

# Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

[www.livingwagesonoma.org](http://www.livingwagesonoma.org)

Spring 2002  
Newsletter



LWCSC is a grassroots organization made up of community, labor and religious groups, and concerned individuals

**“The dignity of all work demands just wages to meet today’s living costs”**

[mml@ap.net](mailto:mml@ap.net)

PO Box 427, Santa Rosa, CA 95402 (707) 545-7349 x220

## FAITH COMMUNITY SUPPORTS LIVING WAGE

### The First Interfaith Forum on Living Wages and Economic Justice to be Held in Santa Rosa

Thursday, May 9th 4:30-6:00 p.m.  
First United Methodist Church, Santa Rosa

**S**ANTA ROSA - In a display of commitment to economic justice, a newly formed group of faith-based advocates will meet for a presentation on how the religious community can support activities that will directly benefit low-wage workers in Sonoma County. Top on the agenda will be a discussion of how living wage campaigns embody a moral imperative for people of faith. The sponsors of the forum hold a common belief that all people have the right to fair wages, benefits, affordable housing, quality public education, and health care.

Speakers will include: Rev. Roger Powers, Associate Pastor at Montclair Presbyterian Church in Oakland from the East Bay Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and the Port Living Wage Campaign; Pastor Tom Kimball (First United Methodist); Rabbi Michael Robinson (Shomrei Torah, retired); and Santa Rosa City Council member Noreen Evans. “We recognize that one in four families in Sonoma County cannot make ends meet and that there are specific actions that we can take that will allow people to live a life free of poverty,” said Rabbi Michael Robinson.

The group is calling upon leaders and advocates from the religious community to join them in a strategy discussion about how to approach issues of economic justice in the area. In addition to living wages, these include responsible use of public subsidies, the right of workers to seek union representation, improving upon the wages and conditions of low-income workers, and securing affordable housing.

This event is organized by the Sonoma County Interfaith Committee for a Living Wage, a subcommittee of the Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County. “Our hope is to engage people of faith in this important work by drawing on their moral commitment to a just wage and their understanding that living wage laws promote a sustainable economy,” states Michael Allen, co-chair of the living wage coalition.

This free event will be held Thursday May 9th from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church 1551 Montgomery Drive Santa Rosa. RSVP to 545-7349 ext.220. All are welcome.

### Recent Living Wage Wins

#### New Orleans

On February 2nd, passed by 63% of the voters, a minimum wage hike to \$6.15 for ALL private-sector employees working within city limits. This is the first city wide minimum wage law to pass.

#### Ashland, Oregon

**December 2001:** Ashland City Council passed a living wage ordinance of \$9.75 an hour with benefits and \$10.75 without. Recent efforts have brought about a living wage ordinance enhanced by so much local support that some organizations not subject to the ordinance have nevertheless increased workers’ wages.

#### Santa Fe, New Mexico

**March 2002:** The City Council unanimously passed an ordinance that mandates a \$10.50 hourly wage for city employees, employees of the city’s contractors and grant recipients, and employees of companies with more than fifty workers or annual gross revenue greater than \$2 million.

#### Montgomery County, Maryland

**March 2002:** Recently key county lawmakers announced that they have brokered a deal to require most companies doing business with the county to pay workers more than double the minimum wage at \$10.50 an hour, the latest development in a lengthy campaign.

#### Richmond

In November 2001 City Council passed an ordinance which requires that the city and all city contractors with 10 or more employees pay \$11.42 an hour with benefits or \$12.92 without. The ordinance also applies to firms that receive more than \$100,000 in public subsidies or lessees of public property. This ordinance sets higher wage standards and is more comprehensive, than similar measures adopted in Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose.

**Details about these as well as other campaigns may be found at:**  
<http://www.livingwagecampaign.org>

## Join Santa Rosa Effort on Living Wage Law

*Santa Rosa Press-Democrat*  
Saturday, March 30, 2002

The Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County is preparing a revised ordinance for consideration by the Santa Rosa City Council. The coalition hopes the council will not repeat the mistakes of last fall which we believe unnecessarily divided our community and discouraged the type of civic activism and consensus building that is central to American democracy.

Baltimore adopted the first municipal living wage ordinance in 1994. Subsequently, a nationwide movement has evolved and over eighty cities and counties have adopted living wage ordinances.

Typically, these ordinances require municipalities, city contractors, and firms receiving public subsidies to pay their employees a living wage and benefits. They cover only a limited number of workers, but living wage legislation expresses the desire of a community not to use taxpayer monies to fund poverty jobs.

Two years ago representatives from labor, religious, and community organizations formed an organizing committee to determine the viability of living wage ordinances for local municipalities and the county. Over 200 supporters filled the Santa Rosa City Council chambers in March 2001, for the first general meeting of a coalition that is now endorsed by more than forty organizations.

After months of research and investigation of living wage legislation in other communities, we proposed an ordinance to the Santa Rosa City Council last October. The coalition also requested that the UC Berkeley Institute for Labor and Employment undertake a study of the fiscal impact of our proposed ordinance. The council agreed to have its staff study the ordinance and report back with any concerns they might have.

In late November, staff issued a report containing sixty-seven questions regarding the ordinance. Councilwoman Evans proposed the creation of a task force to study the ordinance and bring all stakeholders in the community together.

In early December, 150 living wage supporters packed the council chambers to support the formation of a task force. On a split 4-3 vote with Mayor Martini and council members Wright, Bender, and Condrion opposing, the majority decided to pursue no further consideration of the ordinance.

The coalition and, subsequently, many throughout the community were dismayed. What did the dismissal of the ordinance reveal about the responsiveness of the council to a broad-based community coalition and the duty of elected officials to encourage this type of civic engagement?

We knew there were concerns regarding specific provisions of the ordinance, and the coalition expected a lengthy process of deliberation and possible modification. We were confident our proposal warranted further study. Most provisions in it came from ordinances that have been successfully implemented in cities like Richmond, Santa Cruz, San Jose, and Oakland.

We think the council acted precipitously. The coalition should have had the opportunity to respond to the staff report. The council should have investigated the experiences of other communities and reviewed the forthcoming UC Berkeley study. The council simply did not have sufficient information to make a reasoned judgement about the merits of living wage laws.

Most disturbingly, what does the council's dismissal say about the American tradition of local democracy where government is closest to the people and should be most responsive? Council member Bender urged us to take our cause to the state or federal government and claimed that it doesn't belong at the local level. Yet it is precisely the refusal of the state and federal governments to adequately raise the subpoverty minimum wage over the last thirty years which has sparked the living wage movement.

We are proud that the living wage movement is a part of the American federalist, grassroots tradition. The movements to abolish slavery, win votes for women, secure fair treatment for labor, broaden civil rights, and protect the environment all originated at the local level and ultimately had a profound impact on federal policy.

There is hope. Mayor Martini publicly reiterated in a recent debate with Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey what he privately expressed to the coalition leadership last December. He supports the concept of a living wage and, once the coalition responds to the staff report, he has invited us to return.

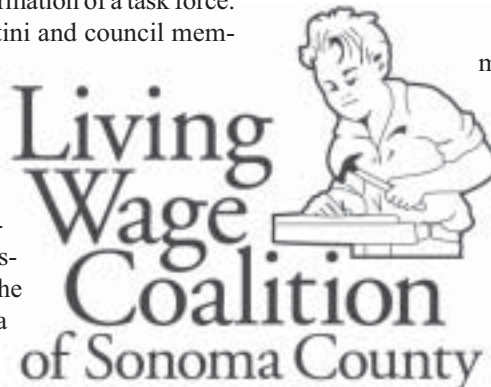
The mayor has pledged that the council will agendize a proposed ordinance and move forward with an in depth process of evaluating the experiences of other cities in the Bay Area, a legal review, and analysis of the fiscal impact of the ordinance. We are ready to start anew and in good faith. We invite the entire community to participate in this process.

Marty Bennett and Gene Hottel are members of the Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County.

A longer and more detailed version of this article has been submitted to the *North Bay Progressive*. Go to [www.northbayprogressive.org](http://www.northbayprogressive.org)

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[www.livingwagesonoma.org](http://www.livingwagesonoma.org)



# Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

## Living Wage Laws Reduce Poverty and Raise Wages for Low-Income Workers

In a study released March 14, the Public Policy Institute of California, David Neumark, a professor of economics at Michigan State University, has found that living wage ordinances adopted in 36 cities throughout the country result in both job losses and wage increases among low-income workers. The report finds that when a jurisdiction imposes a living wage that is 50 percent higher than the state's minimum wage, it will raise the average wage of low-income workers by 3.5 percent. However, it also reduces employment among low-wage workers by 7 percent. The study estimates the net effect on the low-income population is a "modest decrease family poverty." To view a summary or the full report go to: <http://www.ppic.org/>

## Sonoma County Homecare Workers Celebrate First Contract

Sonoma County homecare workers, 2,000+ caregivers, are celebrating their first-ever collective bargaining contract. Even better is the jump in pay from \$6.75 to \$8.50 per hour as of February 1. Also included in this contract is health, vision, and dental care.

Homecare workers have been virtually invisible for years. The clients are low income seniors or the disabled who are entitled to personal services like dressing, bathing, housekeeping, or laundry. Homecare workers were entitled to no more than minimum wages, until recent legislation mandated that each County in California must formalize this employment relationship. The homecare workers did their services literally as a labor of love before getting organized.

"Our bargaining committee should be very proud of this first contract. Our homecare workers do such vital work in the community they deserve all this and more, said Local 250 President Sal Rosselli. "These improvements bring a sense of security to these workers and ease the fears of consumers who are at risk of institutionalization if their homecare workers leave to find better-paying jobs."

Members of the public seeking further information can call the Santa Rosa office at 526-4825 or for Local 250's headquarters at 800 585-4250.

### Number of Living Wage Ordinances Passed by year:

Year	Victories
1994	1
1995	2
1996	4
1997	7
1998	11
1999	15
2000	13
2001	24

The LWCSW wishes to congratulate Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey on her reelection with 81% of the vote in March 2002 to represent the 6th district (Sonoma/Marin). We thank her for supporting the living wage movement and our campaign!

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

### Sonoma County Interfaith Forum on Living Wages

Thursday, May 9, 4:30-6:00 p.m.

First United Methodist Church  
1551 Montgomery Ave., Santa Rosa  
545-7349 x220

### Peace and Justice Center Day in the Park

Sunday, June 2, 12-4 p.m.

Julliard Park, Santa Rosa  
Downtown Santa Rosa Avenue  
near Burbank Gardens

### Potluck Fundraiser and Dance Party for the Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

Saturday, June 8, 2-7 p.m.

Live music, good conversation,  
and food!!!  
sliding scale \$5-\$20 dollars  
Home of Larrick McDowell  
1575 Pleasant Hill Road, Sebastopol  
545-7349 x220

### North Bay Labor and Social Action Summer School

Friday/Saturday June 21-22

Sonoma State University  
Rohnert Park  
contact Tula Jaffe for brochure and  
registration materials 545-7349 x219  
or [tulaabu@aol.com](mailto:tulaabu@aol.com)

Stephanie Luce, University of Massachusetts, Dept. of Labor Studies and co-author of "The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy" will participate on a panel Friday evening and lead a workshop on living wage campaigns Saturday

[www.livingwagesonoma.org](http://www.livingwagesonoma.org)

# Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

- I want to serve as a volunteer
- Please keep me informed
- Please send a speaker to my civic or religious organization
- I want to contribute \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Please use my name as an endorser:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (day): \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (eves): \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to:

Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County  
PO Box 427  
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

## UPCOMING MEETINGS:

- The Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County meets on the third Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m.. The coalition's Outreach Committee meets on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of the month at 6 p.m.
- The Interfaith Committee for living wages meets on the first Friday of the month at 10 a.m.

All meetings are held at SEIU (Service Employees International Union) Local 707, 613 Fourth St., Suite 206, Santa Rosa.

The research and organizing committees do not yet have regularly scheduled meetings and anyone interested should contact the committee chairs listed below:

**Monique Lusse** - outreach and media  
545-7349 x220 - [mml@ap.net](mailto:mml@ap.net)

**Marty Bennett** - research and legal  
527-4873 - [mbennett@vom.com](mailto:mbennett@vom.com)

**Tim Wiese** - organizing affected workers  
235-8330 - [wieset@mcn.org](mailto:wieset@mcn.org)

**Terese Voge** - fundraising/media contact  
586-3032 - [fasc@fasc.org](mailto:fasc@fasc.org)

**John Norris** - Interfaith Committee on Living Wages  
769-9251 - [johnnorris@aol.com](mailto:johnnorris@aol.com)



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