

## ENSURING THAT WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY IS A "POVERTY-FREE" SPACE – Executive Summary

1. ) 'Wake Forward' is seeking faculty support for moves to make the campus a poverty-free space. Achieving that requires examination (and where necessary, improvement) of the wages and benefits paid both to direct Wake Forest employees and to those working for firms contracted to provide services here. The University is already working with the campaign to redress poverty-wages among direct employees: but we (and hopefully the University too) still have to address the poverty-wages paid by companies like Aramark. Costing that is difficult in part because the exact numbers of people employed on the campus by such contractors are, remarkably, not fully known even to the HR department of the University!
2. The three initial aims adopted for this initiative by Wake Forward are: **(1) To ensure that all direct employees of Wake Forest University enjoy a living wage, and are subject to the requirements of a just employment policy – in the first instance by the University ensuring that all those working for it earn at least \$15 per hour. (2) To make Wake Forest University a "poverty-free" space by establishing a living wage – and a labor contract based on just employment principles – for all those employed by firms contracted to Wake Forest University. (3) To make Wake Forest University a leading force in the raising local wage rates, and a leading example on wages and employment principles for other universities in the region and beyond.**
3. We see those three initial aims as fitting within a broader commitment: namely the pursuit by the University (for both its direct and indirect employee) of a 'just employment policy'. As that concept is now understood on other university campuses that have already adopted it, a just employment policy includes such matters as: **All employees should be paid a living wage, as defined by the "MIT Poverty in America project", and provided with an adequate set of work-related benefits. Employment policy should demonstrate a preference for full-time positions, employee continuity, equal access to community resources, non-discrimination, protection from harassment & bullying at work, adequate health and safety at work, and full freedom of association by employees pursuing the meeting of these conditions. Employment policy should apply equally to direct employees and to contract workers on all sites to which employment policy for direct employees applies. Policies should be prohibited that erode the substance of these policies by artificially blocking access by employees to appropriate full-time status. Employment policy should be directed to enhancing the dignity of people at work, their sense of security in their jobs, and their ability to improve their remuneration by training, hard work and commitment to the employing institution. Employment policy should seek to sustain a viable work-life balance for all employees: paying particular attention to the need for flexible working and extra support to employees starting and raising families, or caring for elderly/disabled family members. Employment policy must have adequate mechanisms enabling managers and workers to evaluate the application and development of a just employment policy, and to make corrections/improvements as necessary.**
4. Realizing that a dramatic rise in wages for poorly-paid staff would have serious immediate cost and employment consequences, Wake Forward is urging a steady but incremental process of wage improvement *plus* a set of policy initiatives that can qualitatively improve working conditions without major cost outlays by the University. These include policies on child-care provision, transportation and banking services to **lower the cost of work**, help with individual development accounts and access to EITC to **increase take home pay**. Full details are in Appendix 2 to the Report.
5. We think such a move is essential if the University is to fully live up to its motto of *Pro Humanitate*, send the correct moral message to our students, and underwrite the credibility of the University's involvement in anti-poverty initiatives in the wider community. The case linking the campaign to these and other University goals and practices is documented in Appendix 1 to the full report. **It is our hope that, via discussion and voting at the Faculty Senate, the next stage of this move towards greater social justice for low paid workers at Wake Forest will be the creation of a University-wide working party charged with the design and implementation of needed changes.**

- **MORALITY** There is the moral argument. That should be enough for many of us. We mix on this site the very highest paid people in academia and the lowest paid service workers. But financial remuneration is not only about economics. It is also a personal and cultural message about individual value. We are communicating a disturbing cultural message that devalues the humanity of a large swath of our Wake Forest community. Every faith-community recognizes that common humanity. So does every secular humanist. We are all Americans. We have similar needs and rights. Our payments structures do not currently reflect that commonality, and they should.
- **MESSAGE** Our actions as a university teach just as effectively as does our curriculum. At Wake Forest, we adopt as our motto Pro Humanitate; and under its injunction we send our students out into the world to do good works, to make a difference, to serve humanity. But as they go out to work for humanity, our students pass people in need of the very same help – a need to which the University does not appear to attach a similar priority and focus. Do many of our students even see the poverty around them, in the lives of those who serve them? Probably many of them don't, and surely all of them should. We need to show them.
- **MISSION** As a university of major local importance, we are currently actively engaged in at least two substantial anti-poverty drives in the immediate community: the Women's Fund of Winston-Salem's search for economic security for local women; and (as the opening page of the February 2016 Provost's Newsletter reminds us) the Mayor's (Allen Joines) 21-strong "Thought Force" to combat poverty, of which the Provost is currently the chairman. Unfortunately, we are leading anti-poverty initiatives in the wider community while helping to reproduce it on our site itself. That is not good. If we're out there, telling companies to pay better wages while not doing so ourselves, we could end up looking very foolish as an institution.
- **LEADERSHIP** What lessons does such a clear example of the gap between an institution's public rhetoric and its private performance send as a message to our students? As a university, at our public events, those who speak for us continually stressed the importance of leadership, the development of leadership skills, and the need to lead with moral purpose; and continually pitch Wake Forest as an exemplar of that kind of university practice. Well, if we think leadership with moral purpose is important, let's deploy some: let's show leadership here, where our institutional practices can make so real a difference.
- **COMMUNITY** Although many of those on the lowest pay are not directly employed by the University, the faculty, staff and students of Wake Forest are still a party to that under-payment (as the Department of Labor recently reminded us). So how can we, members of an institution of Wake Forest's stature and purpose, condone the payment to people on whom we regularly depend such low salaries that they are forced to turn to food stamps to survive? We know that nationally a majority of low-wage workers (earning less than \$12.16/hour) rely on public assistance to make ends meet. Many of us criticize Walmart for relying on corporate welfare – having the taxpayer pick up part of the company's running costs – and here we are doing it ourselves.
- **TRANSPARENCY** That we are in danger of doing just that will become more obvious in 2017, when as an institution employing more than 100 people we will have to report to the Department of Labor exactly what each employee is being paid. (These are new regulations being brought in by the Obama Administration to expose gender inequality; but they might well expose class and racial inequalities too. If we were a public institution, all this data would already be public knowledge. Let us use the time leading up to the mandate as an opportunity to audit our practices and make the necessary changes. We have the chance to be known as leaders committed to integrity, compassionate sacrifice, and generosity even before our employment practices and their consequences become public knowledge.
- **RESPONSIBILITY** Anyway, leaving public relations issues on the side and out of mind, we ought to ask ourselves a bigger question. What ultimately is the responsibility of a University of our quality and reputation? Is it to drift with the tide of ever-greater inequality in income and wealth, and an ever stronger sense of entitlement at the top of the society whose next generation of leaders we are seeking to educate? Or is it to stand for fundamental Enlightenment values of equality, fairness and justice – the ones on which the country was originally founded? If it is the latter, how can we then turn a blind eye, allow some of those around us to struggle in such poverty, and do nothing about it? We surely cannot.