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## **Resurrection City: For A Living Wage**

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When Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, the world stopped for a moment. Shaken, confused but searching for a way to continue the fight, civil rights leaders decided to continue King's Poor People's Campaign by building a tent city in the National Mall in Washington DC. People from around the country converged on the nation's capital to bear communal witness to the ravages of poverty and homelessness. They called it "Resurrection City," a parable of a truly loving, equal, and just community.

King is remembered as a civil rights leader, but he died fighting for a living wage for sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. On March 18, 1968, just weeks before he was killed, King proclaimed in a speech to the striking workers, "You are reminding, not only Memphis, but ... the nation that it is a crime for people to live in this rich nation and receive starvation wages."

What would King say about our current economic crisis, and the need for a moral, humanitarian response? In 1968 when the average wage in America was \$3.02 an hour, sanitation workers earned just half that at \$1.65 an hour. Forty-two years later, with the average wage at \$18.63 an hour, a quarter of retail workers are earning starvation wages of \$8 an hour or less and almost half are earning under \$10 an hour. The fact that low wage workers continue to lose ground is igniting the fires of moral outrage in the hearts and souls of a growing group of Americans who are joining the movement for a living wage.

New Yorkers face an economic crisis. Many have lost jobs, more are underemployed, and even more are working for wages that they can't live on. Working all day without earning enough to pay the bills breaks the spirit and weakens our communities, yet the City continues to support and do business with developers who do just that.

We need a compensation system that treats all with dignity and respect. Sanitation workers in Memphis held up placards that read, "I am a Man," affirming a deep personal dignity that's not disposable. King's challenge was prescient: "One day our society will come to respect the sanitation worker if it is to survive. For the person who picks up our garbage, in the final analysis, is as significant as the physician. All labor has worth." Our common humanity trumps our job status and fuels our fight for economic justice.

Los Angeles has a policy requiring all city development projects to pay a living wage. The Queens Center Mall, one of the most profitable in America, is receiving more than \$100 million in taxpayer subsidies yet the majority of workers are earning at or near the minimum wage. It's time for New York to lead the nation through establishing a living wage.

New York City is a rich city. We can lead the way to King's dream. Religious and community leaders call on Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council to pass a living wage of \$10 an hour plus benefits for all city-subsidized projects.

This year, as the anniversary of Dr. King's death falls on Easter Sunday, let us work to carry on his prophetic legacy in the spirit of resurrection. Let's make New York City the next Resurrection City.