

## Understanding Our Working-Class Neighbors Through a Gospel Lens

Excerpts from the article "What So Many People Don't Get About the U.S. Working Class" by Joan Williams in the Harvard Business Review, 11/10/2016  
compiled by the Very Rev. Bob Scott

As a community of faith, we are called to love our neighbors and to understand their struggles with compassion and insight. In her *Harvard Business Review* article "What So Many People Don't Get About the U.S. Working Class," Joan Williams helps us see important truths about many Americans' lived experience — and invites us to listen deeply with our hearts as well as our minds.

One of Williams' central points is that the term "working class" often doesn't mean what many people assume. For many Americans, especially those without a college degree, "working class" is not a synonym for poverty. Rather, it often describes people in the middle of the economic spectrum — families working long hours for steady jobs that once promised a comfortable, stable life.

These neighbors may feel forgotten when policy focuses only on the *poorest of the poor*, without addressing the hopes and anxieties of working parents who struggle to pay bills, secure reliable work, or see opportunities for their children. Williams notes that this can lead to *resentment* — not only toward elites or politicians, but even toward those in need who receive targeted support that feels out of reach for the middle.

From a Christian perspective, we are reminded that **every person bears God's image and deserves dignity** — whether rich or poor, educated or not. Jesus teaches us to walk alongside those who feel overlooked, to embrace those who feel marginalized, and to advocate for fairness and opportunity for all. In doing so, we resist easy stereotypes and deepen our love for neighbor.

Williams also highlights how *geography* affects working-class life: many communities outside urban centers face economic decline, limited jobs, and a sense of isolation. Bringing the gospel into these places means more than offering charity — it calls us to long-term presence, listening, and partnership.

Finally, she warns against dismissing working people's anger as simply "racism" or ignorance. Genuine concerns about economic justice and dignity deserve respectful engagement. As Christians, we can model a better way: **listening first, seeking understanding, and responding with justice and mercy** (Micah 6:8).

This is only one of the many themes and stories explored in the Episcopal Church series called Sacred Ground. You can learn more about Sacred Ground and how to sign up for the entire series of sessions by using this link: [EDNC Beloved Community webpage](#)