

The FaithJustice Vision

The United States is one of the richest countries in the world and it continues to grow wealthier at a substantial pace. Unfortunately, this wealth and its benefits are not evenly distributed - the top 20% of earners take in over 50% of the income. In 2018, the U.S. had 42 million people classified as poor and over half a million homeless people. The gap between the rich, the middle class, and the poor continues to grow. Factors such as gender and race have contributed to economic inequality. Men earn more than women. White households earn more and have greater wealth than black and Hispanic households.

All this has led to the U.S. having a higher poverty rate than most other Western Countries. Despite priding itself on being the land of opportunity, upward mobility has declined. Fewer American adults exceed the income of their parents than in prior generations. These trends toward greater inequality are not a standard feature of American society. From World War II to the 1970s, equality increased and poverty decreased. But recently decades have reversed these trends and have led to increasing inequality.

The FaithJustice vision is that people of faith will identify existing local and national resources that provide the sustainable support to meet needs and reduce systematic poverty and close the wealth and income gap between the rich and the poor. While faith communities need to assist in identifying and encouraging upward mobility, they must also ensure communities understand the importance of active, consistent advocacy, on both the local and national stage, to reduce poverty and increase equality in our nation.

The Biblical Witness¹⁺

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:8-9)

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you'—when you already have it with you. (Proverbs 3:27-38)

And Jesus said to the rich man, "You lack one thing: go, sell what you own and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven, then come follow me." (Mark 10:21)

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God." (Matthew 5:3)

Key Issues

Food Security

The U.S. is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. And yet, [federal food insecurity data](#) released September 2019 indicates that over 11 percent of U.S. households—37.2 million people—are food insecure, meaning that at some point during the year, they don't know where their next meal will come from. This food insecurity affects over 11 million children, who live at risk of going hungry. Food insecurity among Latino households is double that of white households. And for African Americans, it's three times greater.

¹⁺ Scriptures are from the *Common English Bible* translation.

Solutions: The U.S. government has two main food assistance programs —the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). If sufficiently funded and strengthened, they can go a long way to reducing food insecurity by ensuring families experiencing poverty have access to food when they need it. But helping families to earn more so that they can support themselves is essential. Refundable tax credits, such as the earned income tax credit (EITC) and child tax credit (CTC), help low wage workers make up the difference between what they earn and what they need to feed their families. They are a bridge to self-sufficiency. Research shows they increase employment, reduce poverty, and improve child outcomes in health and education. All of these programs need protection and expansion if we are to end hunger in the U.S. [Bread for the World](#) is a leading organization that provides leadership on food security issues both in the U.S. and globally.

How to Take Action:

- Advocate for federal policies to end hunger by organizing a [Bread for the World Offering of Letters](#) in your congregation. Information can be found in the [Offering of Letters Toolkit](#) and [Guide to Conducting an Offering of Letters](#). [Bread for the World Organizers](#) are available across the country to help you.

Affordable Housing

Reliable housing is essential to increasing economic mobility and reducing intergenerational poverty. Studies suggest that increasing access to affordable housing is the most cost-effective strategy for reducing childhood poverty. Currently, there is a nationwide shortage of affordable homes; there are only 7 million affordable homes for more than 11 million people currently living in poverty. 75% of extremely low-income families pay more than half their income on rent; and over half a million people experience homelessness on any given night. A renter working a full-time job that pays the minimum wage cannot afford a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the U.S. The lack of affordable housing not only affects human dignity, but costs the American economy about \$2 trillion a year in lower wages and productivity.

Solutions: The [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#) and other organizations advocate for federal policy changes that would increase the amount of funding available for affordable housing at the state and local levels. Federal investments in programs such as the National Housing Trust Fund, which provides block grants to states for housing targeted at extremely low-income households, must be protected and expanded. While federal funding is essential, housing is a local issue and numerous solutions have emerged locally across the country. Faith-based community organizing through groups like the [Industrial Areas Foundation \(IAF\)](#) have led to numerous victories for affordable housing. Other efforts include [Community Solutions](#), which is using data-driven approaches to end chronic and veteran homelessness in cities, as well as various efforts by faith communities to transform their real estate assets into affordable housing.

How to Take Action:

- [Advocate for federal policies](#) such as protecting and expanding the National Housing Trust Fund.
- [Join a local IAF affiliate](#) or other community organizing effort to advocate locally for affordable housing and other economic justice issues.
- Explore how your congregation could [develop underutilized real estate assets into affordable housing](#) for your community.

Other Resources

Find a list of other resources to learn about and take action on economic justice at www.faithjusticefoundation.org/charitycause/economic-justice.

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