

## ***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 these choices 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**

#### **National**

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  
 NCCC Justice for Women Working Group  
 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

## **State and Local**

### Arizona

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Arizona

### California

Lutheran Office of Public Policy – California  
Pacific Central West Region of Union for Reform Judaism  
Sisters of the Good Shepherd, San Francisco

### Colorado

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry – Colorado

### Delaware

Lutheran Office on Public Policy, Delaware

### Florida

Union for Reform Judaism – Southeast Council

### Illinois

Lutheran Network for Justice Advocacy  
Lutheran Social Services of Illinois  
Protestants for the Common Good

### Minnesota

Institute for Welcoming Resources  
Minnesota Council of Churches

### Missouri

Sisters of the Good Shepherd – St. Louis, MO

### New Jersey

Church and Society Committee, Sparta United Methodist Church (Sparta, NJ)  
The Crisis Ministry of Princeton and Trenton  
Family Promise  
Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry in New Jersey  
Union for Reform Judaism, New Jersey-West Hudson Valley Council

### New Mexico

ELCA-Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry-New Mexico

### Ohio

Union for Reform Judaism, Northeast Lakes Council/Detroit Federation

Pennsylvania

Roots of Promise/Thomas Merton Center  
Social Action Committee at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg

Washington

Washington Association of Churches  
Lutheran Public Policy Office of Washington State

Wisconsin

Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin