



## **Self-Sufficient Wages Position Paper**

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)**

(FAQ's are provided to clarify the National Position Paper. They will be revised and developed as necessary to provide clarity to our position. They are not intended to change the language, meaning or intent of the Position Paper, as approved by the National Council.)

#### **Why use the term self-sufficient more than the widely used “living wage”?**

While terms such as living, just, or sustainable wage are not more commonly in use, they also vary widely in definition. It is our hope that, by using a more narrow definition, as developed by the University of Washington School of Social Work, we can cut through the definitional discussions and confusion and get down to the most important principle - how should we develop a pay scale for our positions that are fair to all stakeholders: employees, donors and our community.

*“A just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice. In determining fair pay both the needs and the contributions of each person must be taken into account. ‘Remuneration for work should guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level, taking into account the role and productivity of each, the state of the business and the common good.’ Agreement between the parties is not sufficient to justify morally the amount to be received in wages.”*

*Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2434*

#### **Our employees all have different family situations. Are you saying we should take that into consideration when setting pay scales?**

Absolutely not! Paying people according to marital status, gender or number of dependents is illegal. Nothing in our position is meant to preclude federal or state laws. We are suggesting that positions be evaluated by most of the same criteria you use today: skill level needed to perform the tasks, difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified people and prevailing wage of similar positions in our community. As Catholic employers, we add another criterion to that exercise-does the pay rate bring our dignity and self-sufficiency to the worker?

*Work is, as has been said, an obligation, that is to say, a duty, on the part of man... Man must work, both because the Creator has commanded it and because of his own humanity, which requires work in order to be maintained and developed. Man must work out of regard for others, especially his own family, but also for the Society he belongs to, the country of which he is a child and the whole human family of which he is a member, since he is the heir to the work of generations and at the same time a sharer in building the future of those who will come after him in the succession of history. (**Laborem Exercens**, On Human Work- Pope John Paul II, 1981), #16.*

**The federal poverty guidelines (<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/14poverty.cfm>) have different thresholds for different family sizes. Does that mean we pay people different rates according to family size?**

No. Again, nothing in this position paper should remotely suggest that we are encouraging violation of any federal or state wage or employment laws. It does mean that local Councils should investigate local costs for food, housing, child care, transportation and other living expenses and use that information when setting the pay rate for their positions.

*As the Church solemnly reaffirmed in the recent Council, “the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person.” All people have the right to work, to a chance to develop their qualities and their personalities in the exercise of their professions, to equitable remuneration which will enable them and their families “to lead a worthy life on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level” and to assistance in case of need arising from sickness or age. (**Octogesima Adveniens**, A Call to Action- Pope Paul VI, 1971).*

**What about folks that will lose benefits as salaries are increased?**

Workers should be paid for their contribution, not their personal situation. However, whenever possible, the starting point for pay should be above the minimum wage. In most locations, minimum wage jobs do not place people to above the poverty level when other costs are factored in.

*In many cases, poverty results from a violation of the dignity of human work, either because work opportunities are limited (through unemployment or underemployment), or just a wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.” (**Caritas in Veritate**, Charity in Truth- Pope Benedict XVI, 2009), #63.*

**What is the responsibility of a Vincentian employer when the wage they offer is commensurate with wages for that type of job in a particular region, but it still not a self-sufficient wage because it is a high cost area? (e.g. clerk, clothes sorter, truck driver)**

As Catholics, we should live out our faith in everything we do - at Mass, with our neighbors and as employers. Therefore, our wage standard should take into account the dignity of the person and their labor, in addition to prevailing local pay scales. If we pay a truck driver slightly more than the company down the block, but they still need to rely on SNAP to make it through the year, then we need to take another look at the wages we offer.

Again, we don't take the personal behavior or situation of the individual in mind when setting pay scales. If someone had a medical emergency and suddenly has a lot of bills, we don't raise their pay because of that situation. We would find a different way to show mercy and compassion.

What we are saying is that, as a Catholic employer, we should look at the wages we offer and make a conscious decision to set pay scales, taking into consideration the costs of living in our areas, and determine do we want to pay enough for a single person (without extraordinary circumstances) to live without outside support or can we move to a wage that might help a family of three or four to make it through the year without SNAP, visiting a food pantry, TANF, etc...?

*Work is a good thing for man- a good thing for his humanity- because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes “more a human being.”* (***Laborem Exercens***, *On Human Work*- Pope John Paul II, 1981), #9.

*The family is the fundamental cell of society and where we first learn, love and develop. A living wage is a fundamental right of workers and a moral imperative of employers because it provides workers with the means and resources to form and support a family. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church points out, “In order to protect this relationship between family and work, an element that must be appreciated and safeguarded is that of a family wage, a wage sufficient to maintain a family and allow it to live decently. Such a wage must also allow for savings that will permit the acquisition of property as a guarantee of freedom. The right to property is closely connected with the existence of families, which protect themselves from need thanks also to savings and to the building up of family property”* (No.250). From the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference, February, 2014.