



Our Commitment as Faithful Citizens to Reducing Child Poverty in Wisconsin

As leaders of Wisconsin's faith communities, we commit ourselves to this goal:

The people of Wisconsin need to set a goal of cutting childhood poverty in half in the next ten years. To guarantee greater equity, we also need to cut racial disparities in childhood poverty in half. These goals need to be accompanied by a commitment to evidence-based evaluation of progress.

The persistence of poverty is a moral crisis that calls us to action. Poverty is not limited by race, ethnicity, or age. However, children are the poorest members of our communities, and growing up in poverty has lifelong damaging consequences. Economic disparities among racial groups in Wisconsin are greater than in the U.S. as a whole. It is therefore imperative that we work to ensure a healthy, thriving future for all our children.

Our religious teachings about loving our neighbor and seeking justice demand that we commit ourselves to reducing poverty. We hold in common the conviction that God has created all people in God's own image and for life in community. Our lives are knitted together in a network of mutual care, respect, and responsibility. God's abundant gifts of creation are enough to meet the needs of everyone, and are meant to be enjoyed by all. Our scriptures tell us that we are to share God's special concern for the vulnerable and the marginalized. Therefore justice, inclusion and compassion for every person in need lie at the heart of individual and social morality:

If there is among you anyone in need...do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. – Deuteronomy 15:7-8

[Jesus] unrolled the scroll [of the prophet Isaiah] and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." – Luke 4:17b-19

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces Towards east or West; but it is righteousness . . . to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which ye have made . . . Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing. – Quran 2:177

This is not only an individual responsibility. Unjust economic structures and social practices can create poverty. Thus the whole community, acting through its laws and governing authorities, is charged with ordering society so that people are not trapped in poverty. In ancient Israel, the law of Jubilee in ancient Israel was to ensure that no one would be trapped in debt, slavery or poverty forever (Leviticus 25) and caring for the poor was an essential quality of a good ruler (Ps. 72). Jewish, Christian, and Muslim societies from ancient times to today have had laws to protect vulnerable persons from economic hardship.

When we turn away from the needs of our communities out of indifference or because greed and anxiety cause us to cling to comfort and privilege, God calls us to repentance – as individuals *and* as a society. At the same time, God draws us forward with visions of relationships healed in a community of dignity, justice, and well-being for all, a world in which every child has a bright and promising future (e.g., Isaiah 58).

Realizing this vision in our state is a shared responsibility. Many in Wisconsin today are working to lift children out of poverty: parents and other caregivers, educators, congregations and faith-based programs, community centers, charities, government agencies, service providers, businesses, and social justice organizations. None, however, can solve this problem by itself. Nor can children escape poverty apart from the adults on whom they depend. Families and individuals living in poverty are not simply the passive recipients of private charity or government assistance, nor can they be expected to raise themselves, unaided, “by their bootstraps.” Rather, as bearers of God’s image and members of our communities, their voices, their efforts, and their insights must be fully part of the common effort to overcome poverty.

The goal of reducing poverty is shared by people of many different faiths and philosophies, and we invite all people of good will to join this effort. On behalf of our religious communities, we commit ourselves to help lead constructive, inclusive, civil conversations among the people of Wisconsin. Together we can find common ground and agree on effective strategies for both public policies and community efforts.

We further commit ourselves to being part of the solution, in partnership with all persons of good will. We will follow through on these conversations, educating ourselves about poverty and racial disparities, supporting sound public policies and undertaking sustained and effective action in our communities to help cut child poverty in half within ten years.

As people of faith, we must respond now to God’s call to justice, community, and compassion. The need for action is urgent. If our children, and our state, are to realize the great promise and potential with which God has blessed us, this work must begin today.

Signed,

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**To add your endorsement to the goal of cutting childhood poverty in half, go to:
endchildpovertywi.org**