

INTERRELIGIOUS WORKING GROUP ON DOMESTIC HUMAN NEEDS

A Faith Reflection on the Federal Budget-2007

As communities of faith, we are grounded in a shared tradition of justice and compassion, and we are called upon to hold ourselves and our communities accountable to the moral standard of our Biblical tradition. This framework defines our hope and our advocacy for a new dialogue about our national priorities that will reinvigorate our collective commitment to the common good of all and to reducing poverty.

We approach the new year and new Congress with optimism and eagerness to collaborate, but also with sober recognition of the challenges that we face as a nation. Poverty and inequality continue to rise, the Gulf Coast region still struggles to rebuild, service providers across the country scramble to fill budget gaps because of cuts in federal funding, and the long-term fiscal outlook remains a cause for deep concern. However, our faith traditions have long held out an alternative vision of abundance and community that becomes possible when the people, acting individually and together through the government, “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God” by being good stewards of our shared national resources.

The federal budget remains a critical challenge for this model of stewardship to which we believe both our faith and our shared national values call us. If we are to set a new direction for our country, the choices we make about how we generate revenues and spend our shared resources must place the common good above narrow self-interest and must embrace a broader understanding of human security that provides hope, opportunity, and a place at the table for those who are marginalized. We offer this reflection again as a statement of our commitment to these priorities and to work with you to develop a budget that will strengthen our life together as a nation and as part of the global community.

Community and the Common Good

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you... and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will have your welfare (Jeremiah 29:7, NRSV).

- Our nation’s well-being is dependent on the well-being of all its members. In order to form a more perfect union, the preamble to the U.S. Constitution commits this nation to promoting the general welfare. In faith language we call that the “common good” and the budget should reflect a commitment to the common good by ensuring that the basic needs of all members of society are met. At this time, when Gulf Coast communities are still struggling to rebuild, when nearly 46 million Americans are uninsured, 37 million live in poverty and one in five children lives in a household experiencing food insecurity, greater investments in programs to meet human needs and reduce poverty are critical.
- Health care, affordable housing, and the revitalization of the Gulf Coast are critical to strengthening our common life and providing opportunity for all. These should be budget priorities with enough funding provided to expand the State Children’s Health Insurance Program to cover all kids during reauthorization, to restore capacity to current housing programs and support new affordable housing construction, and to keep our promises to the residents of the Gulf Coast for just rebuilding.
- A broader vision of community demands that budget decisions be evaluated not just in the short term, but with respect to their long-term effects on our children’s children, the global community and on all of creation.

Concern for Those Who Are Poor and Vulnerable

Give the king your justice, O God... May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice... May he defend the cause of the poor of the people and give deliverance to the needy (Psalm 72:1-4, NRSV).

- As a nation we have a special responsibility to care for the most vulnerable members of society. All budget decisions and administrative procedures must be judged by their impact on children, low-income families, the elderly, people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations.
- Whatever one's position on the war in Iraq or on tax cuts, these policies are driving current deficits. Attempting to reduce the deficit by cutting programs that affect needy populations, when these programs did not lead to the deficit, is unjust.

Economic Justice

Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people (Isaiah 10:1-2, NIV).

- God has created a world of sufficiency for all; the problem is not the lack of natural and economic resources, but how they are shared, distributed and made accessible within society and throughout the world.
- Our government should be an instrument for correcting inequalities, not a means of institutionalizing them. Good stewardship demands that the federal budget share the burdens of taxation, according to one's ability to pay, and distribute government resources fairly to promote a just and equitable society.

Endorsing Organizations (as of March 1, 2007)

American Friends Service Committee
Brethren Witness/Washington Office
Church Women United
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Mennonite Central Committee, Washington Office
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches in Christ in the USA
National Council of Jewish Women
National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Washington Office
Sojourners/Call to Renewal
Union for Reform Judaism
The United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society