



Voice of the Poor

Legislative Information Sheet

Protect the Most Vulnerable in the Federal Budget

August, 2012

Our Vincentian Tradition

As Vincentians visit those families in need, we see first hand that these families cannot make ends meet. Unemployment is high, local services are being cut, and our resources are stretched further than they have been for quite some time.

Low and non-income people are finding it difficult to provide the basics required for survival (i.e., food, clothing, shelter, utilities, child care, transportation and health care). We hear, and see, the cries of the poor in person. We witness families whose cupboards are bare, parents who have no money for medicine for sick children, a mother's plea in desperation because she cannot afford shoes for her children

Blessed Frederic Ozanam left a legacy and a responsibility for Vincentians to continue the call for charity built on justice. Amin A. De Terrazi, past international president of the Society, said that Frederic Ozanam was key among Catholics of the 19th century to "first come up with the idea of the *salaire nature!* (forerunner of the basic minimum wage)," to demand action by the state to assist workers who become unemployed or can no longer work because of illness or disability, and to ask that retirement be guaranteed to workers. "His call to the voters of the Department of the Rhone on 15 April 1848 echoed these audacious and generous ideas of which a good number found their way into Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, in 1891."

As in Blessed Frederic Ozanam's time, the experience of members today who visit those in need and provide emergency assistance to families, as well as statistical facts regarding what is required for a family to have a decent living, need to be verbalized to those with the power to enact change. As Vincentians we must find opportunities to tell the story of the poor, to speak knowledgeably of their plight, and band together with one voice speaking for what is fair, decent and just.

(from the SVdP *Position Statement on Fair Wages, Sept. 2005*)

United States Catholic Conference of Bishops Position

The federal budget is a moral document reflecting the priorities and values of the nation, and these priorities have consequences on people's lives. In the face of historic deficits, the nation faces unavoidable choices about how to balance needs and resources and allocate burdens and sacrifices.

“As you consider budget proposals that address how to allocate burdens and sacrifices and balance resources and needs, we reiterate the following moral criteria to guide these decisions:

1. Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity.
2. A central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects “the least of these” (Matthew 25). The needs of those who are hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty should come first.
3. Government and other institutions have a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.”

In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, Scripture gives us the story of the Last Judgment (Mt: 25) and instructs us to put the needs of poor and vulnerable people first.

THE CIRCLE OF PROTECTION

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul and USCCB are founding members of the “Circle of Protection,” which brings together a diverse group of national Christian leaders to defend the lives and dignity of poor and vulnerable people in the budget debate. The Circle offers the following principles to guide Congress and the Administration as they work to craft the FY 2013 federal budget:

1. The nation needs to substantially reduce future deficits, but not at the expense of hungry and poor people.
2. Funding focused on reducing poverty should not be cut. It should be made as effective as possible, but not cut.
3. We urge our leaders to protect and improve poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance to promote a better, safer world.
4. National leaders must review and consider tax revenues, military spending, and entitlements in the search for ways to share sacrifice and cut deficits.
5. A fundamental task is to create jobs and spur economic growth. Decent jobs at decent wages are the best path out of poverty, and restoring growth is a powerful way to reduce deficits.
6. The budget debate has a central moral dimension. Christians are asking how we protect “the least of these.” “What would Jesus cut?” “How do we share sacrifice?”
7. As believers, we turn to God with prayer and fasting, to ask for guidance as our nation makes decisions about our priorities as a people.
8. God continues to shower our nation and the world with blessings. As Christians, we are rooted in the love of God in Jesus Christ. Our task is to share these blessings with love and justice and with a special priority for those who are poor.

Catholic teaching asserts that a fundamental moral measure of our nation’s budget and economic policies is whether they enhance or undermine the lives and dignity of those most in need. Sadly, political pressure frequently leaves poor children and families missing in the national debate and without a place at the table. Our nation needs a genuinely bi-partisan commitment to focus on the common good of all and on the special needs of poor and vulnerable people struggling to live in dignity.

“Politics is more than a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life: its origin and its goal are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics. The State must inevitably face the question of how justice can be achieved here and now. *(Pope Benedict XVI, in Deus Caritas Est (God is*

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Urge your Senators and Representative:

1. To support a **Farm Bill** that “provides help for poor and hungry people both at home and abroad, offers targeted support for those who grow our food, promotes stewardship of the land and helps rural communities prosper.” (*Letter to House Agriculture Committee*

on the Farm Bill, Bishop Stephen Blaire, Bishop Richard Pates, Dr. Carolyn Woo, Mr. James Ennis, July 10, 2012)

2. Retain the **Earned Income Tax Credit and the refundable Child Tax Credit**. “Low-income tax credits are pro-work, pro-family, and some of the most effective antipoverty programs in our nation. Every year, the **Earned Income Tax Credit and the refundable Child Tax Credit** lift millions of American families out of poverty and help them live in dignity and with greater economic security. These investments should be supported and protected, not undermined or forgotten.” (*Letter to Senate on Tax Credits for Low-Income Working Families Bishop Stephen E. Blaire, July 25, 2012*)
3. Maintain the **Social Services Block Grant**. “This is an important source of funding for programs throughout the country that serve vulnerable members of our communities-- the homeless, the elderly, people with disabilities, children living in poverty, and abuse victims. We should prioritize programs that serve “the least of these,” not eliminate them.” (*Letter to House on Budget Reconciliation Cuts to Poverty Programs Bishop Stephen E. Blaire, May 8, 2012*)

Urge your Senators and Representative to put the needs of poor and people vulnerable first as they consider the FY 2013 budget. Decisions should be made that not only reflect a commitment to national and long term fiscal security but demonstrate justice, compassion and fairness.

"We believe that a fundamental moral measure of our nation's budget policy is whether it enhances or undermines the lives and dignity of the most vulnerable members of our society. The needs of poor children and families of modest means are often overlooked. They deserve special priority as you allocate economic resources and burdens. The choices you make determine how future generations will be burdened and blessed."

-- Most Reverend Wilton D. Gregory