

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH, USA
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Dear Members of Congress:

September 13, 2005

As leaders of our respective denominations, we have long sought an end to the injustices inherent in poverty. We have never seen these injustices born out so vividly in our own country as in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The devastation wrought by Katrina has exposed the anguished faces of the poor in the wealthiest nation on the planet. These faces, precious in the eyes of God, cause us to remember that racial disparities and poverty exist in almost every community in our nation. They also compel us to set before Congress once again our concerns for the FY '06 federal budget and its impact on people living in poverty. With renewed urgency, we call on Congress to stop the FY '06 federal budget reconciliation process immediately.

We believe our federal budget is a concrete expression of our shared moral values and priorities. Congress rightly and quickly responded in appropriating needed funds to ensure an adequate initial response to Hurricane Katrina. Our denominations have mobilized and are responding in prayer and financial support and direct service to those in need. Yet, just as disaster struck the Gulf Coast, the U.S. Census Bureau reported in very particular detail that poverty in the United States is growing. The annual report, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004* showed that 37.0 million people lived in poverty in 2004, an increase of more than one million people since 2003.

In April, during consideration of the budget resolution we wrote to Congress that, "As we view the FY '06 Federal Budget through our lens of faith this budget, on balance, continues to ask our nation's working poor to pay the cost of a prosperity in which they may never share." It is clear that programs such as Medicaid and the Food Stamp Program that were slated for cuts by Congress will in fact have greater burdens placed on them as a result of Hurricane Katrina. These programs are not simply entitlements or "government hand-outs," they represent the deep and abiding commitment of a nation to care for the least among us.

Believe us when we tell you that even before Hurricane Katrina or the Census Bureau's report, neither we nor our friends of other faiths had the resources to turn back the rising tide of poverty in this country. The FY '06 reconciliation bill that is working its way through the authorizing committees will send more people searching for food in cupboards that, quite frequently, are bare.

We commit ourselves to working for economic policies infused with the spirit of the One who began his public ministry almost 2,000 years ago by proclaiming that God had anointed him "to bring good news to the poor."

The Most Reverend Frank T. Griswold

Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, USA

The Right Reverend Mark Hanson

Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American

The Reverend Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick

Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Reverend John H. Thomas

General Minister and President, United Church of Christ

Mr. James Winkler

General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church