success of this sort of work is rarely as suddenly evident as it is gradually evident. Remember the big picture as you focus on some of the smaller details.

**5. Commit to supporting each other:** Part of building a community is to start being one. What kind of support and accountability might be needed to continue your work?

These are all pretty simple steps that are profoundly important. If Jesus needed time to pray, a community of allies, and conversations with others, certainly we do, too.

In a world blessed by God's abundance but marred by poverty and inequity, we are called to work for economic justice. May God strengthen us for the journey, give us courage to confront the powers and principalities, lead us in paths of love and compassion, and bless our work for justice.



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*God is still speaking,*  
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