



THE ARCHBISHOP
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Archbishop Stephen writes in today's [Yorkshire Post](#) in [Living Wage Week](#)

Our economy is not in great shape. The heavy rain of bad news has felt pretty relentless these past few months. Doubly disconcerting is that whether it's because of decisions made in the corridors of Whitehall, or in seismic global events like pandemics and war – the roots of our woes lie largely beyond the control of ordinary people in Yorkshire. But, like sunshine after rain, good news does come. And, at the start of Living Wage week, I'm reminded that we are not powerless in the face of all earthly suffering. That there is something we can do.

A real Living Wage. Linking pay to the cost of living so workers can make ends meet even as prices rise is a brilliantly simple idea. But one with profound impact. How? Because when workers don't struggle to afford the essentials, they often reinvest their money back into the local economy. New research released today by the Living Wage Foundation and the Smith Institute found that lifting just a quarter of Yorkshire's 368,000 low-paid workers onto £10.90 per hour, the real Living Wage would benefit us all to the tune of £165 million. It is this pay-back into the local economy which means that money spent on raising the wages of the poorest is one way to promote growth and not just to stoke inflation.

Over 11,000 employers have already signed up to pay substantially higher wages than the £9.50 minimum 'National Living Wage' they are bound to pay by law. 550 of those are based in Yorkshire. By earning the real Living Wage, their staff will be nearly £3,000 a year better off than those earning the legal minimum. In a cost of living crisis, what an astounding difference that figure would make to individuals and families.

When so many across the country are buckling under the weight of rising prices, the commitment of Living Wage Employers to the welfare of their staff is to be praised in the highest terms. Inflation is soaring, mortgage rates and rents are rising. While none of us – including businesses – can escape the squeeze on our incomes, its impact on the 3.5 million British workers who are paid less than the real Living Wage is utterly devastating. Around 80% of low paid workers consider this the worst financial period they have ever lived through. Four in ten are going hungry to make ends meet. But by paying the real Living Wage, employers are also helping to stimulate demand in the local economy. It is a virtuous circle.

I've long been a supporter of the Living Wage movement. The principles it is built on are threaded throughout the Bible. They can be found in the book of Deuteronomy, which teaches us that workers must be fairly compensated for their labour (24:14-15). In the First Epistle of John, which implores those who find themselves in good fortune to share their worldly wealth with those in need (3:17). And, above all, they can be found in God's commandment to recognise and uphold the dignity of all His children: to love your neighbour as you love yourself. That's a commitment Jesus continually emphasises.

A real Living Wage is a promise – a fair day’s pay for a hard day’s work. That enshrines the values of compassion, dignity and justice in action.

There can be no doubt that many employers will struggle to stay afloat in the coming months and difficult decisions are inevitably needing to be made, but I want to commend those 11,000 employers who have already made the commitment to pay staff in line with the cost of living. The Church of England, across its 19,000 buildings and various organisations, may still have some way to go, but I make this challenge to myself as well as to all of us. I believe it is now vital for those who have not yet accredited with the Living Wage Foundation and are in the position to do so, to act quickly.

Inflation of the kind we are experiencing now has not been seen in decades and the winter ahead is likely to be grim for workers and families across the country. But today’s news from the Living Wage Foundation reminds us that, as the temperatures drop and the nights draw in, we



omy at large, there is another way. All that’s left to do is take it.

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