

Unificationist Wonman Joseph Williams Hunger-Strikes in Solidarity with Campus Workers

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Wonman Joseph Williams is a third year student at the University of Virginia, and a football player for the Virginia Cavaliers.

Second-generation Unificationist Wonman Joseph Williams underwent an eight-day hunger strike as part of a movement called the Living-Wage Campaign initiated to support the workers of the University of Virginia (UVA). Williams is a third-year student studying political and social thought and a football player for the Virginia Cavaliers. He has received attention from *Ebony* magazine, *ESPN* and the *Washington Post* for participation in the Living Wage Campaign.

He said on his blog that at UVA, “hundreds of contract employees may make as little as \$7.25/hour while six out of the top ten highest paid state employees in Virginia hold administrative positions at the University. Many employees, mostly women and African Americans, do not receive enough pay for their basic necessities to exist in Charlottesville, where the cost of living is nearly 10 percent higher than the national average. This extreme inequality has disturbed and disillusioned students for decades, many of whom have tried to grapple with issues of race, class, and poverty in and out of the classroom. We have taken every conventional route towards this goal, yet our pleas have been consistently ignored, and workers are still paid unjust wages.”

According to Williams, this cause “hits very close to home.” He is one of four children supported by a single mother, and has moved more than 30 times – including into homeless shelters and church basements, as a result of economic hardship. He therefore identifies with the financial difficulty of UVA employees and in response, has banded together with other Living Wage supporters to “give a voice to the many University employees who often cannot speak up for fear of retaliation from the administration.”

He continued, “I speak for all decent human beings in saying that I will forever refuse to ‘follow the rules’ of any institution which places a monetary value on human life. I refuse to comply with rules, regulations, or restrictions that reinforce the discrimination, persecution and exploitation of human beings.”

In an interview with the *UC Newsletter*, Williams said that faith had a big impact on his decision to take part in the strike. “My parents taught me and my siblings that we always had to be mindful of what we were representing,” he said. “Wherever you go, you represent, first and foremost, your family. They would also say that we had blessings that other people didn’t have and that we had to share those blessings with others.

“I learned this teaching of love through my parents, who learned it first and foremost through Rev. Moon. His teachings about unconditional love have shaped my ideology and world view. My parents really educated us in a wide variety of religions – we celebrated Unificationist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim holidays.

“Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Faith are all centered around the ideology of love. That’s what the strike was about. We at the University of Virginia really care about the workers here and are willing to sacrifice things like food or physical comfort for them to have a better chance at life.”

Williams ended his eight-day fast in order to prepare for an upcoming project in Belize, where he will co-lead UVA's Alternative Spring Break, during which students forgo their vacation to volunteer through activities such as repairing an orphanage, serving in soup kitchens, working with youth, meeting with community leaders and supporting local Negros.

Williams’ brother, Victor, plans to attend Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s upcoming mass-wedding ceremony on March 23, 2012. Victor says, “My brother is my best friend. I love my brother and I fully support him in going to the Blessing. Dedicating yourself and your life with another person to the cause of cross-cultural peace and the broader message of love and building an ideal family is a great thing. I respect my brother greatly in trusting our parents and Rev. Moon enough to participate in the Blessing ceremony.”