# Worship Resources for Guaranteed Livable Income Effort

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For specific ways communities of faith can take action, please go to The United Church of Canada webpage [Create a Guaranteed Livable Income Program](https://united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/create-guaranteed-livable-income-program) on united-church.ca.

## Theological Rationale for Guaranteed Livable Income developed by GLI Network

When the pandemic first happened, some people began saying that we are all in this boat together. In fact, we are not all in the same boat. Inequities that existed long before COVID have been exacerbated in the pandemic. Low-income racialized communities have been hit the hardest by COVID and its economic impact. In our commitment to becoming an anti-racist church, we continue to work collectively toward economic justice.

Mutual care and responsibility for one another is part of what it means to be a neighbour.  “God has so arranged the body…that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it“(1 Corinthians 12:24‒26).

We share this divine imperative of care and responsibility with other major religions of the world.  “Do unto others as we would have them do unto us,” The Golden Rule, is a faith principle of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Indigenous Spiritualities, and most other religions.

The Parables of Jesus make it clear that God’s economy is inclusive of all. The price of something does not determine its value. All labourers in the vineyard receive the same compensation no matter how great or small a contribution they are able to offer. (Matthew 20:1‒15). God instills in every human the desire to contribute to the common good and values each contribution.

Canada’s current social welfare system has failed to recognize the value of all persons, the work and contributions of all, denying the dignity of our common humanity.  Instead, artists, caregivers, and workers in our precarious gig economy struggle with inadequate incomes that suck the time, energy, and health from our neighbours. This reality contradicts the very justice and peace God envisions for the whole inhabited earth. “[T]hey shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid…  (Micah 4:4).

Poverty in a wealthy nation such as Canada is a judgment on the community that creates and allows the impoverishment of its people. It is morally and ethically an affront to the will of God.

A guaranteed livable income replaces the systemic divide between the weak and strong, between the worthy and unworthy, with a system based on our common humanity. It replaces a system built on employability―where the so-called “deserving poor” have to beg for an inadequate subsistence―with a system that invests our taxes in the lives of all Canadians so that all may flourish and live with dignity.

During the pandemic, certain policy measures have been implemented by the federal government to relieve some of the insecurities and indignities over the past year. Thus far, these measures have been interim, not universally accessible, and without the commitment to be seriously and deeply named as abidingly durable.

We thus call for a guaranteed livable income that implements a structure of justice-making and justice-keeping that no longer excuses, rationalizes, and tolerates poverty. We call for a system that expresses a fundamental, fair level of income security for all (as did the early band of Christians who shared their resources so there was no need among them, Acts 4:32‒35).

Let us add our voices to the growing popular call for this historic movement of the Spirit.

## Guaranteed Livable Income Prayers

God of all peoples,  
Creator of a grand cosmos and tiny infants,  
Source of nurture and creation,  
you call us into relationship with each other.

We remain in our own judgment  
when we turn away from those who suffer  
in the midst of affluence and pandemic  
and the struggle to survive.

Open us to the cries of others  
and our hearts to your persuasive Spirit.  
May we acknowledge the needs among us  
and advocate for the fair distribution of resources.

May we learn the politics of justice and adequacy,  
that we may act with justice,  
love kindness, and move with humility.

Today we remember all who struggle to survive.  
We specifically hold in our hearts  
low-income racialized communities,  
who have experienced the most challenges with COVID.

We pray for our political leaders,  
that they act with compassion  
as they are asked to give leadership  
to implement a guaranteed livable income.

Remind us, Holy Wisdom, that through your love  
we encounter in each person, friend, or stranger  
Christ’s light and love in the world.

Grant that we may promote the justice and acceptance  
that enables peace, a true shalom.  
Help us to remember that we are one world and one family.  
Amen

―*Rev. Susan Eagle, Chair, Shining Waters Social and Ecological Justice Commission with Barry Rieder, Jane Finch Community Ministry*

All-loving and compassionate God,  
we pray for all Canadians, that they may have a livable income  
that can shepherd us through COVID times and onward.

We specifically hold in our hearts   
low-income racialized communities   
who have experienced the most challenges with COVID.

We pray for our political leaders,  
that they act with compassion  
as they are asked to give leadership  
to implement a guaranteed livable income.

Amen

―*Barry Rieder, Jane Finch Community Ministry*

Good, gracious God:   
As we thank you for each precious breath,   
breathe on us the Spirit of liberty, that it move to extend us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly―  
with and for thy creation, thy peoples, thy liberation from oppressions, inequalities,  
indignities, and insecurities of inadequate basics, including thus a livable income.  
In the accompanying name of the Anointed One and those before us, ahead of us, and beside us.  
Let it be (= Amen)

*―Rev. Barry Morris, Longhouse Council of Native Ministry, Vancouver*

### A Prayer of Confession and Resolve

Mysterious Creator God  
with gratitude we come seeking  
a new word and deed for our time  
that will bring us closer  
to the vision of your  
kindom of right relations  
and peace on earth

we approach you  
knowing that in response to  
our wayward ways  
you come running,  
welcoming our return with intimate embrace   
as a child a parent  
as a hen her chicks  
offering your  
divine compassion to hear and see  
our basic needs

we come confessing  
our complicity and ineptness of care  
in a world where  
the neighbour’s  
daily not enough  
is overshadowed by  
the fleshpots of  
those who have too much,  
and we need your  
heavenly spirit of distribution  
to heal and save us

prophets and seers of your Spirit  
truth-sayers in your name  
foretell  
a new day and time  
when the inequities and injustices  
of our making  
the sins of commission and omission  
of our doing  
will be no more  
and then justice will run down like a mighty stream

loaves and fishes God  
with that vision before us  
we pray for restoration  
remove the selfishness and greed  
from our existence  
till  
that great meal  
of generosity in your day  
is repeated in  
every village and town  
of this nation  
for all your children  
of whatever race, colour, or orientation

and then may we  
go to our beds at night  
knowing that when we  
rise in the morning  
there will be bread for the belly  
shelter for the body  
respect for our living  
and  
dignity for our being

O God of Restless Spirit  
stir the powers that be  
in our land  
of whatever stripe or party or place  
to make laws that are freeing  
policies that bring healing  
decisions that honour our being  
for  
the sake of the world you so love

Amen

―*Hallett Llewellyn (Rev. Dr.)*

## October 18, 2020, Gower Street United Church, St. John’s, NL Sermon by The Very Rev. Dr. Marion Pardy, [m-pardy@nf.sympatico.ca](mailto:m-pardy@nf.sympatico.ca)

### Text: The Labourers in the Vineyard Matthew 20:1–15

Introduction prior to the gospel reading: The gospel reading today is a story told by Jesus called “the labourers in the vineyard”―I call it the “parable of the caring vineyard owner.” The gospel parables are simple stories of everyday life in first-century Palestine, easily understood by the people of the day. They are simple stories but with profound meanings, to shock us into new insights about God and what God requires of us.

(A reading from Matthew 20: 1–15)…Herein is Wisdom

### Mending the World

The Jewish tradition has this story. When God, the Holy One, gets up in the morning, God gathers the angels of heaven around and asks this simple question: “Where does my creation need mending today?”

It is mind-boggling and overwhelming to focus on all that is broken in the world, in our country, province, and community, and in our own lives; our own health and well-being or that of our children, grandchildren, other relatives, and friends; broken relationships within our homes and outside; people dying far too young; the death of a loved one who lived among us for years and whose death leaves an aching absence; illness and financial loss caused by the pandemic and other diseases; homelessness; hunger; wars and threat of wars. We can throw up our hands in despair or focus on one piece of brokenness at a time. This morning’s parable of the labourers in the vineyard, as told by Jesus, invites us to focus on one piece of the larger picture and think about our place in it, to focus on poverty and how we might respond in the mending of God’s world.

The key to the parable is the beginning phrase. “The kingdom of heaven is like” or “The kingdom of God is like.” Not about life in the hereafter, but rather, here is a story about what life is like when we follow God’s way on earth―the way of compassion, justice, fullness of life for all people. It is the Jewish concept of shalom, peace with justice on earth. In Jesus’ day, to speak of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God was a strong political statement. It was in contrast, and a dangerous contrast, to the kingdom of Caesar, the kingdom of military might, hunger, and oppression, where one could be accused of treason and struck down with a sword or crucified for refusing to shout, “Caesar is Lord.” More appropriately, today, the phrase would read the “kin-dom” of the heavens, what life is like when we live in relationship with one another, as “kin” to one another, in relationship to the whole cosmos―when we live as one world, one family.

In God’s world, when God’s will is done, Jesus seems to be saying in this parable, there is enough for all to have a livable income. There is enough for all if distributed wisely to make “give us this day our daily bread” a reality: “give all of us our daily bread.”

It wasn’t the fault of the later labourers that some of them weren’t hired first. They are inaccurately called “idle,” if the word conjures up “lazy.” A more accurate reading of the Greek word for idle (*argeo*) means “not working” or “unemployed.”

They are standing in the “scorching heat” of the day, in the designated place where people who want to work stand, hoping that someone will hire them so that they can provide for themselves and their families. We can imagine that, for most of them, their wives are at home working hard to clean and to care for children, maybe baking the last batch of bread, praying that by the evening meal there will be food to put on the table.

The landowner is portrayed as a good businessperson. (Think about those you know who are good businesspeople―maybe business owners who did not remove the $2 an hour added to staff wages at the height of the pandemic, maybe the benefits of federal and provincial governments for laid-off workers and extra financial help for business owners.) In the parable, the landowner, as a good businessperson, naturally wants a profit from his harvest, and he hires just enough workers according to his need at a particular hour. Fortunately for the unemployed workers, he realizes that he needs more workers to harvest his grapes, and he returns and hires four more times, according to his need. While the last labourers do go to work an hour before the day ends, we can almost hear them lamenting, “What can one hour of work buy? Not much. Maybe we will be paid with a portion of the grapes, but at least extreme starvation may not be knocking on the door for another day.” To everyone’s amazement, and to the distress of the all-day workers, everyone is paid the same, a denarius, a Roman coin that, we are told, was sufficient for three to six days of food. Not a bad wage―better than our present minimum wage! In Roman coinage, there were coins less than the denarius, so the landowner could have paid less; he could have paid only for the number of hours worked. But no, the workers were all paid the same, sufficient until they might be hired again. “You have made them equal to us” the all-day labourers grumble. Of course, in the “kin-dom of the heavens,” when God reigns in our decision-making in business and in our economy, Jesus appears to be saying, “There is and must be enough for all to have a livable income.” All that it requires is the distribution of resources available.

How does this relate to us? If most of us are the early arrivals, who are those who are standing in the “heat” of the day, desperately needing a livable income? To name a few:

* maybe people who have to close or downsize their businesses because of the pandemic and those unemployed as a result
* essential workers who risk their own health for the well-being of others, some of whom are earning a minimum salary only, placing them below the poverty line
* maybe a single mother who works part-time at a minimum wage and is forced to choose between food for her children and paying her electricity bill
* refugees and other newcomers who have to take lesser work and income than their qualifications and credentials indicate or take jobs at minimum wage that no one else will take, and then hear us criticize them for taking jobs away from the locals
* maybe those who, before they dash out the door, have the care of children, or a sick spouse, or elderly parents

Yes, of course, some may be idle or lazy―such people are found in all walks of life, in government, churches, other faith communities, and businesses.

World poverty: As overwhelming as it is, we help to eradicate it each time we give to Mission & Service and our birthday/anniversary money to World Development and Relief. And it was heartening to learn on October 9 that the World Food Programme was this year’s recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. I saw the goodness of our M&S dollars and of the World Food Programme when I visited Angola several years ago. There I saw teachers volunteer their time so that children can attend school and receive an education. I saw the WFP plane unload much-needed food supplies in destitute areas. Canada is a major contributor to the World Food Programme; we can support this and other efforts in global development, global aid, and vaccine research and urge our government to do more.

This month Bridges to Hope, sponsored by the United and Presbyterian churches in St. John’s and Area, encourages us to help satisfy the hunger needs in our area. Food banks are an essential service because, as a society and government, we have not ensured that all people have a guaranteed livable income where all people can have the dignity of choosing and purchasing their own food at a grocery store as you and I do. And, thus, The United Church of Canada, together with Anglican and Lutheran Canadian Bishops, together with the Sisters of Mercy, St. John’s, together with our multi-faith group of Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, together with some 41,616 people who signed the petition in support of Motion M-46 Guaranteed Livable Basic Income as of October 14, are urging the federal government to implement a guaranteed livable income.

You and I can help to mend our Canadian world by writing to our prime minister, MP, premier, and MHA urging them to implement a guaranteed livable income; each time we donate food to our food bank is a good time to write a letter. We can support and learn about Stella’s Circle and about End Homelessness St. John’s. These may appear to be small ways; together, however, we make a difference, and we become a visible sign of God’s presence in the world.

The parable of the labourers in the vineyard may be best understood as a livable wage parable.

It is no surprise that Jesus was in trouble with Roman authorities. The kin-dom of the heavens, the kin-dom of God is vastly different from the kingdom of Caesar. It is, indeed, a kin-dom―one world, one family. In God’s kin-dom our hunger, spiritual and physical, can never be satisfied fully until the hunger of all God’s people is satisfied.

Figuratively speaking, God still gets up in the morning, calling all of God’s messengers, including us, and asks: What in my world needs mending today? By our response, in the midst of all that is broken in our world, we also celebrate the goodness―the “mending” that you and I have done and can do to eliminate poverty and to attend to the brokenness in our own lives and in the lives of our significant others. And, if our activity tends to be minimal, we can support and pray for those who offer their leadership in government, in churches and other faith communities, and in the community at large those who work patiently and persistently to ensure that the kin-dom of the heavens, the kin-dom of God, the “give us this day our daily bread” becomes a reality in our world. May it be so.

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*argeo*: I am idle (unemployed, without occupation). Alexander Souter. *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament.* Oxford University Press, 1935, page 33.

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## October 18, 2020, Christie Gardens Retirement Home, Toronto Sermon by The Very Rev. the Hon. Lois M. Wilson, CC, [7peewee9@gmail.com](mailto:7peewee9@gmail.com)

Texts: Isaiah 61:1‒4; Psalm 44; Mark 5:21‒43

### Good News to the Poor

I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ, whose body we are, and bring you greetings from some other members of the body: the small Protestant church in North Korea, the Church of Christ in China, and the Church of the Cherubim and Seraphim in Africa. We keep them in our prayers and expect them to do the same for us.

One of the best moments in the vice-presidential debate in the USA was when Kamala Harris held up her hand and said to Mr. Pence, who had been interrupting her, “Mr. Pence, I am speaking! Mr. Pence, I am speaking!” She immediately captured my vote.

Her interruption made possible a new relationship between them so that a conversation was possible between them. Every interruption opens up the possibility of a new relationship. COVID-19 is a major interruption in our lives, but it does open up new possibilities instead of the world returning to normal as some wish.

Three gospels tell the story of a major interruption and of new possibilities. This story is NOT history or biography. No one was there taking notes. This is the gospel genre of literature, which are reflections of the early Christians on the person of Jesus. It is more powerful than history or biography because the convictions of the Christian community inform the storytelling.

The story is about Jesus’ encounter with two women of very different backgrounds. One is Jairus’ daughter. She is 12 years old, belonging to a family of great privilege, and Jairus, her father, is a big man in the synagogue. The second story is of a woman ostracized because of a flow of blood, which she has had for 12 years.

The number 12 establishes a symbiotic relationship between the two and stands for wholeness, totality, completeness (12 tribes of Israel, 12 gates to Jerusalem, etc.).

So this is a story with a major interruption, and therefore the possibility of a new reality.

Story #1: Jesus is at the seashore, mixing with the “ochlos,” the street people, illegal immigrants, etc. Among them is Jairus, socially important and wealthy, at the centre of Jewish privilege. He is seeking Jesus because his 12-year-old daughter is in desperate need. Mark says she is dying. Luke, written later, says she is dead. Jairus implores Jesus for help, and so the two set out to go to Jairus’ house.

Suddenly the story is interrupted with ANOTHER story. Why did Mark do this?

The second is the story of a woman who has been menstruating for 12 years. The story immediately establishes a symbiotic relationship with Story #1 of Jairus’ daughter. The story means three strokes against the woman.

First, she is ritually unclean, so it is taboo for her to leave her home during menstruation according to the laws of Leviticus. So she is ISOLATED from her community. Lawrence Hill, in his Massey Lecture on Blood: The Stuff of Life, writes, “All five major religions, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism in their conservative manifestations, place restrictions on menstruating women. I have seen this in India where the Mar Thoma church practices this exclusion. This prejudice exists deeply in our culture as well. We refer to menstruation as ‘the curse.’”

Second, she is barren in a culture that prizes fertility. It is relatively recently in our own culture that single women are not called old maids, in derision.

Third, she is poor. She has spent all her money on doctors. She is unable to go to movies, or the art gallery, or out for dinner. She is excluded!

So barren, poor, excluded from community. And we all know how inclusion is SO important to mental health. We have learned that during COVID.

She is desperate. So she joins the crowd surrounding Jesus. If she could only creep up from behind and touch his garment, she believes it will connect her historically with the Hebrew tradition of wearing the tallit, the tasselled garment Jews wear that connects them with their history of liberation under Moses (Numbers 15:34). This audacious woman knows that if she can touch him, she will be liberated from her troubles. So she reaches out and immediately “she knew herself freed from her troubles.”

“Who touched me?” Jesus knows immediately some energy has left him. So she told him the truth. And this is the crucial line in the story.

The Revised Standard Version has ”Daughter, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace, freed forever from this disease.” The King James Version has “healed of that plague.” J.B. Phillips and the New English Bible have “freed forever from your trouble.” The Jerusalem Bible has “your faith has restored you to health, freed forever from your complaint.”

Asian theologians translate it, “Go in wholeness, freed forever from your bondage”―i.e., your taboo and exclusion. She broke the taboo, reached out, and appropriated the spiritual energy of Jesus.

Much hangs on the translation of this text.

The J.B. Phillips translation has “your willingness to risk [faith] has made you whole [has healed you.] I once asked Ted Scott, the Primate of the Anglican Church, the difference between faith and belief. He replied, “Think of a person at Niagara Falls turning to you and saying, ‘Do you believe I can walk across the falls on that high wire and not fall in?’ ‘Yes,’ you respond, ‘I believe you can do that.’ That’s belief. But if he should turn to you and say, ‘Hop on my shoulders and I will take you across,’ that is faith!”

All agree that it is the initiative of the woman that releases the spiritual power of Jesus. But he responded to the excluded women immediately, while Jairus had to wait.

“Go in peace.” Every time I phone my neighbourhood Jewish centre I am greeted with “shalom.” Peace means wholeness. The woman is restored to community, to full participation in the sociopolitical life of her society.

So what is happening in this interrupted story? Healing in its broadest sense―body, mind, and spirit, and restoration to full community. Jesus certainly manifested spiritual power, but he was not a magician whose powers contradict our reason. He establishes a new relationship with this woman. He heals the whole person.

Our understanding of the church as the body of Christ means that some churches include the practice of healing in their weekly rituals.

1) Methodist Church in New Delhi, 1975. This was my first experience of a healing ritual being included in the service of a mainline denomination. In the calendar it had this explanation: “The church’s main focus is dealing with the minds and spirits of people. It aims to free us from guilt, anxiety, and fear. Healing in these areas affects quite naturally the healing of the body. Prayers for healing of physical infirmities should always be in the context of the wholeness of body, mind, and spirit.”

2) Metropolitan Community Church, Toronto. At this church, founded by gay and lesbian people, there is always an invitation to all who feel the need of healing to step forward to be greeted by an elder, who speaks words of healing and anoints one with oil as a seal and sign of restoration into community.

3) Sandy Lake, Ontario. A photo hangs in my living room of a healing ceremony in this Indigenous community, showing the elders laying hands on a sick person. They know there is healing and energy in touch.

4) Ordination. When we practise the laying-on of hands we bear witness to our belief that spiritual strength is conveyed through physical means.

So, the woman is restored to community after 12 years. Suddenly the story is interrupted with Story #1 about Jairus’ daughter. Jesus and Jairus immediately set out (after the needs of the most vulnerable have been met), and Jesus tells him not to be afraid as she is only asleep. He clears the crowd from her room and, reaching out, says to the 12-year-old girl, “Get up!” She does, and is restored to wholeness and to community. Rather than suggesting they all fall on their knees and pray, Jesus says, “Give her something to eat!”

So why does Mark interrupt his first story? I think it may be because he can’t bear to see the one at the centre be made well until those at the edge are reconnected to full community. My friend Jim was travelling to San Francisco to celebrate the founding of the UN. Standing in the subway next to a beggar, he decided, “Since I didn’t want to miss Jesus,” that he would give some money to the beggar. He did so. Then, to his consternation, he found he hadn’t kept enough back for his fare. But the beggar noticed also, and returned enough money so Jim had his fare again!

If this captures some of the meaning of this passage, then what understanding does it give us of these COVID days? I watched Steve Paikin’s *The Agenda* show on TVO the other night, and they were discussing the issue of poverty. They kept endlessly quoting, “The poor we will always have with us,” though nobody knew where the quote came from. I was so mad I e-mailed Steve and pointed out they were misquoting Deuteronomy 15:4‒5, which says, “There will never be any poor among you IF only you obey the Lord your God by fully keeping my commandments.” I received a lovely acknowledgement back from the TV host, who said he will never misquote that again!

Today there ARE many more poor among us because of COVID. Many cannot afford a smartphone or computer or food.

Can we affirm that the setting free from economic insecurity for the poor, the isolated, the Indigenous person, the street person, the student...those on the edge must happen BEFORE we can be set free to live a life of wholeness?

COVID is a major interruption. Might it mean a fundamental change in relationships between those of us at the centre and those of us on the edge? What might be our response to this major interruption? Not, surely, a return to normal.

Recently the United Church joined the Anglican and Lutheran churches nationally and some major secular groups, such as 50 senators, to ask the federal government to make a structural change in Canadian society. Would it will all the temporary financial benefits (CERB, etc.) into a permanent Guaranteed Livable Income (GLI) for people earning less than $2,000 per month? Based on tax rolls, a cheque would automatically arrive in one’s bank account. No applications, no stigma. Pilot projects in Hamilton and Thunder Bay revealed that people on this benefit paid fewer visits to the doctor, got themselves better jobs, and joined in community events more. The Ford government in Ontario prematurely cancelled these pilot projects even though they showed less work for bureaucrats and much less red tape.

May we not return to normal… If our understanding of scripture is that the well-being of those at the centre depends on those at the edge, then can we forge new relationships, particularly economic ones? Today we are needing a radical reordering of our social and economic institutions as radical as medicare once was. COVID gives us that opportunity. Your church is urging the federal government to act now! Can we become companions with the poor? So that the peace and wholeness that God wishes is restored to your neighbourhood and to our world? There are blessings in interruptions. Maybe even good news to the poor!

## Sermon by Hallett Llewellyn (Rev. Dr.), [hllewellyn@bellaliant.net](mailto:hllewellyn@bellaliant.net)

Text: Mark 6:30–46

### A Distribution Spirituality

Well, the facts are in. And they’re not pretty. We’ve got a big problem in this wonderful nation of ours that affects millions of people in every community, every province, and some far more than others. It seems 10.3 percent of people between the ages of 18‒64, and 8.7 percent of people under the age of 18 live below the poverty line in Canada. Bad as these stats are, they conceal the alarming reality for Indigenous children. Currently 47 percent of First Nations children are living in poverty, and the rate is 53 percent—the highest in Canada, at three times the national rate—for those living on reserve. These are Statistics Canada numbers, and facts from an Indigenous news service, citing a recent study.1

This level of poverty exists even though we have all kinds of social, economic, and health safety nets. Millions of Canadians, many of them children, are still falling through the cracks.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, famous Jewish philosopher and activist, used to tell the story that when God, the Holy One, gets up in the morning, God gathers the angels of heaven around and asks this simple question: “Where does my creation need mending today?” And then Rabbi Heschel would continue, “Theology consists of worrying about what God worries about when God gets up in the morning”2

Well, the scriptures of our faith are clear: When God gets up in the morning, one of the things God worries about is poverty. And if there is one place where creation needs mending, it is the economy of Canada that creates, perpetuates, and even supports our level of poverty. Christian folk, let us be clear. The Bible that we claim as a sacred text for our lives is unequivocal. We are called by God to care for the neighbour, to keep an eye out for one another. Story after story, deed after deed, parable after parable recorded in the scriptures of our faith tell us you cannot worship the God of your life without loving the neighbour of your life, especially those made “least ones”3 by the domination systems of life. Love of God and love of neighbour are inextricably linked. The prophets of Hebrew Scripture tell us this, and Jesus of the New Testament speaks the same.

That is the message of the Good Samaritan story, is it not: Look out for the neighbour who is hurting? And is that not the message of the workers in the vineyard story: your neighbour, regardless of how much they work, deserves a fair wage as much as you do. In other stories, we hear that if your neighbour is thirsty and hungry, or without clothes to wear, then you need to share what you have until they are OK. It’s that simple. That is Jesus’ way as portrayed in the gospels. Let us look for a moment at the Jesus loaves and fishes story. It’s a popular one. All four gospels record it in one fashion or another.

From childhood onward we have heard this story. And in most cases, we were taught that it was a kind of proof story of the miraculous nature of Jesus’ power. If we dig a little deeper, however, we find there are other meanings. In a little book called *The Last Week,* Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan tell us the real point of this story is not the miracle of multiplication.4 There is no hocus-pocus stuff going on here, no abracadabra or waving of a magic wand. On the contrary, what is going on, says Marcus Borg, is an act of distribution.

The writer of Mark’s gospel sets the context clearly. Ministry was at times exhausting. The ways of Herod, and the politics of Jesus’ time, were rough. The poor were having a suffering time trying to make ends meet. Jesus’ best friend John has just been killed, and Jesus decides that he needs some time away. He withdraws for some quiet to the countryside with his disciples.

The problem was people wouldn’t leave him alone. The writer of Mark in fact says up to 5,000 people followed him, a big crowd even by modern standards. They followed and they stayed for the whole day, so long in fact the daylight was fading, and it was getting time to eat. Hunger was setting in. The disciples sensed all of this, and clearly as far as they were concerned there was only one thing to do. “Send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat" is the way the writer of Mark puts it (6:36). Send away and fend for themselves. That was the disciples’ solution to the hunger dilemma, and it made some sense did it not? They were in a deserted place after all. There was no comparable McDonald’s around the corner. For the disciples, it was time for them to go. The response of Jesus, however, was different and immediate. Turning to the disciples he said, “You give them something to eat!” A clear and utter rejection of the Send Away and Fend for Themselves solution the disciples had proposed.

Now this is where the story gets interesting. The disciples’ reaction to Jesus was quick and predictable. The first thing they did was raise an economic objection. It would take at least 200 denarii of bread to feed this crowd. The cost, in their judgment, was prohibitive. But still Jesus persisted. Tell the crowd to sit down on the grass, and then take whatever resources you have at your command and feed them. And Mark tells us the disciples heeded his instructions, and when they had finished, to the astonishment of everyone, they had baskets and baskets of food left over. The disciples’ anguish about not being able to feed the crowd was totally misplaced. When they got into the act, they had more than enough.

A lot of questions, of course, are left with this story. What actually happened God only knows. What we do know is that, faced with hunger, Jesus had compassion on the crowd and made sure they had something to eat. He utterly and totally rejected the Send Away and Fend for Themselves policy when faced with the basic need of people’s hunger. In its place he enacted a practice of holy distribution.

It is a compelling story, especially in light of the poverty stats we alluded to at the beginning of the sermon, which, as a reminder, point to the fact that millions of Canadians through no fault of their own live in poverty and don’t have enough food or provisions to live with dignity.

It could be argued that many factors go into creating the poverty conditions we have in a rich country like ours; we need to be vigilant and care deeply. A growing number of economists point to the enormous disparity between the poor and the rich and the fact that too few have too much at the expense of too many. An older United Nations Human Development report (2005) stated that the richest 500 people in the world earn more in combined income than the poorest 416 million.5 In Canada it is reported that 1 percent of households hold up to 26 percent of the wealth. It is estimated that tax avoidance offshore investments by Canadians amounts to between $80 and $240 billion.6 The fact is we don’t have a scarcity of resources problem in this nation, anymore than Jesus lacked food in the deserted place to feed the hungry crowd. We have an abundance of wealth and resources. The problem, as it was for Jesus when faced with the hungry crowd, is distribution. But this isn’t just any ordinary distribution. It is distribution that is fair and just. It is redistribution that we are talking about.

Send Them Away and Fend for Themselves ain’t going to cut it anymore. And neither are the myriad charitable acts we engage in from time to time. Depositing old clothes at dumpsters, handing out toonies to desperate street people, taking a few cans of goods to the nearest food bank may make us feel good and have some value but are like band aids to a deep wound when radical surgery is in order. And political rhetoric that makes promises to the middle class may work as campaign strategy but doesn’t put food on the table of the desperate ones.

The French economist Thomas Piketty, in his book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, argues that the wealth disparity gap is unsustainable in the long run and is the major cause of social and economic instability in the world; we need, he argues, to find some way to redistribute the wealth of the world.7

Any number of solutions are being proposed. Piketty argues for a progressive system of wealth taxation on the rich. Others, as the United Church is proposing, argue for a guaranteed livable income, which makes sure every Canadian, especially the ones struggling the most, have enough income to provide for the basic needs of life. This policy proposal is growing in support and urgency. It is one of the very strong options to redistribute the resources we have in this country. The feasibility of the proposal economically has been proven over and over again. Simply by reclaiming taxes on offshore investments in Canada could yield up to $5 billion a year to be applied to a GLI. And the justice of the proposal, given what we see and hear in the scriptures of our faith, is without question.

“You give them something to eat,” Jesus said to the disciples in response to their Send Away solution. With the sound of political campaigning in the winds of our nation at the moment, knowing that our leaders are about to gather in the policy corridors of Canada, and with the cries of people growing ever restless over the economic and social inequities of their living, it is time the directive of Jesus becomes our moral and ethical imperative. It is time to take action and make it be so. Amen

### Notes

1. APTN National News, “Half of First Nations Children on Reserve Live in Poverty, New Study Says,” July 9, 2019: [www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/half-of-first-nations-children-on-reserve-live-in-poverty-new-study-says/](https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/half-of-first-nations-children-on-reserve-live-in-poverty-new-study-says/). The Statistics Canada numbers for 2018 were calculated based on living costs in 2008. This reliance on out-of-date measures does not realistically account for the increased cost of living in 2018. Therefore, taking into consideration the costs of living in 2018, the number of people living below the poverty line is actually more than 4 million. This is due, in large part, to increased housing costs between 2008 and 2018. For more information: Jolson Lim, “Poverty Rate Sees Decline, as StatCan Set to Move to Redrawn Poverty Line,” iPolitics, February 24, 2020: [ipolitics.ca/2020/02/24/poverty-rate-sees-decline-as-statcan-set-to-move-to-redrawn-poverty-line/](https://ipolitics.ca/2020/02/24/poverty-rate-sees-decline-as-statcan-set-to-move-to-redrawn-poverty-line/). This information is cited in a Senate of Canada document entitled *Why a Guaranteed Livable Income*.

2. [*Mending the World*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/partners-mission/interfaith-relations), a 1997 document of The United Church of Canada, from the Prelude.

3. Matthew 25:40.

4. Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus’s Final Days in Jerusalem,* HarperSanFrancisco, 2006, pp. 114‒115.

5. United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2005*, p. 4: [hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2005](http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2005).

6. Zach Dubinsky, “Wealthy Canadians hiding up to $240B abroad, CRA says,” CBC News website, June 28, 2018, [www.cbc.ca/news/business/cra-tax-gap-foreign-holdings-1.4726983](https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/cra-tax-gap-foreign-holdings-1.4726983).

7. Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Belknap Press, 2017.

## Transcription of Video Messages on [GLI YouTube Playlist](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQDu-SgFb3Rh9FcZ_M6cK_by8n4UHWg9w)

### Right Rev. Richard Bott, Moderator 2018 – present

With COVID-19, we have all become keenly aware of our interconnectedness and the importance of protecting the health and safety of all Canadians. I encourage you to join with the church and with many others across the country to call on our government to roll out a guaranteed livable income program in collaboration with the provinces, territories, and Indigenous leadership. Such a program would enable all people to live with dignity regardless of work status. Contact Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland today. Multiply your efforts and invite 10 friends to do the same. For decades we as a church have been working towards this; now is the time to make history.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HC2pV9MX01k&list=PLQDu-SgFb3Rh9FcZ\_M6cK\_by8n4UHWg9w&index=7](https://can01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DHC2pV9MX01k%26list%3DPLQDu-SgFb3Rh9FcZ_M6cK_by8n4UHWg9w%26index%3D7&data=04%7C01%7CCKutchukian%40united-church.ca%7C5bc7c341a2724d36ff3208d8b71b26fa%7Ccf18b5a826784011931215f0f7157574%7C0%7C0%7C637460674531209063%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=skgzg21SbTuD4qoHfqM0k2cMx1M3F%2BWvW10baZhY6ao%3D&reserved=0)

### The Very Rev Jordan Cantwell, Moderator 2015–2018

Friends, if this pandemic has taught us anything it is that we are all connected―what affects one of us affects us all. It has also highlighted inequities in our society as we see Indigenous and racialized people disproportionately impacted by the virus. Now, as followers of the One who proclaimed a gospel that is good news for the poor, this initiative for a universal basic livable income for all Canadians should be right up our alley. And as a church that has stated its commitment to reconciliation and to becoming anti-racist, this provides us an incredible opportunity to put those commitments into action in a very tangible way. We are at a unique moment in history where we have the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of Canada’s most vulnerable people. So friends, let us seize this moment, and let us all join our voices together to support a universal basic livable income for all Canadians so that together we emerge from this pandemic stronger and healthier than we were before.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6RjpVIKOnw&list=PLQDu-SgFb3Rh9FcZ_M6cK_by8n4UHWg9w&index=4>

### The Very Rev Dr. Marion Pardy, Moderator 2000–2003

Today we lament the pandemic. At the same time, we applaud our essential workers, who continue to risk their own health for the well-being of others. Too many of our essential workers are earning only a minimum wage, placing them below the poverty line; a disproportionate number are women. As people of faith we need to act now for a guaranteed livable income so that all residents of Canada can live with dignity with the basic necessities of life. In Newfoundland and Labrador our multi-faith group of Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs have been advocating for a living income for years. People of other faiths and other peoples of goodwill in other provinces and territories have been doing the same. Now is the time to coordinate all of our efforts for a guaranteed livable income. As a former Moderator of our church, I heartily endorse a guaranteed livable income, and I urgently and respectfully ask you to do the same. Thank you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sC_LRA9RfNE&list=PLQDu-SgFb3Rh9FcZ_M6cK_by8n4UHWg9w&index=3>

### The Very Rev. Lois M. Wilson, Moderator 1980–1982

Hello. My name is Lois Wilson. I’m a former Moderator of The United Church of Canada. I want to speak to you about a situation that has arisen because of COVID-19. The epidemic has exposed for many of us the economic problems of people, including those below the poverty line who can’t pay their rent and can’t get enough for food. The United Church is therefore petitioning the federal government to institute a guaranteed livable income for people below the poverty line so that they’ll be able to automatically receive a cheque every month which will enable them to buy basic food and pay their rent. We urge you to support this initiative, which is not a new idea. Twice before the United Church has tried for this, and now we’re joining a whole host of people across Canada who support this major change, a sea change,= in fact, in how people are treated in this country. Please support the guaranteed livable income. Thank you very much.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBm5y8Yj31U&list=PLQDu-SgFb3Rh9FcZ_M6cK_by8n4UHWg9w&index=5>

## Series of Three Worship Services on Basic Income Guarantee: St. Thomas United Church and Foothills United Church, Calgary

Full worship services can be viewed at [Basic Income Guarantee: YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLY1BdXaR_FW6HucEIsAsOste5_yshd_ug).

Generously, St. Thomas and Foothills have provided the full text with service program for the services. If you wish to be e-mailed a copy, please contact [justice@united-church.ca](mailto:justice@united-church.ca).