Made in Minnesota 2013:
Fair Retail Wages Strengthen Local Economies

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Minnesota 2020 urges shopper to be socially responsible purchasers by asking all stores basic questions about how they treat workers.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many of the workers who make the holidays happen live in poverty with pay and hours falling short of what’s needed for a family to meet basic living expenses, according to data collected from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). In the three categories most commonly associates with holiday shopping — general merchandise, which includes department stores, clothing, and sporting goods — the median hourly wage is just $9.05.

That’s far below the $13.55 an hour both adults working full time in an average Minnesota family of four must earn to meet basic living expenses, according to the Jobs Now Coalition Cost of Living Calculator. Even when you broaden out the sector to include food stores — many of which are unionized helping ensure fairer wages — and electronics and appliance stores — many of which involve commission — the median hourly wage for the entire holiday shopping sector is only $9.56.¹

With inconsistent and “just-in-time” scheduling, most employees aren’t even working 40-hour weeks, putting average annual wages between $17,000 and $19,000 for workers in the clothing, department store, and sporting goods industry sectors. Part time status typically comes with no vacation and no employer-provided health care — even if workers could afford it, which most can’t.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MINNESOTA’S RETAIL WORKFORCE</th>
<th>Number of Workers</th>
<th>Median Wage</th>
<th>Weighted av. media wage</th>
<th>% of total employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electronics and Appliance Stores - 443</td>
<td>8,505</td>
<td>$14.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and Beverage Stores - 445</td>
<td>50,332</td>
<td>$9.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores - 448</td>
<td>21,478</td>
<td>$8.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Merchandise Stores - 452</td>
<td>62,585</td>
<td>$9.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total/Average</td>
<td>155,218</td>
<td>$10.35</td>
<td>$9.56</td>
<td>5.8 % of total employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excludes Electronics</td>
<td>146,713</td>
<td>$9.29</td>
<td>$9.27</td>
<td>5.5% of total employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excludes Electronics and Food and Bev</td>
<td>96,381</td>
<td>$9.15</td>
<td>$9.05</td>
<td>3.6% of employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ These categories include: electronics and appliance stores, food and beverage stores, clothing and clothing accessories stores, sporting goods, hobby, book, and music stores, and general merchandise stores.
Based on these working conditions, Minnesota 2020’s *Made in Minnesota 2013* report will chart a new course in conjunction with the state’s Raise the Wage Coalition. In addition to buying more of their holiday goods locally, MN 2020 urges shoppers to be Social Responsible Purchasers by asking all stores basic questions about how they treat workers.

MN 2020 bases these screens on two bodies of research: Socially Responsible Investing models common among faith-based organizations and pension funds and a series of socially responsible dining guides published by groups in Wisconsin, San Francisco and New York City.

While these answers might be hard for individual shoppers to find out on their own, it’s important to at least initiate inquiry by looking at a store’s website, calling corporate headquarters, or asking an in-store manager/owner.

**A socially responsible shopper should be able to at least answer the following questions about stores they frequent:**

- Is the store’s minimum wage $9.50?
- Are full-time employees eligible for affordable insurance (with premiums 10 percent or less of gross income)?
- Are full-time employees entitled to paid sick days?
- Are full-time employees provided with at least five paid days off per year?
- Are the majority of workers given full-time opportunities?
- Are personnel policies clearly written and available to all workers?
Previous *Made in Minnesota* reports reveal when consumers demand certain shopping conditions and products, merchants tend to respond. This was especially apparent in *Strategies for Growing Sustainable Small Businesses*, the 2010 version of the report, where shops small and large began supplying green goods based on consumer requests.

Moving forward, Raise the Wage Coalition and its partner groups from the faith, labor, nonprofit and service community should go about compiling this information for Minnesota consumers as was the case with worker justice dining guides in other major cities.

Socially Responsible Purchasing practices aided with these consumer guides and stronger state employment policy would go a long way shaping both behavior at the corporate level and within locally owned outlets in treating workers fairly. It will also help set a uniform standard and minimize instances where socially responsible employers are reluctant to extend better wages, benefits, and job conditions for fear of being at a competitive disadvantage.

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Supporting local entrepreneurs through “buy local” campaigns has been the central theme of Minnesota 2020’s annual Holiday Season special reports. They include:

- **Made in Minnesota 2012: Cross Cultural Commerce**

- **Made in Minnesota 2011: Fertile Ground for Minority Opportunity**

- **Made in Minnesota 2010: Strategies for Growing Sustainable Small Businesses**

- **Made in Minnesota 2009: Homegrown Holidays**

- **Made in Minnesota 2008: Boosting Minnesota’s Economy in Tough Economic Times**

- **Made in MN: The Value of Buying Local this Holiday Season**
Smart firms already recognize the economic advantages that result from decent pay, good benefits, and fair working conditions in the form of low turnover, increased worker morale, and a well-trained, highly experienced workforce. However, this takes committing to a long-term business plan, which not all firms are willing to do without market or government pressure.

A $9.50 Minnesota minimum wage would boost the state’s low-wage workers’ purchasing power by $470 million annually.

Better wages and benefits would also be good for the economy as a whole, as personal and household consumption accounts for 70 percent of national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) — a market force impossible to ignore. The Economic Policy Institute estimates that a $9.50 Minnesota minimum wage would boost the state’s low-wage workers’ purchasing power by $470 million annually.

Furthermore, low wages drain social safety net programs. A recent Minnesotans for a Fair Economy report estimates that alone 12 major big box retailers doing business in the state cost taxpayers $150 million from workers supplementing their salaries with Medicaid, SNAP, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and cash assistance.

In the spirit of why MN 2020 started the Made in Minnesota series — to boost local economies and strengthen main streets — we’re calling on shoppers to recognize the retail workforce’s dignity this holiday season and beyond — to boost local economies and strengthen Minnesota families.
FINDINGS

✓ The typical retail worker in stores we commonly associate with holiday shopping lives in poverty, with median wages around $9 per hour (meaning half of the retail wages are even lower).

✓ The bottom of the wage scale, hasn’t kept pace with basic living expenses; had minimum wage’s purchasing power stayed on par with late 1960’s levels, it would be well over $10.

✓ When consumers demand merchants operate with ethical leadership or sell ethically produced products, retailers typically respond, even if it costs them more upfront.

✓ There is an economic model for shoppers looking to ensure workers are treated fairly when it comes to wages, benefits and job conditions. It’s called socially responsible purchasing. Its roots are in socially responsible investing, common practice among large religious organizations and pension funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ Raise Minnesota’s wage to $9.50 an hour, indexed to inflation, with federal work week and family leave conformity, and no penalty for tipped workers.

✓ Urge shoppers to be Socially Responsible Purchasers by inquiring how retailers treat their workers and supporting merchants who are socially responsible employers.

✓ Faith, labor, nonprofits, service organizations should work with researchers and industry experts to compile worker justice-oriented shopping and dining guides for consumers who want to support business that support their workers.
INTRODUCTION

There’s an economic and social cost to low wages, and shoppers have a role to play in helping ensure economic justice for workers. Consumer complacency allows companies’ abusive behaviors that hold back workers and contribute to community poverty, hunger and homelessness. People of faith and conscience, working with labor and community leaders, can break this cycle by demanding that retailers, manufacturers, food stores and restaurants do right by their workers.

Some anti-worker tactics are extreme violations of the law, such as wage theft. Other classic corporate tools to depress wages and benefits are more subtle, such as keeping employees in persistent part time status. Consumer advocacy groups must join labor, faith, and non-profits in demanding action on the following issues:

- **Ending Wage Theft** – millions of low-pay and other vulnerable people are victimized annually by underpayment or non-payment of wages.

- **Perpetually Low Wages** – Large corporations use standardized poor working conditions, long-term part-time work, avoid worker benefits, and resist collective bargaining.

- **Comprehensive Immigration Reform** – More than 11 million undocumented workers become victims of labor abuses, unable to protect their rights, and undermine rights of others.

- **Raise Minimum Wages** – Join state and federal efforts to raise wages.

- **Paid Sick Days** – More than 80 percent of low-wage workers do not have sick day protection.

**Consumers and investors as partners**

Consumers concerned about economic and social just have a number of historic and modern models to adapt in sending a strong message to merchants who fail to share corporate riches with workers.

Product and company boycotts had been useful tools to eliminate items from shelves that have been harmful and hazardous to children and other members of society. These were also effective instruments in fighting segregation and other civil rights abuses perpetrated by retailers and manufacturers.
In making their fights public, Socially Responsible Purchasers\(^2\) also found another powerful ally, Socially Responsible Investors.\(^3\)

Solidarity came as consumers and investors stood shoulder-to-shoulder demanding justice not only for workers but other stakeholders in a company.

Consumers wanting to do right by workers have natural corporate, community, and public allies. These entities have a dual utility. First, they’ve set a model for how an individual or firm with the least amount of market power builds a coalition. Second, they now have purchasing power, provide jobs, and stimulate the economy and can use that leverage for good.

For example, locally-owned businesses have had success with well-coordinated “buy local” campaigns. The “Fair Trade” movement for importing coffee and other consumer products is growing across the country and here in Minnesota. State-supported programs, such as the “Minnesota Grown” promotions and directory, show hugely beneficial impacts on local economies and on consumer behavior.

Employees, consumers (customers), managers and stockholders are indelibly linked stakeholders in any enterprise. Creditors and the enterprise’s various suppliers, or vendors, tied to the firm are only a small step away. Often overlooked, however, are secondary stakeholders that include communities and the general public that rely on the firm for community talents, economic activity, employment and taxes that support local government services and schools.\(^4\)

All players in the local economy are directly and indirectly connected and should engage each other, thereby bringing more potential “market power” to consumers wishing to engage in Socially Responsible Purchasing.

For these reasons, labor groups, faith-based organizations, social welfare nonprofits and community service groups should explore ways to cooperate and put socially responsible purchasing — consumption — on equal footing with socially responsible investing.
Building market power for workers

U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 70 percent dependent on consumption. Even though Minnesota is home to 19 Fortune 500 companies, local economists repeatedly point out Minnesota’s economy is a reflection of the national economy. Corporate revenue and profit reflect consumption patterns nationally no matter where the point of sale occurs.

This is the largest, under-utilized source of market power in existence worldwide. If Minnesota raised the minimum wage to $9.50 an hour, it would produce an additional $470 million in purchasing power among Minnesota’s lowest paid workers, according to the Economic Policy Institute. It would also have a positive upward benefit for workers on the fringes of living wage, which ranges between $12 and $15 depending on where a worker lives.

In recent years, much of this capital has been stockpiled in accounts for big box stores or in savings accounts of a few wealthy shop proprietors, doing the overall economy little good. It’s better for society and business pumping this cash back into the economy through fairer wages.

People of conscience should ponder “what” to buy as well as “where” to buy, fully aware that household decisions about consumption have enormous potential to influence local standards of living and our own quality of life. Consumers who want to help their local economies will shop at stores that give their workers the greatest level of purchasing power.
Questions to Ask About the Stores You Frequent

- ✔ Minimum wage at least $9.50?
- ✔ Affordable insurance?
- ✔ Paid vacation, sick days for full-time employees?
- ✔ Majority of workers full-time?
SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING

Unlike Socially Responsible Investing (SRI), Socially Responsible Purchasing (SRP) isn’t a widely accepted business or academic term. Business school literature is devoid of its usage. However, certain Twin Cities investment consultants, a former business school dean, and community activists are beginning to use SRP to describe engaging consumers — individuals, households and institutions — in making discretionary purchasing decisions for social aims.

This paper seeks to marry SRI / SRP concepts to bring socially responsible decision-making down to the household level where it may produce the greatest “bang for the buck,” to use another non-academic slang term.

Unfortunately, the broader consumer base won’t pay much attention to SRP until consumers, faith-based groups, labor organizations and community leaders come together to create screens, advocate corporate/company policies, and encourage socially responsible behavior in supply chain management, the selection of products and services produced or sold, and in providing democratic and humane workplaces.

“Academia follows activism,” said Robert Bock, a former University of Wisconsin business school dean. “You will need to have something out there before academics start studying it.”

Slowly, that process may be starting. Far from Minnesota’s retailers, the University of Pennsylvania’s purchasing service has adapted seven principles to guide buying decisions.

1) **Community:** “Provide support and add value to your communities and those of your supply chain…”

2) **Diversity:** “Proactively promote purchasing from and the development of socially diverse suppliers…”

3) **Environment:** “Encourage your organization and others to be proactive in examining opportunities to be environmentally responsible within their supply chains either upstream or downstream…”

4) **Ethics:** “Be aware of ISM’s [Institute for Supply Management] ‘Principles and Standards of Ethical Supply Management Conduct’…”

5) **Financial Responsibility:** “Become knowledgeable of, and follow, applicable financial standards and requirements. Apply sound financial practices and ensure transparency in financial dealings…”

6) **Human Rights:** “Treat people with dignity and respect. Support and respect the protection of international human rights within the organization’s sphere of influence…”

7) **Safety:** Promote a safe environment for each employee in your organization and supply chain…”

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5 Bock, Dr. Robert. October telephone interview.
Institutions such as universities can be the driving force that starts this change. In Dean Bock’s backyard, the University of Wisconsin-Madison severed a licensing agreement with Nike over the shoe manufacturer’s treatment of factory workers in Honduras.

Cornell University and the University of Washington took similar steps. Nike responded. It decided to contribute $1.4 million to a workers’ relief fund. While this is hardly a significant change on Nike’s part, it’s a small example of purchasers’ power.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM), referenced in the Penn principals, is the oldest and largest research and education group involved with helping business leaders apply sustainability and social responsibility throughout the supply chain.

That is what came into play in Honduras; Nike didn’t own the factories making its shoes, but it was reminded of and recognized obligations it had for actions of its subcontractors.

No Need to Re-invent Wheels

It’s true that individual shoppers lack the purchasing power of a major university. That’s why broad coalitions need to be formed in marshalling consumer purchasing strengths. There are already several models to follow, including CorpWatch, Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights, Social Accountability International, and the University of Minnesota’s Human Rights Center.

These provide ample intellectual support backing up any and all forms of local efforts at socially responsible purchasing. Furthermore, Yale University’s Robert Shiller, one of three Americans to share the 2013 Nobel Prize for Economics, made the following to-the-point observation of our times in an interview with the Associated Press following the award announcement:

“The most important problem that we are facing today, I think, is rising inequality in the United States and elsewhere around the world.”

Labor, community leaders, people of faith are painfully aware of this growing problem. Nonetheless, it is reassuring to see these words from the Nobel laureate.

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8 Ibid

Strength in changing numbers

A powerful gender connection is building that may add strength to labor, community and faith-based groups seeking to affect social justice goals. Women do the vast majority of household purchasing. Recent Economic Policy Institute reports show that 57 percent of Minnesotans impacted by a $9.50 minimum wage are women, bringing an additional $256 million in purchasing power.

As already noted, 70 percent of U.S. GDP relies on individual and household consumption. The She-economy.org market research group, however, has research showing that women account for 85 percent of all consumer purchases, or more than $5 trillion annually, representing more than half of U.S. GDP.\textsuperscript{10}

Among key findings, women purchase:

- 91 percent of new homes
- 66 percent of personal computers
- 92 percent of vacations
- 80 percent of health care
- 65 percent of new cars
- 89 percent of bank accounts
- 93 percent of food
- 93 percent of OTC pharmaceuticals

Research gathered by she-economy.com also found women would make substantial social responsibility purchases, given adequate information. For instance, surveys found nearly 50 percent of women wanted more green choices, 37 percent would pay attention to brands committed to environmental causes, and 25 percent of women’s shopping cart purchases are environmentally-friendly products.\textsuperscript{11}

Further, she-economy.com cites market research findings from the Fleishman-Hillard consulting firm that projects women will control two-thirds of consumer wealth within the coming decade, and will benefit from the largest transfer of wealth in U.S. history with “Boomer” (Baby Boom generation) women getting a “double inheritance windfall” from parents and husbands.\textsuperscript{12}

This is occurring even as women – and the children they care for – are also among the poorest of the poor. As previously noted, women still struggle for equality in workplaces and as low-income women with children face some of the most severe sociological tasks of raising children, finding housing and keeping food on their tables.

While change, at long last, may be tilting in women’s favor, it isn’t coming fast enough to affect a more just society and lift people out of poverty.

Almost all of the reasons mentioned above regarding women also apply to immigrants, refugees and working people on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder. This is why social justice groups are nearly unanimous in supporting immigration reform efforts in Washington and at state levels as well as gender equity issues.


\textsuperscript{11} ibid

\textsuperscript{12} ibid
70 percent of U.S. GDP relies on individual and household consumption.

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Madison, Wisconsin: Another model for Socially Responsible Purchasers

Social justice advocates in the Wisconsin capitol city face as many challenges as labor and people of conscience anywhere. They are also bridging ecumenical, political and social divides to promote economic justice and labor democracy in a hostile state political climate.

When not advocating for social justice at the state capitol, the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice (ICWJ) of South Central Wisconsin has teamed with the Workers’ Rights Center of Madison to begin a Just Dining Guide about Madison restaurants. “The guide highlights employers who are going the extra mile to provide good quality, family supporting jobs in our community,” the Workers Rights Center explains on its website.13

The guide was launched in December 2012 after conducting surveys of employers and workers at Madison restaurants. This may be the most detailed such effort anywhere. Rabbi Renee Bauer, executive director of the ICWJ, said San Francisco has a similar type of customer guide, and Ithaca, N.Y. has another (Bauer). Another is produced in New York City, she said, “but just in the Jewish community for kosher establishments.”

There is movement to extend human rights and economic justice advocacy to engaging consumers, Rabbi Bauer said, “although it is a constant struggle to keep people involved and aware.”14

But Madison, a unique university town and state capitol city, does have area talents to draw from in organizing advocacy groups. People involved come from diverse backgrounds, said Rev. Jerry Folk, a retired Lutheran pastor and a former director of the Commission for Church in Society for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA).15

Just Dining Guide is a “carrot” encouraging people in the Madison area to support establishments committed to employment equality and social justice. It is effectively a companion action to the Community Investment Program (CIP) operated by the Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCOC).

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13 Just Dining Guide. The Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice (ICWJ) and the Workers’ Rights Center (WRC), both based at Madison, Wis., http://workerjustice.org/just-dining-guide/about-the-dining-project/.

14 Bauer, Rabbi Renee. Comments an October email exchange.

15 Folk, Rev. Jerry L. Comments from a telephone interview and email exchange.
SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE INVESTING

Social responsibility in investing is a constantly evolving financial practice. Historically it was called “ethics” investing. It has started to take different shapes over the past 50 years, and has taken on nuances in the past two decades as funds and participating investors grew in numbers and committed dollars.

“I really believe capital gets attention and can bring about change,” says Matthew Fitzmaurice, co-founder and managing member of AWJ Capital Partners in Minneapolis. There is impact when fund managers go to a company and say, “We want to invest in you because you are doing good.”

Social responsibility criteria for measuring corporate performance are tricky. For instance, academic researchers Ter Horst and Zhang, Renneboog found at least 23 different areas of interests in shaping screens that guide placement of investments in U.S. “ethical” mutual funds.

Within those categories, 18 sets of socially responsible categories employed negative screens to identify companies to avoid; 11 areas of mutual fund investing employed positive screens to reward company behavior.

Adding to the complication is the fact that church-based and ecumenical, faith-based organizations frequently add defense, or military weaponry stocks that they avoid in their investment portfolios.

That raises issues beyond the reach of this paper; how people of faith view these stocks likely vary geographically and depend on employment, environmental and community-support practices in use by nearby defense contractors or military bases.

Does socially responsible investing work?

It does. It has. And it can be financially rewarding when funds are placed in “green” or other ventures that development and produce “the next best thing.”

In general terms, Fitzmaurice said he observes socially responsible investing produces “at or slightly below market rates of return,” in the short term. At the same time, Renneboog et al

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The Evolution of SRI

**Early SRI Categories:**
Avoiding “sin” products and equities
- Alcohol
- Gambling
- Pornography
- Tobacco

**Current SRI Categories:**
Supporting corporate responsible behavior
- Environmental practices
- Human rights
- Religious views / moral activities

**Evolving SRI Categories:**
Avoiding or supporting corporate behavior, categorized as
- (E) Environmental / Sustainable
- (S) Social
- (G) Governance

*Source: Minnesota 2020, from diverse literature*

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16 Fitzmaurice, Matthew. Telephone interview.

found attributes brought to social investing can lower SRI mutual funds’ volatility, which can be valuable to risk-adverse investors.

Incrementally, and issue-by-issue, faith-based organizations and their allies have scored victories in pressuring companies and industries, even when they haven’t changed all companies or eradicated all offensive business practices.

Combined with socially responsible advocacy, socially responsible investments have changed the course of history, governments, and public policies that either serve or harm people and the planet.

A few examples would include:

People of faith and their allies in labor do not take credit for the accomplishments brought about by the people of South Africa and neighboring Namibia to end apartheid and bring majority rule to their country. But they certainly helped; faith-based social justice screens applied in pension funds, mutual funds and in advocacy for North American and European countries for anti-apartheid public policies greatly supported the democratic movements in South Africa.

Textile workers in the north of England, along with their religious neighbors, supported American abolitionists and the North in the American Civil War despite the interruption of cotton trade resulting in massive unemployment and hardship. Cooperative historian David Thompson gives a moving account of these heroic workers resisting slavery and British commercial interests that sought to side with the South to keep cotton flowing to the mills.18

In the 1960s with opposition to the Vietnam War, and screens against military suppliers; promotion of civil rights and racial equality, which contributed to passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act; and creation of community development banks to serve low-income and minority populations.19

The spread of social investing activities to ensure worker, consumer and environmental protections goes back to the 1970s; the 1980s brought opposition to apartheid, creative of special SRI funds such as Dreyfus Third Century, Calvert Social Investment Fund.

18 Thompson, David J. Weavers of Dreams. Center for Cooperatives, University of California. 1994. (A later edition is available, supported by CHS Inc. and other cooperatives.) See Chapter Nine: Co-ops, Cotton and the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865).

Balanced Portfolio, and the Parnassus Fund.

By the 1990s, SRI had its own index to measure performance. Four hundred U.S. firms, comparable to the S&P 500, made a Domini Social Index.

Some traditional capitalists and not-so-socially motivated investors see social funds as meddlers in their capital markets. Sister Patricia Daly, a Dominican sister and the executive director Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment, begs to differ. She credits her Catholic group and its ecumenical partners as providing economic rewards for companies and as serving as a “great job incubators”.20

“As a result of our activity, companies have had to develop expertise in issues such as managing labor standards and trading carbon. Now some of this expertise is starting to pay back for them.

“I’ve seen energy efficiency investments that pay back at 18 – 20 percent a year, which is a better return than you will get from Wall Street at any stage of the economic cycle. … We have helped to create this whole industry within companies – and in many cases the industry is very profitable for them.”21

There is growing evidence that companies are being rewarded for ethical behavior by socially responsible investors who remain more loyal to these companies’ stock than to other equity held in conventional investments. Investor survey data from Mennonite Mutual Aid and Praxis Mutual Funds, researchers found CSR operated assets tend to be more stable than non-CSR assets22, which the author credits to the investors’ “more patient capital.”

The United Methodist General Board of Church & Society (GBCS) hailed the January 2012 announcement that the United Methodist General Board of Pensions & Health Benefits (GBPHB) would divest stock held in two large operators of for-profit prison systems.23

This is further evidence that faith-based and socially conscious groups must constantly adjust to new information and changing conditions. The Interagency Task Force on Immigration brought conflicts with profit motives for incarcerating people, and particularly immigrants, to the Methodist groups’ attention.

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
Advocacy

Investors can express a lot of concerns once they are in the door. Consumers must have their voices heard at the cash register. In both cases, reverting to old-fashion advocacy helps move Minnesota and America forward.

Christian Brothers Investment Services Inc. offers a concise look at contemporary faith-based advocacy efforts among social investing groups on its website. As of early October, the site had links to human rights efforts, shareholder calls for gender diversity on corporate boards, various environmental investing issues, climate change, corporate initiatives directed against SRI investors, corporate governance issues and collaborative efforts with other faith-based partners.

Using many of the tools of socially responsible investors described above, much more good for our neighbors, our communities, our states, our nation, our planet is possible through extension into Social Responsible Purchasing.

CONCLUSION

Socially Responsible Investors have taught us that the free market and treating workers, the environment and communities with fairness and decency are not incompatible.

By adapting tools developed and employed by conscientious investors, labor, faith-based and community service activists can move Minnesota communities forward in the area of Socially Responsible Purchasing.

We’ve ignored workers’ rights and their fair share of company equity for too long. It’s resulted in challenges with growing inequality and poverty. We’ve failed to act politically on policies that would mitigate this disparity, such as raising minimum wages and breaking down obstacles to collectively bargaining. It’s basically guaranteed widespread poverty.

While public policy action in mandating fairer wages and better working conditions advance slowly, a number of groups from activists to social service organizations to major universities are already working on ways to ensure shoppers consider workers, the environment, local communities and other stakeholders in their purchasing decisions.

Minnesota’s people of faith, nonprofits, community leaders, labor and groups engaged with and concerned about social justice have already started a worker justice movement, forming the Raise the Wage Coalition. It’s calling for a $9.50 Minnesota minimum wage by 2015, indexed to inflation, with federal work week and family leave conformity, and wants no penalty for tipped workers.

So far these participants have brought various issues to the table. As part of this coalition, Minnesota 2020 is calling for support from local shoppers this holiday season and beyond to weigh purchasing decisions on how their dollar aids or harms the broader community, especially workers.

Does the purchase strengthen or make worse:

- ✓ Wages,
- ✓ Poverty and homelessness,
- ✓ Gender equality and minority opportunity,
- ✓ Direct and indirect impacts on other stakeholders?

Focusing such questions will move concepts of using socially responsible capital forward, continuing what investment advisors see as a continuous progression.
“When we gather at a place like our State Capitol, there are people here from all sorts of religious and non-religious backgrounds.

There are Christians and Jews, Muslims and Buddhists, Hindus and Bahai, Humanists and people who are pretty sure they believe something, but don’t know exactly how the heck to describe it.

What connects us all this day is a spirit of hospitality, a spirit of compassion and a spirit of justice.

… As we create a place where all can feel welcome, whatever their country of origin, whatever language they speak, whatever challenges they face, we say: Let justice roll.”

Rev. Phil Haslanger
Invocation excerpt from May Day Rally
Madison, Wis., 2013
Minnesota 2020 is a progressive, non-partisan think tank, focused on what really matters.

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