

Economic Justice - 1985

Issue

1. Disproportionate number of poor or near poor who are women and children.
2. Elimination of discrimination in pay scales between women and men.

Background

The annual income at which a family of four will officially be counted as poor is \$10,610. A single person's income can be no more than \$5,280. This is called the "poverty line"; 15.2% of the population of the United States or 35.2 million people live below the "poverty line." This is an increase of 9,000,000 or 35% from 1979 to 1983. (U.S. Census Bureau). Seventy-five percent of poor people in the United States are women and children. Women have substantially lower median incomes than men throughout their lifetime.

Low lifelong earnings directly result in little retirement income for elderly women. Many women are poor because they work only part-time or in low-paying jobs. The federal programs which help provide the barest essentials to homeless people, poor women and children have lost over \$27 billion dollars since the beginning of 1981 and the trend continues. There is in this country a rapidly growing number of individuals and families who have no homes and are forced to wander the streets. Although the problem of homelessness is not a new one, the rate at which it is increasing is alarming.

In Canada, 83% of all single-parent families are headed by women; of these families, 44% live below the poverty line, which is \$8,200 for a family of three. A single mother with two children receives only \$7,200 in government social assistance. One out of every six Canadian women live in poverty. Half of all Canadian women can expect to be poor at some time in their lives.

Through the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (amended 1972), the United States Congress sought to deal with the problem of sex-based wage discrimination. Still, for a variety of reasons, women continue to earn substantially less than men.

The Equal Pay Act of 1963 made it generally unlawful for employers to pay higher wages to employees of either sex who performed equal work in the same establishment. However, because men and women usually work in different occupations, the Equal Pay Act is unable to end wage discrimination against women. The concept of pay equity goes beyond equal pay for equal work. Pay equity would address the problem of sex-segregated employment which results in discriminatory underpayment of female-dominated jobs. It requires that wages be based on the skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions required by an occupation. A National Academy of Sciences study concluded that women are concentrated in low paying jobs as a result of earlier traditions of discrimination against women that have become institutionalized, as well as current intentional discrimination. The wage gap adversely affects Canadian women as well.

Resolution

The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods in continued commitment toward equality for men and women in all respects:

1. Urges responsible government spending which reflects the pressing needs of low-income Americans

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and insists that the perceived need for a balanced budget not outweigh the human needs that are served by federal social programs;

2. Urges all Sisterhoods and members in both the United States and Canada to actively study programs and policies that affect our respective economies in the furtherance of our own “economic literacy”;
3. Commends those Sisterhoods who are actively working on programs to alleviate the plight of the poor and homeless;
4. Urges all Sisterhoods to increase aid to homeless people in their communities by providing financial assistance to established shelters; by organizing volunteers to assist in staffing these shelters on an ongoing basis; and join together with religious and communal institutions in coalitions to work toward an effective remedy to the problems of the homeless;
5. Supports the principle of pay equity as a means of overcoming sex-based wage discrimination in accordance with the principles of the United States Equal Employment Opportunity and the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 (amended 1972) which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, race and national origin;
6. Urges Sisterhoods and members in both the United States and Canada to communicate with their legislators asking for their support, endorsement and adoption of pay equity legislation.