

INTERRELIGIOUS WORKING GROUP ON DOMESTIC HUMAN NEEDS

A Faith Reflection on the Federal Budget

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. We speak together now to express our concern about our national priorities.

In the year that has passed since this reflection was originally written, this concern has deepened as we have watched poverty, food insecurity, and the number of people without health insurance climb for the fourth year in a row. Across the country, churches and faith-based organizations who care for our most vulnerable people are straining under increased demand for services due to cuts in federal funding for critical safety net programs. Devastating hurricanes have underscored real problems of racism and inequality in our country and along the Gulf Coast and scattered throughout the country survivors of are struggling to provide for their families while waiting for the bold action that has yet to materialize from our national leaders.

These circumstances make it necessary to even more closely examine our government's decisions, particularly those concerning the budget, through a moral lens. The federal budget remains a fundamental statement of who we are as a nation. The choices we make about how we generate revenues and spend our shared resources reveal our true allegiance. As people of faith we must continue to ask: Do they uphold values that will strengthen our life together as a nation and as part of the global community?

We offer this reflection as a starting point for such a dialogue and to make clear the values to which we hold ourselves and our nation accountable.

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 would call that the "common good." 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 recover from last year's hurricanes, when nearly 46 million Americans are uninsured, 37 million live in poverty and one in five children lives in a household experiencing food insecurity, additional cuts to critical human needs programs cannot be justified.
- Investments in education, job training, work supports, health care, housing, food assistance and environmental protection strengthen families and communities and promote opportunity for all. These should be budget priorities.
- Budget decisions must 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 the tax cuts, these policies are driving the deficit. Attempting to pay off 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 a tool to correct inequalities, not a means of institutionalizing them. The federal budget should share the burdens of taxation, according to one's ability to pay, and distribute government resources fairly to create opportunity for all.

Endorsing Organizations

American Baptist Churches USA
 American Friends Service Committee
 Bread for the World
 Call to Renewal
 Central Conference of American Rabbis
 Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office
 Church Women United
 Conference of Major Superiors of Men
 The Episcopal Church
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
 Friends Committee on National Legislation
 Institute Justice Team - Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
 Jesuit Conference USA
 Jewish Council for Public Affairs
 Leadership Conference of Women Religious
 Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
 Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
 National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
 National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
 NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
 Pax Christi USA
 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
 Union for Reform Judaism
 Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
 United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries
 The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
 Women of Reform Judaism