

Dear Member of Congress:

As leaders of this nation's religious communities, we are greatly troubled by the lack of fairness and compassion in the just-released federal budget and by the disastrous impact many of its provisions will have on the lives of millions of men, women and children.

Scores of religious leaders recently wrote to you describing the questions that should be asked to determine whether the budget provisions are fair and just, and whether they promote the common good. Now that the budget has been released, the answers are clear.

They reveal a budget that falls woefully short in its basic obligations to the poor and most vulnerable. By slashing housing, health-care, education and job-training programs, this budget offers an empty hand to our sisters and brothers who are working hard to make ends meet.

Those who can least afford it are being asked to make the greatest proportional sacrifice, as the budget also proposes reckless tax cuts that will reduce revenues by \$1.4 trillion over the next ten years. In addition to these failings, the budget shirks its moral responsibility to protect the air, water and land, which are God's glorious creation.

Through its many provisions and priorities, this budget turns its back on our nation's oldest and most enduring values of compassion, justice and honesty. It demands an unequal sacrifice, and so it is unworthy of who we are, as children of God.

Here are a few examples of budget provisions that raise concerns.

They include:

- Cutting federal spending on Medicaid by at least \$45 billion over the next ten years, which will put at risk crucial health protections for more than 50 million children, parents, seniors and disabled Americans
- \$1.1 billion cut in food-stamp aid over the next ten years, which will eliminate nearly 300,000 people from the program
- A five-year freeze on child-care assistance, which will prevent 300,000 low-income children from receiving child care by 2009
- An overall cut in education funding, the first since the Contract with America, and a \$12 billion shortfall this year alone in the President's own No Child Left Behind initiative
- An 8.4 % cut in the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program that assists the poor in heating their homes

- \$118 million cut in housing aid for the disabled, cutting that program in half, in addition to cuts in housing assistance to the low-income, Native Americans and those with AIDS
- \$360 million cut in EPA programs that help communities build waste-water treatment plants
- \$700 million cut in clean-water programs overall
- \$1 billion cut in the Community Oriented Policing program, which will weaken the efforts of our nation's first responders

Now that the budget has been sent to Congress, we urge you to protect and restore the provisions which reflect our nation's best moral values. We will be doing our part in the weeks ahead -- sharing our vision of a just and merciful nation, and working to make it visible throughout our land.

Signed:

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