

I. PREAMBLE

A. Our Message to Political Leaders

As communities of faith, we respect and care for one another as a sacred imperative that expresses our endeavor to "love our neighbor as ourselves." But American society as a whole is called to be a place where we delight in the value of each and every person and gladly accept a mutual responsibility for one another's wellbeing.

Government of, by and for the people is a vital forum for promoting the common good, cultivating basic virtues, and ensuring that no one is left behind. All of us have something to contribute to our life together, and none of us is excluded from our circle of mutual care and concern.

A federal budget that is faithful to these convictions must promote a compassionate and comprehensive vision for the future. As communities of faith, we call on our elected leaders to craft a Faithful Budget that fulfills our shared duty to each other in all segments of society. A Faithful Budget prioritizes the well-being of those who are struggling to overcome poverty or are especially vulnerable, as well as our obligation to future generations through our collective responsibility as stewards of creation. It is a budget that addresses and remedies the inequities that result from institutional racism and systemic injustice and a broken immigration system, creating a world where everyone may realize the potential of all that God intends. It is a budget that enhances the transformation of conflict with creative and courageous nonviolent peacebuilding, thus cultivating a more sustainable just peace.

Our message to our national leaders--rooted in our sacred texts--is this: ***Act with mercy and justice by serving the common good; robustly funding support for poor and vulnerable people as well as peacebuilding, both at home and abroad; and exercising proper care and keeping of the earth.***

In the current political and economic climate, neither party is giving sufficient voice to the needs of the families who are struggling to overcome poverty. A Faithful Budget will maintain a strong safety net while creating jobs, revitalizing communities, and ensuring a living wage. It will advance fiscal responsibility by means of an equitable tax system based on fairness and by prioritizing true human security and development. A Faithful Budget will also seek to save lives and advance human flourishing among our neighbors around the world who struggle to overcome hunger, poverty, disease, human rights abuses and forced displacement. A Faithful Budget will offer assistance to resettle refugees and will not provide funding to further militarize our southern border resulting in separation of families.

The way to a thriving nation is not to close our hearts to the poor, but to heed the words of the Prophet Isaiah who assures us, "[I]f you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday . . .you

shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in”(58:10-12).

B. The Scriptural Call

In this time of global economic uncertainty and political division, Jews, Christians, Muslims, and other communities of faith, guided by our sacred texts, advocate a constructive vision of the directions needed for a just society and a healthier world. The common prophetic message found in sacred texts calls for God’s Will to be done “on earth as it is in heaven.” Our shared traditions insist that piety and righteousness cannot remain only individual endeavors, but must also encompass our society’s commitment to justice and mercy.

We respond to the call of the Prophet Isaiah, who challenged his nation to know God’s ways and to practice true piety and righteousness--breaking injustice and oppression, feeding the hungry, and sheltering the homeless:

. . . . Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?—Isaiah 58

The New Testament Gospels call us to embody in action the just vision of Isaiah’s piety and righteousness:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”—Jesus’ words in Luke 4:18-19

The Qur’an teaches a piety that is inextricably linked with the spending of money for the betterment of those who are struggling:

Never shall you attain to true piety unless you spend on others out of what you cherish yourselves; and whatever you spend—verily, God has full knowledge thereof.—The Holy Qur’an 3:92

Guided by these sacred texts, we lift our voices to speak to the social and ecological challenges we face together under God--as a people, as a nation, as global citizens, and as stewards of God’s creation.

C. Principles of a Faithful Federal Budget

Advancing True Economic Opportunity: The opportunity to work hard and improve one’s economic condition is a value that defines this nation. But it is a reality increasingly available

primarily to those who are already wealthy. We believe in the inherent worth of every individual and that God intends dignity, health, and wholeness for each person. Therefore, we seek an economy that invests in proven pathways out of poverty where work pays and empowers workers to be self-sufficient for themselves and their families. The principles of “liberty and justice for all”, as enshrined in our Pledge of Allegiance, seem hollow in light of the pace at which wealth and opportunity have shifted from the many to the few. We believe that everyone deserves equal opportunity and must therefore have equal access to the building blocks for success. ***We urge Congress to make the long-term investments needed to sustain the United States’ economic renewal, create economic opportunity for all, and work toward ending poverty and racism. This requires investments in high-quality, affordable education, sustainable jobs with living wages, and policies that help families to build assets.***

Ensuring Adequate Resources for Shared Priorities: From the time a federal income tax was established, the concept of a progressive tax system, based on the ability to pay, has been widely accepted as fair and equitable. Over the last several decades our tax system has grown less progressive, and now frequently places more of a tax burden, as a percentage of income, on the middle class than it does on the wealthiest among us. The tax system also creates financial incentives for individuals to act in ways that are thought to strengthen our social fabric, but because of the way tax benefits are structured, too often low-wage workers do not earn enough to access those benefits. This results in a system that perpetuates inequality by rewarding behavior that generates financial security for those who already have it, while excluding those who are working hard at low-wage jobs and need help the most. An equitable, moral tax code should reward the efforts of low-income people to work and save at every level. A Faithful Budget will act to correct this imbalance. ***Investment in the renewal of our nation’s economic well-being and protecting individuals struggling with poverty and vulnerable populations will itself serve to reduce the long-term deficit. Such investment should be financed through an equitable tax system founded on fairness, one that gives corporations incentives to pay living wages and benefits and where those who have reaped extraordinary benefits contribute proportionately to the good of all.***

Prioritizing Peacebuilding and Human Security: Over the last 10 years, we have seen some improvements in funding for the prevention of violent conflict, prevention of mass atrocities and genocide, and peacebuilding. Global threats to peace and human security need not instill a national inclination to make additional investments in new weapons systems, immigrant detention centers, and militarized border walls. Our safety and well-being depends on rethinking national security.

Robust U.S. investment in global poverty-reduction, disease prevention, disaster relief, refugee assistance and prevention of violent conflict are essential to U.S. and global human security. Compassionate assistance to our neighbors in need around the world represents the best in the American character and is an imperative of our religious faith. Now is the time to increase, not reduce, our nation’s commitment to international relief and development aid. ***We believe a Faithful Budget must, prioritize and increase investment in the areas of violent conflict***

prevention, peacebuilding, diplomacy, health, education, and community well-being that are essential to peace, basic human rights and security for all.

Meeting Immediate Need: As it always has been, the faith community itself continues to be committed to serving vulnerable populations at home and around the world. At the same time, we urge our nation to implement policies that will reduce poverty and hardship. As a united people committed to compassion and justice, we fulfill our calling when we invest in a social safety net that will support the vulnerable in times of hardship, such as economic downturns, unemployment, sickness, and old age. Even with a growing economy, many parts of the country are experiencing remarkably high unemployment and underemployment rates. Basic assistance programs and the elasticity of the mandatory safety net programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid, are incredibly effective measures that have prevented millions from falling into poverty. ***Congress has the moral and pragmatic responsibility, even as it pursues long-term deficit reduction, to adequately fund critical human needs, social service, and humanitarian and poverty-focused international assistance programs, all of which contribute to human security in its broadest sense.***

Accepting Intergenerational Responsibility: We must not leave our children a legacy of rising poverty, growing inequality, structural injustice, racism and a broken immigration system. Unreasonable caps and sequestration cuts threaten educational programs, adequate housing, health care, nutrition programs, environmental protection, job training, and other community services. Pressures to find offsets, increase military spending, and penalize people struggling at the margins of society further put these programs at risk as economic vulnerability continues to grow and more families find themselves one disaster away from poverty. Our nation's vital social safety net is essential for the general prosperity and common good. At a time when the richest Americans are becoming even wealthier, the middle class is growing more insecure and people struggling to overcome poverty are falling further behind. Vulnerable populations served by the social safety net should not bear the brunt of spending cuts. ***A Faithful Budget will seek to advance the common good of current and future generations by the wise, compassionate and just allocation of resources that create a more equitable society in the present and lay a foundation for a more just and sustainable future.***

Using the Gifts of Creation Sustainably and Responsibly: In the book of Genesis, God called creation "good." Because of Creation's intrinsic worth, the earth and its resources deserve our respect and our consideration. Global warming and other forms of environmental degradation have substantial, and potentially irreversible, short and long-term impacts, such as rising health care costs from air pollution and resulting respiratory problems; increased premature deaths due to the cumulative impacts of poor air quality; declining water quality in our communities; degradation of public lands; global climate change, which is already affecting some of the most vulnerable populations on earth; and loss of open space. ***A Faithful Budget must encompass a reverence for our created environment, making choices that protect air, water, and land—the entirety of creation—as gifts from God that must be available to and protected for this generation and those to come.***

Providing Access to Health Care for All: As providers of services and care, both physical and spiritual, our members, congregations, and institutions are well acquainted with the importance of providing access to health care for all people. All individuals, regardless of their age, income, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, geography, employment status, or health status, deserve equal access to quality, affordable, inclusive, equitable and accountable health care. Reducing health care options for some based on any of these factors is profoundly unjust. As we examine the interwoven web of access within the federal budget, there are areas of profound concern for the common good and practices of good stewardship. ***A Faithful Budget will protect the gains that have been made and ensure access to quality health care by investing in wellness and making needed improvements in the health care system in order to extend healthcare to all.***

Recognizing a Robust Role for Government: We are inspired by a common conviction that God has called on all of us—as individuals, as communities of faith, and as a society acting together through our government—to protect the vulnerable and promote the dignity of all people. For this reason the faith community has worked alongside the United States government for decades to protect those struggling to overcome poverty in the U.S. and abroad. People who need help paying rent or feeding their children come to us, frequently as a first and last resort, and we do all we can to provide the aid that compassionate love demands. And yet, faith communities and agencies cannot do it alone. ***We need the government’s continued partnership, especially to address poverty and institutionalized racism, while fostering policies that serve to prevent poverty, promote peacebuilding, support proper care for the earth, and build economic security and opportunity for all.***

Transforming Institutionalized Racism and Privilege: Many of the injustices in our society and expressed in our budget are in part driven by racism and privilege. We see this in our policies around immigration, criminal justice, environment, foreign conflict, health care, the economy, education, etc. ***We believe a faithful budget must fund programs that consciously support people of color, enable racial justice and reconciliation, as well as dismantle structures of privilege.***

D. The Call

As faith communities and Americans of conscience we stand with those whose need is great and we call on all of us to act together as the American people with mercy and justice, and to re-arrange our national priorities to focus on the common good.

Accordingly, this Faithful Budget boldly proclaims the aspirational goals toward which, we believe, our nation must strive. More pragmatically, we urge Congress and the President to show their intent to move toward these goals by enacting legislation for fiscal year 2018 that enhances the well-being of all Americans and to make a good faith increase in funding support for poor and vulnerable people as well as peacebuilding, both at home and abroad, and in exercising proper care and keeping of the earth.

Let us embrace a call to live together in community, not agreeing on everything, but sharing in the common purpose of bettering our nation, honoring the dignity of our brothers and sisters here in the U.S. and around the world, and sustainably caring for our environment. We call on Congress and the administration to craft a federal budget that protects the common good, values each individual and his or her livelihood, and helps lift the burden on the poor.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Baptists

American Baptist Home Mission Societies

American Friends Service Committee

American Jewish World Service

Bread for the World

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Refugee & Immigration Ministries

Christian Reformed Church in North America, Office of Social Justice

Church World Service

Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)

Ecumenical Poverty Initiative

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Faith in Public Life

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Interfaith Worker Justice

Islamic Relief U.S.A.

Islamic Society of North America

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Leadership Conference of Women Religious

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Churches

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Pax Christi USA

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of Public Witness

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Leadership Team

Union for Reform Judaism

The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

United Methodist Women, Washington Office of Public Policy

Unitarian Universalist Association