



JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
BUILDING A PEACE WITH JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Another World Is Possible

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Faith Reflections on the President's Proposed Federal Budget 2007

INTRODUCTION

REV. WALLACE RYAN KUROIWA, MINISTER AND TEAM LEADER, CLEVELAND-BASED TEAM

WHEN WE IN JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES began this annual resource in 2002, we declared our conviction that a budget is a moral document. It reflects our values. It says who we are as a people, just as our church or personal budget does. Since then, others have picked up that theme, and we are glad for that. It is as critical today as ever. While others might lift up human sexuality and abortion as the thermometer for the moral state of our nation, we continue to claim that Jesus placed more emphasis on what we do with our money than what we do with our bodies. Scan the gospels and you will see many more references to money and attachment to material things than almost any other moral quandary.

What does the 2007 federal budget proposal from our president say about our nation and its priorities? This year's edition of *Winners & Losers* will look at important portions of the budget through the lens of the common good. In 2005 the General Synod of the United Church of Christ unanimously passed a resolution affirming the need to consider policy through that lens, <http://www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions/gsrev25-5.pdf>.

Rather than considering what the budget will do for me, the notion of the common good urges us to ask what are the implications of budgetary proposals for us as a nation, us as a global village.

From the time of the founding of our nation and certainly through most of the twentieth century it has been assumed that the role of government is to protect the needs of the public. Now as such assumptions are being actively questioned by proponents of radical individualism, we defend the public space itself and reaffirm the importance of institutions designed to serve the common good.

—General Synod 25, 2005, *Resolution for the Common Good*

Further, we want to add another improvement to this resource. We know that the proposal sent from the president to Congress is only the beginning of a long and arduous process. There are two other critical junctures in the finalizing of the budget. The first is the budget resolution phase, when the total budget amount will be approved, and the second is the appropriations phase, when individual line items will be funded. We will provide updates when

Congress reaches these phases to encourage everyone to lobby their Congressional representatives about these important moral decisions. These updates will be offered via e-mail if you sign up at <http://www.ucctakeaction.org>. We will also post updates on the United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries web page at <http://www.ucc.org/justice/index.html>. Just click on the yellow "issues index" menu and scroll down to "Federal Budget."

These are difficult days especially for the most vulnerable among us, and increasingly for all working families. As programs are cut that affect the poor and as our economy struggles, the safety net that has long protected economically marginalized persons is slowly being shredded. We know that as a nation we can do better.

In this volume we begin with a review of the hard work of people of faith during last year's budget debate, followed by a reflection on becoming a *Matthew 25* Christian. Then

this resource explores the moral implications of the Fiscal Year 2007 proposed federal budget, in an overview and in a range of specific areas. The volume concludes with a reflection on the Reign of God, for after all, another world is possible!

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Last Year's Federal Budget and Advocacy by People of Faith

Jan Resseger, Minister for Public Education and Witness

JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

AS WE PUBLISH A BRIEFING FOR United Church of Christ advocates on the subject of the 2007 federal budget, it is important to remember the accomplishments of faith community advocates who worked during all of last year for a "common good" budget in 2006.

In the theological reflection that introduced last year's *Winners & Losers*, Rev. Mari Castellanos wrote, "When God's people act as if God were in charge. . . it . . . frequently places the church at odds with the rulers of this world." Advocates from communities of faith spent the entire year at odds with supporters of federal budget priorities. They mounted an effective, disciplined, year-long campaign for justice in the budget, and with their allies almost succeeded in defeating it.

Although the 2006 federal fiscal year began on October 1, 2005, Congress could not agree on a budget reconciliation until February 1, 2006. On December 14, 2005, speaking at a prayer vigil on the steps of the Cannon House Office Building, UCC General Minister and President, Rev. John Thomas decried a federal budget packed with tax cuts for the wealthy and reductions in services for the vulnerable: "Now is the time to bear witness in concrete actions to the song of Mary, the mother of Jesus, a song in which God promises to lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things." The Senate Budget passed at midnight on December 21, by only the tie-breaking vote of Vice President Cheney, and when the House approved the budget conference bill on February 1, 2006, it was by only two votes, 216-214.

Despite all this effort the 2006 budget as passed does not reflect our values. Here are examples of some of the

troubling realities in the budget as passed:

- Overall, while Congress calls the 2006 budget a "deficit-reduction bill," there will be no deficit reduction. Congress reduced spending for domestic programs by \$40 billion over five years, but, although the final conference committee tax package has not passed at the time of this printing, it is predicted that Congress will agree on \$70 billion in tax cuts for wealthy Americans. This will increase the federal deficit for FY 2006.¹
- At the end of the 2006 appropriations process for domestic programs, Congress passed a 1 percent across-the-board reduction in spending for all domestic, non-entitlement programs except homeland security and veterans programs.² This 1 percent across-the-board cut reduced spending for domestic discretionary programs below 2005 levels.³ Senator Dick Durbin, (D-IL) criticized across-the-board program cutting in a late night speech just before the Senate budget passed: "A calculator can cut everything by 1 percent, but not every line item in the budget is of equal importance . . . Cutting every program is an abdication of responsibility and no way to manage a budget."
- *Poverty* . . . Under the 2006 budget, women receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families will have to work longer hours with reduced subsidies for child care.⁴ Community Development Block Grants were reduced by \$777 million.⁵ Head Start was cut by 2.8

percent to eliminate places for 25,000 poor children. Section 8 Housing Vouchers were reduced by \$383 million, eliminating 65,000 families from this program.⁶ Even the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant was cut by \$47 million.⁷

- *Health Care* . . . A cut of \$4.8 billion⁸ will require that 13 million Medicaid patients pay higher co-pays and deductibles.⁹ Cuts of \$64 billion¹⁰ will eliminate coverage for 65,000 Medicaid enrollees. The president scaled back a health tax credit proposal to benefit lower-income households by two-thirds, from \$77 billion to \$24 billion.¹¹ Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) called 2006 cuts to health and education “scandalous.”¹²
- *Public Education* . . . Despite increased demands made by the *No Child Left Behind Act*, Congress cut federal education funding for 2006 by \$624 million below 2005 spending. Even Title 1 funding was cut by \$28 million below the 2005 level. Federal funding for federally mandated special education programs is reduced in 2006 for the first time in ten years.¹³ The 2006 budget will result in higher interest rates for college loans.¹⁴

In July, 2005, the 25th General Synod passed a resolution “For the Common Good” calling the United Church of Christ in all its settings, “to affirm the role of public institutions paid for by taxes for ensuring essential services and protecting the good of the wider community.” During the 2007 budget debate, it will be important again to mount a disciplined campaign for a “common good” budget. Advocates should note that cuts imposed in the 2006 budget will continue in upcoming years; all cuts now being proposed for 2007 will accrue on top of those already enacted last year.

PRAYER

God, as we consider our needs, help us remember others and society as a whole. Inspire us to be courageous in speaking for civic responsibility and public services that benefit all of us, but especially those who are vulnerable. Amen.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Do you agree that the federal budget is a moral document?

2. What are passages in the gospels in which Jesus speaks about attachment to money and material things?
3. What are the ways in which members of your congregation can witness for justice in the federal budget debate?

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NOTES

1. Jonathan Weisman, “Senate Passes \$70 Billion in Tax Cuts over 5 Years,” [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), February 3, 2006. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/02/AR20060202960_pf.html, p. 1.

2. Arloc Sherman and Richard Kogan, “What Do the Across-the-Board Cuts Mean for Domestic Appropriations?” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, January 6, 2006, p. 1.

3. Richard Kogan, “Budget Cuts Mark Appropriations for 2006: Domestic Funding is Below 2005 Levels and Constitutes a Smaller Share of the Economy than in 2001,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, January 24, 2006, p. 2.

4. Johathan Weisman, “Budget Cuts Pass by Slim Margin: Poor, Elderly and Students to Feel Pinch,” [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), Thursday, February 2, 2006. Posted at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/01/Arw006020100329_pf.html.

5. Arloc Sherman and Richard Kogan, p. 2.

6. Arloc Sherman and Richard Kogan, p. 7.

7. Arloc Sherman and Richard Kogan, p. 8.

8. Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “House Approves Budget Cutbacks of \$39.5 Billion,” *New York Times*, February 2, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/02/politics/02spend.html>.

9. Johathan Weisman, “Budget Cuts Pass by Slim Margin: Poor, Elderly and Students to Feel Pinch,” [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), Thursday, February 2, 2006. Posted at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/02/01/Arw006020100329_pf.html.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Jason Furman, *The President Greatly Reduced His Health Proposals for Lower-Income Families While Expanding Health Benefits for the More Affluent* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, February 8, 2006).

12. Coalition on Human Needs, “The President’s Scandalous Budget,” February 8, 2006, <http://www.chn.org>.

13. National Education Association, “First Session of 109th Congress Wraps Up and Slams Public Education.” Posted at <http://www.nea.org/lac/funding/index.html?mode=print>. Accessed February 9, 2006.

14. Johathan Weisman, “Budget Cuts Pass by Slim Margin: Poor, Elderly and Students to Feel Pinch,” [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), Thursday, February 2, 2006. Posted at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/02/01/Arw006020100329_pf.html.

A just and good society balances individualism with the needs of the community. In the past quarter century our society has lost this ethical balance. Our nation has moved too far in the direction of promoting individual self interest at the expense of community responsibility. The result has been an abandonment of the common good.—General Synod 25, 2005, *Resolution for the Common Good*

On Becoming a Matthew 25 Christian: A Reflection

Rev. Ron Stief, Team Leader, Public Life and Social Policy Team

JIM WALLIS, EDITOR OF *Sojourners Magazine*, and I got arrested with 115 other religious leaders on December 14 in our nation's capital, protesting a vote the House of Representatives was about to take to authorize one of the most punitive and anti-poor federal budgets in recent memory. The Fiscal Year 2006 budget was full of over \$35 billion in cuts for low-income programs, and prompted this group of Pentecostal preachers, heads of social service programs, Catholics, Baptists, UCC members, and many others to stand up for justice.

As we were hauled off on that cold December day, charged with blocking the entrance to the Cannon House Office Building, I reflected on something I had read in Jim's national best-selling book, *God's Politics*: "Prophecy is not future telling, but articulating moral truth."¹ And it came to me that what we really need to be right now are *Matthew 25* Christians.

A national poll, commissioned in 2004 on election issues by the Alliance to End Hunger and Call to Renewal, sampled likely voters with a simple question: What is more important to you: hearing a candidate's

position on gay marriage or hearing a candidate's plan for fighting poverty? 78 percent said they would rather hear a candidate's plan for fighting poverty while only 15 percent would rather hear a candidate's position on gay marriage. This suggests that a *Matthew 25* Christian will have a plan for using the federal budget to fight poverty, and will not be distracted by, well, distractions in the political arena.

Interestingly, in mid-December, a debate on *Matthew 25* broke out on the floor of the House of Representatives at the same time people of faith were lobbying to stop the federal budget cuts and restore a sense of morality and dignity to our U.S. Congress. Rep. Charles Rangel, NY, member of the Congressional Black Caucus, began to list the call of *Matthew 25:35–40* to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Rep. Jim Nussle, IA, chair of the House Budget Committee, returned to the podium to claim that nowhere in *Matthew 25* does it say that the government should help those in need, but rather that individuals alone should take responsibility for helping "the least of these."

In fact, Jesus is very clear about our corporate responsibility to the poor and the oppressed. Jesus pref-

In the story of the last judgment, Jesus tells us that nations will be judged by how they care for their most vulnerable citizens . . . In the story . . . Jesus describes basic human needs in the agrarian biblical society: food, water, clothing, healing, compassion, and hospitality. A contemporary list of basic human needs would also include a decent job, sufficient income, health insurance, affordable housing, quality public education, affordable child care, and a healthy environment.—General Synod 25, 2005, *Resolution for the Common Good*

aces his oft-quoted discourse on feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and visiting the prisoners (Matt.25:35–46) with a context that helps define who is responsible. This teaching on handling social problems is prefaced in *Matthew 25:31* as a discourse on what will be said “when all the nations are gathered before him.” So yes, individuals must act. But also yes, governments must act.

Does God not command, in the Old Testament, a set of specific guidelines—laws, not individual charity—for Israel to follow in taking care of the those who do not have enough? The law (*Leviticus: 19:9–10*) is so specific that it instructs farmers that the corners of fields are not to be reaped, to leave something for the needy and the landless to eat.

What is striking in *Matthew 25* is when Jesus says (Matt. 25: 4) that the king of heaven will say to those at his left hand, “You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire.” Best not to be on the left hand side when your treatment of the poor comes to the attention of God.

Who in our society is in this left hand position? Senator Barak Obama, one of my favorite candidates for being a *Matthew 25* Christian, and a UCC member from Illinois, reflected on racism and the slow federal response to Hurricane Katrina.² Commenting on the decades of conditioning that have gone into the racial attitudes of many leaders, Obama said: “I see no evidence of active malice, but I see a continuation of passive indifference on the part of our government toward the least of these.”

Matthew 25 Christians should be disturbed by the unbroken and patterned indifference to the poor in

several recent budgets, including the FY2007 federal budget. It contains the same conditioned response to the poor as the FY 2006 budget. Whether the indifference is active or passive, intentional or not, the result is still the same. The racial consequences are still the same. The children in poverty still go to bed hungry night after night.

In the core passages of *Matthew 25* that point to the divine sorting process that happens at the throne in the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 25:31–34), whether one sits at the right hand or the left will depend on who had eyes to see what was happening to the poor in the nation and who did not.

Congressional representatives and voters who continue to ask the naïve question, “Lord, when did we see you hungry,” and who are unable to see the eyes of God in the eyes of a person naked, hungry or in prison, sit in the unenviable left-hand ejector seat. This year, it is time for *Matthew 25* Christians to stand up to their members of Congress and make it politically and theologically impossible for them to vote for the immoral and irresponsible 2007 federal budget.

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NOTES

1. Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), p. 72.

2. Eric Michael Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Perseus Books, 2006), p. 20.

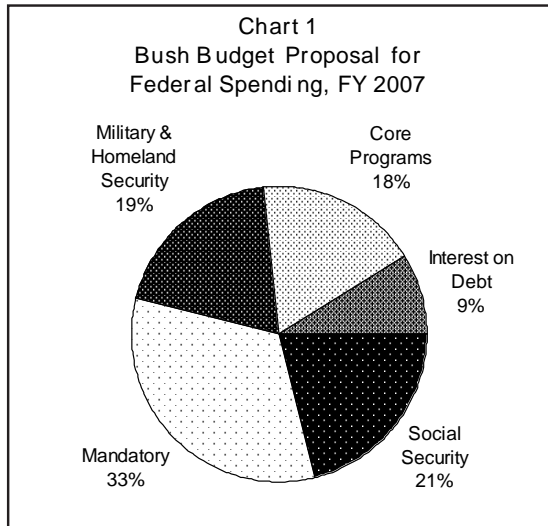
The Proposed Fiscal Year 2007 Budget: An Overview

Edith Rasell, Minister for Labor Relations and
Community Economic Development

FOR THE 2007 FISCAL YEAR, which runs from October 2006 to September 2007, President Bush proposes that the federal government spend \$2.77 trillion, about one-fifth (20 percent) of our total national output—gross domestic output (GDP). Proposed revenues would total \$2.416 trillion, leaving a deficit of \$354 billion.

FIVE CATEGORIES OF FEDERAL SPENDING

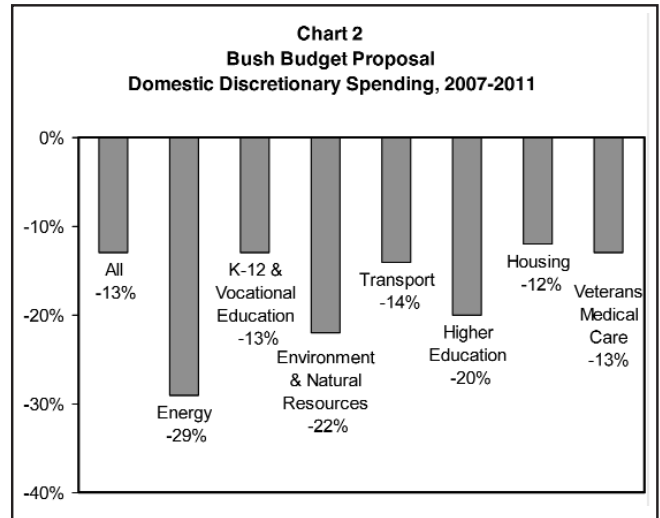
To understand the budget, it is first necessary to understand the five categories of spending (also illustrated in Chart 1).



- **Social Security**—21 percent of all spending in 2007. Social Security has its own source of funding, the FICA tax. Currently these taxes bring in \$174 billion more than the program is spending. The surplus is loaned to the U.S. Treasury to cover the funding shortfall in the rest of the federal budget. This surplus is invested in Treasury bills until it is needed.
- **Mandatory Spending other than Social Security**—33 percent of the total in 2007. Mandatory spending pays for on-going programs that are mandated by law. These include Medicare (health insurance for the elderly and disabled), Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program for the poor, the federal employees’ retirement program, veterans’ programs, unemployment compensation, and other income security programs. These funding obligations are somewhat fixed from year to year.
- Spending for the **military and homeland security**—19 percent of expenditures in 2007.
- Other core government functions called “**non-military discretionary spending**”—18 percent of spending in 2007. This category includes most of the things we consider to be the primary work of government: roads, bridges, and airports; environmental protections; education; diplomacy and the work of the state department; the federal courts; agriculture programs; energy programs; public health and safety; poverty reduction; and many others.
- **Interest on the debt**—9 percent of all projected spending in 2007.

THE 2007 BUDGET PROPOSAL

Spending cuts: Over the next five years, the administration proposes cutting non-military discretionary programs (core government functions) by \$183 billion.¹ By 2011, the last year of the budget projections, reductions will average 13 percent. The impact of the proposed cuts in a variety of areas is shown in chart 2.



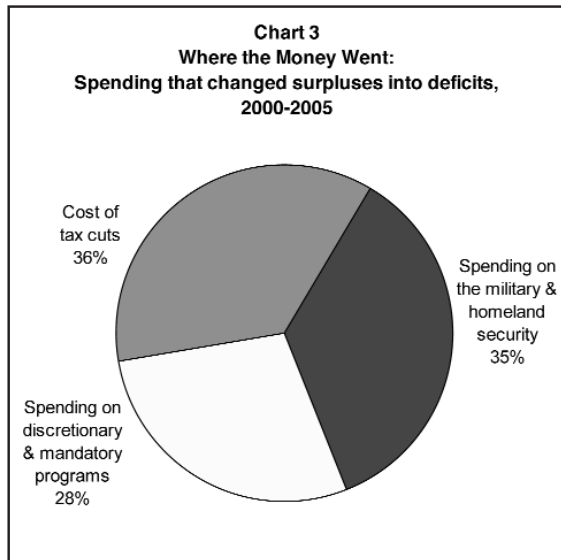
More money for the military: At the same time, spending for the military and homeland security will rise by \$79 billion over the next five years.² Since funding for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is not included in this budget, the actual increases will be even larger. The president plans to seek “supplemental” funds projected to total at least \$50 billion in 2007 for these wars.

Tax cuts: The President also proposes tax cuts costing \$285 billion over the next five years and \$1.7 trillion over 10 years.³ These cuts will be the result of making permanent many of the temporary cuts enacted in 2001 and 2003. As is well known, these tax cuts primarily benefit the wealthy. If the 2007 budget proposal is passed by Congress, the top 1 percent of households will pay \$900 billion less in taxes over 10 years; the top two-tenths of 1 percent of households, those with incomes of more than \$1 million a year, will receive over \$600 billion of that total.⁴ These very high income households will receive tax cuts of about \$136,000 per year while middle-income households will receive only about \$650 per year.

Deficit Increases: The increased spending on the military and the cost of the tax cuts more than offset the reductions in spending on domestic programs. Consequently, over the next five years, deficits will be \$192 billion higher than they otherwise would have been: \$952 billion instead of \$760 billion.⁵ In just one year, 2011, the deficit will be increased by \$116 billion.

WHERE DID THE MONEY GO?

From 1998 to 2001, the government ran a surplus; that is, revenues exceeded expenditures. But a surplus of \$236 billion in 2000 became a deficit of \$318 billion in the 2005 fiscal year that ended last September. While projections in the late 1990s showed annual surpluses extending many years into the future, today deficits are projected. This swing from surplus to deficit could be the result of either huge increases in spending, huge reductions in revenue, or some of both. Analysts have identified the following reasons for this reversal (see Chart 3)⁶



- 36 percent is due to tax cuts that reduced revenues.
- 35 percent is the result of increased spending for the military and homeland security.
- 28 percent is due to increased spending for discretionary and mandatory programs including the Medicare drug benefit.

The tax cuts have severely shrunk federal government revenue which, in 2005, was lower than the average for

the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s.⁷ With revenue this low, only massive spending cuts could balance the budget. For example, to eliminate the deficit in 2007, it would be necessary to cut core government functions (“non-military discretionary spending”) by nearly three-quarters (72 percent) or Medicare by over 90 percent.

Be it further resolved that the United Church of Christ in all its settings will work to make our culture reflect the following values: that paying taxes for government services is a civic responsibility of individuals and businesses; that the tax code should be progressive, with the heaviest burden on those with the greatest financial means . . .—General Synod 25, 2005, *Resolution for the Common Good*

SOCIAL SECURITY

Throughout his presidency, Bush has promoted the use of private accounts within the Social Security program. However, he has never included the costs of these accounts in his budget proposals. With public support for private accounts at a record low level, in the January 2006 State of the Union Address, Bush stated his intention to appoint a bi-partisan commission to examine options for Social Security. He appeared to abandon, for the time being, the drive for privatization.

However, a close reading of the Bush 2007 budget proposal shows that, for the first time, it contains money for private accounts: some \$700 billion. Starting in 2010, people would be allowed to divert some of their Social Security (FICA) taxes into these accounts in a plan that would cost the federal government \$712 billion over the first seven years (2010-2016).⁸

The risks and disadvantages of Social Security privatization are well recognized. For more information, see <http://www.ucc.org/justice/ss/>.

PRAYER

Loving God, you have blessed us with a democratic form of government. We ask that you also bless us with wisdom as we fulfill our responsibility to participate in its decision-making processes. Guide our thinking, strengthen our voices, and give us courage to work for a

society that is pleasing to you—one where all people and your entire creation enjoy the fullness of life that you intend for your world. Amen.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Over the next five years, many domestic programs will face spending cuts while funding for the military will grow. What is the proper balance between these two functions of government? Is the current balance the correct one?
2. Federal revenues are at record lows, so the federal government runs a deficit and cuts programs. This is intentional; the current administration believes that government should be very small, leaving most things to be done by either corporations or non-profit organizations including churches. What is the proper role of government? What does government need to do? Are there things that society needs that are not or cannot be provided by corporations or non-profits?
3. If government needs to take a larger role, for example, in providing health insurance to those without it, ensuring the availability of affordable housing, and repairing bridges and improving schools, then where is the money to come from? How should the tax bur-

den be shared among people of different income levels?

4. Is government inherently less efficient and more corrupt than private business? What evidence can you present to support your point of view?
5. Is the federal budget a moral document? What should be the role of the church in political debates about the federal budget?

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NOTES

1. Relative to 2006 funding levels, adjusted for inflation. This figure omits spending on international affairs. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, "The Hidden Cuts in Domestic Appropriations," Washington, DC, February 9, 2005, p. 1.

2. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, "The President's Budget: A Preliminary Analysis," Washington, DC, February 10, 2005, p. 1.

3. *Ibid.*, page 1.

4. *Ibid.*, page 5.

5. *Ibid.*, page 2.

6. *Ibid.*, page 8.

7. Measured as a share of GDP. *Ibid.*, page 8.

8. *Ibid.*, page 6.

The Military Budget and the Iraq War

Edith Rasell, Minister for Labor Relations and Community Economic Development

Another World Is Possible
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

IN THE 2007 budget, President Bush proposes to spend \$439.3 billion for the Department of Defense and \$33.1 billion for Homeland Security. Combined, this accounts for 19% of the entire federal budget. Actually, military spending is significantly higher than this. It is scattered throughout the budget, not just in the Department of Defense. Nuclear weapons are funded through the Department of Energy, for example. Veterans' Affairs are not in the Department of Defense. In addition, the proposed budget omits the costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which will be funded through special supplemental requests expected to total at least \$50 billion.

Since the first Bush Administration budget in 2001, spending on the Department of Defense has risen from \$306 billion to \$503 billion, an increase of 64 percent.¹ At the same time, total federal spending has risen 49 percent, which means the Department of Defense has received more than its proportionate share of the growth in spending. Much of the increase in total federal spending over this period has been paid for with borrowed money. The increased spending on the military and homeland defense accounts for 35 percent of the borrowing.²

Critics charge that while the mission of the military has changed radically in the past few years because of the

need to fight irregular forces like decentralized terrorist organizations, the majority of expenditures continue to pay for expensive weapons systems more useful for traditional warfare.³ Shipbuilding, including a new-generation destroyer and nuclear submarines, will get \$11.2 billion. This year funding for the error-plagued missile defense program is being increased by \$1.7 billion to a total of \$10.4 billion. The Air Force's Joint Strike Fighter will receive a 23 percent increase in funding to \$3.1 billion. There will also be \$2.9 billion for the F/A-22 Raptor fighter jet, a \$1.4 billion decrease from last year, but the total number of planes to be built has increased and will be extended over a larger number of years.

The defense budget also includes additional money for special operations forces, the troops especially suited for fighting insurgencies. Some \$5.1 billion, up by \$1 billion since last year, will fund the beginning of an expansion that in five years will add 14,000 additional special forces. The budget also provides \$1.7 billion (the first allotment of what will be a \$11.6 billion expenditure) for unmanned aerial vehicles for surveillance. These are currently in use in many places including the Mexico-U.S. border.

THE COST OF THE IRAQ WAR⁴

Currently, the Iraq war is costing approximately \$6 billion per month, and we are paying about \$1 billion each month for the war in Afghanistan. Between March, 2003, when war began, and December, 2005, Congress appropriated \$357 billion to fund operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. This includes the cost of military operations, reconstruction, embassy costs, enhanced security at U.S. bases, and foreign aid in these countries. Some \$251 billion of this total is solely for military operations in Iraq. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that the Iraq war will cost an additional \$266 billion over the next decade, for a total of over \$500 billion in direct costs.

But these are not the full costs. Over 16,000 troops have been wounded in Iraq and, of these, 20 percent suffered major head or spinal injuries. An additional 6 percent have had limbs amputated. Another 21 percent have other serious wounds that prevent them from returning to military duty. The Army reports that 30 percent of U.S. troops develop mental health problems within three to four months of returning from Iraq. All these needs represent enormous costs for the Veterans

Health Administration. Treatment of the head injuries alone is projected to cost \$14 billion over the next 20 years.⁵ There are also added costs for the thousands of additional recruiters who have been hired to help the military meet its recruiting goals. Higher re-enlistment bonuses have been put in place. And since no taxes have been raised to pay for any of this, the money for the war has all been borrowed. Increased borrowing will likewise increase interest payments on the federal debt. If we look farther, the war has contributed to the higher price of oil, costing households and businesses billions of dollars. A more comprehensive examination of all the factors would project the full cost of the Iraq War to be \$1 trillion to \$2 trillion.⁶

Early in the course of the war, a government official estimated its total cost might rise to \$200 billion. While at the time the administration labeled this a gross over-estimation, now we see that this estimate was widely off the mark—too low, not too high. These numbers do not measure the impact of the war on Iraq itself, neither the casualties nor the destruction of property and infrastructure.

PRAYER

Great and generous God, your son Jesus told us to love our enemies. But soldiers are shooting and bombs are exploding half-a-world away. People are dying, and American and Iraqi lives are being torn apart. Have mercy on us. Help us to know what to do. Amen.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. How much spending on the military and homeland security is enough? Would the U.S. be safer if we spent even more? Does a high level of military spending serve to weaken the U.S. in any way?
2. Some experts argue that there will be no military solution to the “war on terror.” Instead, they suggest we need to make greater use of diplomacy to address contentious issues like the Israeli occupation of Palestine, to encourage repressive governments in countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia to honor human rights and democratic processes, and to spend money to foster economic development in poor Middle Eastern countries. What do you think? What is the right mix of military spending, development aid, and diplomatic initiatives?

3. What is the role of oil in U.S. policy in the Middle East? Given that our lifestyles and the economy are very dependent on oil, should the U.S. be concerned with oil security? How might this be achieved?

For more information, contact: Edie Rasell, raselle@ucc.org.

NOTES

1. See historical budget documents from the Congressional Budget Office, <http://www.cbo.gov/budget/historical.pdf>.

2. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, "The President's Budget: A Preliminary Analysis," Washington, DC, February 10, 2005, p. 8.

3. Scully, Megan, *National Journal's CongressDailyAM*, February 7, 2006.

4. The following is taken from a paper co-authored by Joseph Stiglitz, former chief economist and senior vice president of the World Bank: Linda Bilmes and Joseph Stiglitz, "The Economic Costs of the Iraq War," 2006. http://www2.gsb.columbia.edu/faculty/jstiglitz/Cost_of_War_in_Iraq.pdf.

5. Eric Eckholm, "Struggling Back," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, February 7, 2006.

6. Bilmes and Stiglitz, Figure 6, page 30.

Surveillance

Rev. Sala W.J. Nolan-Gonzales, Minister for Criminal Justice and Human Rights

JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

OUR COUNTRY IS GOVERNED BY systems carefully delineated for checks and balances. No one order dominates, and discourse is necessary for government to function. As citizens, we depend on the executive, legislative and judicial branches to maintain a precious equilibrium to make, implement, and interpret laws. Within that system is a carefully constructed mechanism to address spying, in which the executive branch must first explain itself to the judiciary, and at points inform Congress.

Today, the delicate balance of the system is challenged profoundly. More than ever in our history, all branches of government are dominated by one view of the world. This view is reflected in all aspects of program implementation, particularly in the annual budget proposed by the administration and approved by Congress.

Since 2001, the administration has more than tripled spending for non-defense homeland security, which is proposed at \$33 billion in 2007,¹ although some additional funds for homeland security will also be drawn from other parts of the budget.² It has merged 22 agencies and programs under a single department, and restructured immigration and border security, customs, detention, and citizenship services to immigrants.³

The United States is a nation whose founding documents proclaim the ideals of liberty and justice for all... Realizing our nation's founding ideals will require ongoing attention to maintaining public institutions designed to ensure that all persons can thrive.—General Synod 25, 2005, Resolution for the Common Good

The current spending plan reallocates resources from human services into defense and homeland security.⁴ Although it will cut non-defense programs in the coming

year, cuts will deepen substantially in the years to come. The president's budget caps non-defense spending through 2011 to the extent that from 2006–2011 it is reduced by 16.4 percent, while defense increases 10.8 percent and homeland security increases 4.6 percent.⁵

These cuts will devastate social programs.⁶ Medicare will be reduced by \$35.9 billion over the five year period.⁷

The administration has been granted incredible resources for defense, for military action, for spying, and for detaining people suspected of terrorism. Yet even with such control, the current administration has chosen to conduct surveillance without benefit of judicial review.

This unwarranted surveillance violates the law, and it violates the trust of the people.

The budget is driven by an ideology that assumes military might is the key to global stability, safety, and peace. It draws money away from social programs for health, education, environmental protection, science, and economic support, and funnels resources to the wealthy and

to the corporate world that makes weapons, surveils our people, and houses those suspected of terrorism in prisons without due process.

We have been told that only terrorists are being wiretapped. Who has determined their status? How are we to know who and what they are, or why they are scrutinized?

Four presidents have just honored the passing of Coretta Scott King, First Lady of a worldwide movement for human justice, by speaking at her funeral service. President Carter noted the years Mrs. King suffered unjust surveillance, the utter invasion of her privacy. With her husband, she dissented. Her husband was murdered. Whose terrorist was she?

Discernment is shared wisdom. What bodies discern these things? Here in our carefully constructed government, the scales swing wildly, with no review, no checks, no balance.

The justification for unwarranted wiretapping is that it is being done to protect the American people from attacks by terrorists. But consider the violence such surveillance is designed to protect us from. What are the seeds from which it grows? Only poverty and injustice, and a sense that one's most sacred places have been violated.

A budget comes from the people, who must consent to being governed. This is the work of our hands and the fruit of our labor. It is our time, our thought, our heritage. It is a precious resource, and with it we are purchasing guns and precious little butter.

Imagine what could happen if we spent our resources instead on the causes of rage. We could channel our gifts to restoring health care, providing decent education for all our children, and developing clean, renewable and affordable energy.

What do we nourish? Will it be the seeds of violence, or the seeds of justice? As a country, we will be known by our fruit.

PRAYER

God, we seek to be respectful in your sight. We seek to treat all of your Creation, each individual, with respect and dignity. May the Holy Spirit guide us in discernment. May we have courage to bear witness to your love, and do what you would have us do. Amen.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. What are the sources of terrorism?
2. How can we best address those sources?

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Poverty

Rev. Marvin Silver, Policy Advocate

Another World Is Possible

ON MARCH 8, 2005 the United Church of Christ's General Minister and President, Rev. John H. Thomas signed a joint statement with other ecumenical leaders denouncing the proposed 2006 federal budget that President Bush had sent to Congress. The letter told the Gospel story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19–31) and went on to criticize the Fiscal Year 2006 budget, which had much for the rich man but very little for Lazarus. The same is true for President Bush's Fiscal Year 2007 federal budget proposal to Congress.

Our federal budget should reflect our nation's historic commitment for those in our country and world who are left behind in ways that deny their human dignity when they are robbed of the opportunity to live out their gifts. As we look at the FY07 federal budget through the lens of faith, we can see that on balance it asks our nation's working poor families, our children, and the elderly to pay the cost of a prosperity in which they may never share. This budget proposal is unjust and immoral. Rather than providing economic security for our nation's poor, the FY07 budget proposal will increase poverty by:

- Eliminating approximately 300,000 people in poor working families from Food Stamps.¹
- Denying access for 40,000 children to free school meals by changing the eligibility requirements.²
- No longer providing food packages to 420,000 poor elders (60 and older) and 50,000 pregnant women and young children through Commodity Supplemental Food Distribution.³
- Eliminating \$630 million in grants for local social service agencies and community action centers that provide poor people with assistance in employment, housing, food, and health care.⁴
- Cutting childcare for at least 400,000 children and increasing the work requirements for poor parents in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

This is not good news for the poor! As it reduces aid to those in poverty, this budget showers presents on the rich. It sets the wrong priorities for future generations. If passed

in its current form, it will make permanent tax cuts from 2001-2004, including those that overwhelming benefit the rich in our society.⁵ If passed in its current form it will increase spending for the Department of Defense and Homeland Security by \$29.5 billion, not even including the supplemental request for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶

The Administration contends that the elimination of 141 public service budget lines is necessary because they are ineffective, and faith-based organizations do a better job. This FY07 budget is based upon dubious economic assumptions. It attempts to absolve the federal government of its role to eradicate poverty and places religious organizations in the position of being the sole provider of many social services.

Our nation's economic policies need an infusion from the spirit of the man who began his public ministry almost 2,000 years ago by proclaiming that God had anointed him to "bring good news to the poor."

PRAYER

God, who has special concern and affection for the poor: may the poor who are among us receive grace, mercy, and good news during these times of economic insecurity. Amen.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Does the President's FY07 budget proposal set the wrong priorities?
2. Does the President's FY07 budget proposal communicate the wrong values of the Christian faith?
3. Jesus makes clear in Luke 16:19–31 that perpetrating economic injustice is among the gravest of sins. As the wealthiest nation in the world, is the United States perpetrating economic injustice through our economic policies?

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The Twenty-fifth General Synod calls upon all settings of the United Church of Christ to uphold the common good as a foundational ideal in the United States . . . and reaffirms the obligation of citizens to share through taxes the financial responsibility for public services that benefit all citizens, especially those who are vulnerable . . .

—General Synod 25, 2005, *Resolution for the Common Good*

Health Care

Barbara T. Baylor, Minister for Health and Wellness

JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

IN HIS 2006 STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS, the president said that “our government has a responsibility to provide health care for the poor and the elderly, and we are meeting that responsibility.” But, according to figures provided by Families USA, the national organization for health care consumers, under the president’s watch health care affordability continues to worsen. The number of uninsured grew from 38.7 million in 2000 to 45.8 million in 2004. Health care spending (the amount purported to be spent on each person) soared from \$4,729 to \$6,280. Employer-based health coverage dropped to 60 percent in 2005, down from almost 70 percent of businesses offering health coverage for their workers in 2000. And, the average monthly premium paid by workers increased from \$135 to \$226.¹

Although the administration says that high quality and affordable health care is a priority, the 2007 budget reveals some disturbing truths about what the priorities really are. While the budget increases funding to the departments of defense and homeland security, this same budget calls for devastating funding cuts in programs designed to improve health and save lives. In some cases

the budget eliminates programs entirely. Briefly, the president’s budget calls for the following changes.

The National Institutes of Health, the nation’s foremost medical research center, would lose about \$70 billion.² The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would see a \$367 million reduction, to \$5.8 billion. The Preventive Health Services Block Grant at CDC, that enables states to implement disease prevention and health promotion programs

like oral health services and substance abuse programs for youth, and that helps states address health emergencies such as West Nile virus and natural disasters like Katrina, would be eliminated.³ Also slated for termination are the Community Supplemental Food Program for low-income elderly people, the Project to Treat People with Traumatic Brain Injuries, programs to improve emergency medical services for children, and the Safe and Drug Free Schools Grant. The budget curtails funding for the Environmental Protection Agency’s State and Tribal Assistance Grant, Violence Against Women Prevention and Prosecution Program, Universal Newborn Hearing Screening and the Urban Indians Health Program.⁴

Be it further resolved that the United Church of Christ in all its settings will do justice and promote the common good by working actively to: provide adequate health care including reproductive rights as an entitlement for all . . . —General Synod 25, 2005, *Resolution for the Common Good*

The budget proposes cuts to the two major entitlement programs—Medicaid and Medicare. Cuts to Medicaid, totaling approximately \$14 billion over five years, will jeopardize the access of children to periodic health screening along with vision, dental, hearing and mental health services. It will exclude low-income women from vital reproductive health services. The largest budget cuts are to Medicare, where the budget reduces spending by \$35.9 billion by reducing payments to hospitals and nursing homes.⁵

The president says health care can be made more affordable with Health Savings Accounts (HSAs). The underlying rationale for this solution is that if consumers have “Skin in the Game,” they will make better decisions about their health care because they will have to pay for it. HSAs are high-deductible policies that will significantly raise the out-of-pocket expenses for low and moderate income people. People suffering from chronic illnesses or injuries are likely rapidly to deplete their HSA; then they will be saddled with out-of-pocket costs they may be unable to afford. While the administration reduces the health tax credit targeted on low-and moderate-income families, from \$77 billion in last year’s budget to \$24 billion in its new budget, it now proposes \$132 billion in HSA-related health tax breaks that would go disproportionately to affluent households, as compared to \$31 billion in such tax breaks last year.⁶ The president’s budget includes \$156 million in tax cuts over the next ten years to promote Health Savings Accounts. HSAs will drain federal resources needed to strengthen the health care safety net such as Medicaid and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).⁷

PRAYER

Great God, please forgive us for our lack of concern, compassion and empathy for the elderly, children, adults and the disabled, who are without quality, affordable health care and who have no means of obtaining it. Amen.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Will the president’s proposals make health care more affordable for Americans?
2. The budget cuts to Medicaid and other health programs will deliver a crippling blow to our nation’s most vulnerable citizens. How can we as people of faith continue to support a plan that seriously undercuts the public’s health? How can we mobilize people of faith to engage in health care justice work?
3. The assumption of Consumer Driven Health Care is that if people have more “Skin in the Game,” they will act like consumers by comparing quality and costs and negotiating lower prices. What, if any, concerns do you have about the ability of Consumer Driven Health Care to reduce health costs?

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Public Education

Jan Resseger, Minister for Public Education and Witness

THE PRESIDENT'S PROPOSED 2007 budget, in tandem with the four-year-old *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), not only proposes the money to be spent by the federal government but also defines the federal government's role in public education. This budget confirms a radical shift in philosophy from the federal government's historic role. While Washington traditionally has invested a relatively small federal contribution to promote opportunity, today the federal goal is almost exclusively regulatory. The philosophy has changed from equity to efficiency.

A bit of background . . . The Constitution does not address public education, a responsibility set out in their fifty constitutions as a primary responsibility of the states. Based on his belief that, "Poverty has many roots, but the taproot is ignorance," Lyndon Johnson pushed through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the entry in 1965 of the the federal government into education policy. Then as now the federal government provided only 6 to 8 percent of the cost of public schools. Then its use was exclusively for compensatory education—a super-added investment to enrich the lives of poor and in later years disabled and immigrant children.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the 2002 reauthorization of Johnson's ESEA, altered the federal government's role. The benevolent grandfather with a pocket full of special treats for the tiniest, most recently adopted, or disabled grandchild has become a chief executive officer, ranking all the company's divisions according to product standards; increasing production targets; making less efficient plants more accountable; outsourcing services, and pushing privatization to increase market competition.

The president's new budget for 2007 reduces funding for the Department of Education from \$55.9 billion in 2006 to \$54.4 billion.² The budget reduces funding at the same time NCLB escalates requirements for schools.

Again this year, funding for NCLB is far below the amount Congress said it would provide when NCLB was

passed. A February 2005 bipartisan report of the National Conference of State Legislatures defined two types of spending mandated by NCLB. While federal spending may be almost enough for "compliance costs" for aligning standards, testing, and collecting data,³ reimbursement for the cost of "proficiency"—for remedial programs and improved instruction to boost achievement—is "minimal or non-existent."⁴ The 2007 proposed budget does not change that reality.

Even though the budget invests too little for public schools, the president proposes a \$100 million voucher program that would fund private school tuition for children in "failing" schools.⁵ Congress has refused to fund similar privatization proposals in previous budgets.

The 2007 proposed budget adds \$200 million to the largest federal education program, Title I,⁶ the original centerpiece of ESEA that supported schools serving students in poverty, but something is different now under NCLB. This year the increase is earmarked for schools already rated in-need-of-improvement by NCLB. These schools are under sanctions, by which they must set aside some Title I funds previously used for instruction for the purpose of transporting students to more successful schools or for tutoring, much of it being provided by for-profit firms. In reality, the 2007 proposed budget will reduce Title I funding to 29 states.⁷

The president's budget slashes 42 programs in the Department of Education.⁸ Federally funded vocational education is eliminated. Also cut is Safe and Drug Free Schools, which school districts use for such services as alternatives to expulsion, counseling, after-school enrichment, drug use prevention, and mentoring. GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), which has helped introduce low-income middle school students to colleges and help them prepare, is also eliminated.

Be it further resolved that the United Church of Christ in all its settings will do justice and promote the common good by working actively to: provide opportunity for every child in well-funded, high quality public schools . . . —General Synod 25, 2005, Resolution for the Common Good

This year the president adds scholarships for high achievers in math and science, if they attend four-year colleges. At the same time Pell Grants for needy college students are frozen and Perkins loans eliminated. Federal scholarships have historically prioritized opportunity; this budget will support privileged students at the expense of poorer students more likely to attend community colleges.

To ensure our future, we must create schools that embody our love and hope for our children. This budget will not achieve that end.

PRAYER

God, help us appreciate the gifts in each one of your children. Help us embrace opportunity through education. Help us see that schools where children are loved and nurtured enrich not only the children but also the common good. Amen.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Do you agree with the philosophy of the *No Child Left Behind Act* that federal policy can best work through sanctions that punish so-called “failing” schools by taking away Title I money to be re-directed for transportation costs to transfer children to other schools or for the costs of supplementary tutoring?

2. Accepting that the federal government provides less than 10 percent of funding for public education, what goals should guide the federal government’s investment?
3. Public schools are our nation’s largest civic institution. Do you believe public schools are important for promoting the common good? What are the reasons public education is important?

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Hurricane Katrina

Rev. Sala W.J. Nolan-Gonzales, Minister for Criminal Justice and Human Rights

IN AUGUST 2006, the world witnessed the horrific destruction of the US Gulf Coast. Exposed were the raw poverty and need of citizens, particularly the elderly and African Americans. The administration pledged to do whatever is necessary to rebuild the communities devastated by wind and floods. To that purpose, the Department of Homeland Security has expended more than \$80 billion for recovery efforts, through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and several other agencies including the Department of

Defense, Transportation Security, the Corps of Engineers, Housing and Urban Development, and the Small Business Administration.¹ In the 2006 budget, the Congress passed a 1.3 percent funding increase for Homeland Security including a one-time \$1.6 billion allocation for Gulf Coast relief, and \$362 million in new spending authority for FEMA.² But the promise requires able administration to deliver.

The infrastructure was put into place in 1979, with the establishment of FEMA. After Hurricane Andrew, which

hit Florida in 1992, the Clinton administration appointed a professional emergency manager, James Lee Witt, and elevated the agency to Cabinet status. But the Bush administration showed little interest in emergency management, removing FEMA from Cabinet status

and subsuming the agency under the new Department of Homeland Security in the wake of 9/11. This year, it was announced that FEMA is “officially” to lose the disaster preparedness function that was the purpose of its origination, and a new agency yet to be named will assume that responsibility.³

House Republicans have severely criticized the administration for failure to act quickly on early reports that the levees had broken during Hurricane Katrina. The draft report “. . . revealed that Katrina was a national failure, an abdication of the most solemn obligation to provide for the common welfare,” and stated that, “At every level—individual, corporate, philanthropic and governmental—we failed to meet the challenge that was Katrina. In this cautionary tale, all the little pigs built houses of straw.”⁴ Even Secretary Michael Chertoff, Homeland Security, acknowledges that the response was “unacceptable.”⁵ This despite an annual budget of billions of dollars specifically allocated to disaster response.

This catastrophe was foreseen. Disaster plans were enacted. Advance weather reports were clear. Concerns with levees were expressed for years, although repair budgets were cut repeatedly. Still, 1,400 people along the Gulf Coast died.⁶ Roughly 700,000 people have been displaced, and their voting rights are now in question.⁷ Bodies remain unidentified. Children have simply vanished. And in the aftermath, we have learned that people who were evacuated to shelters and hotels could have been placed in long-term housing almost immediately, but were hampered by bureaucratic red tape.⁶

The president’s 2007 budget includes an additional \$18 billion for hurricane relief. Senator Trent Lott, R-Miss, said he is uncertain that the amount will be enough, but in any event, the money should not go to the Federal Emergency Management Agency because it is “totally incompetent” to meet the need. Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour has shaped a well-researched, fiscally responsible plan to rebuild, but with the lack of a federal

Be it further resolved that the United Church of Christ in all its settings will work to make our culture reflect the following values: that societies and nations are judged by the way they care for their most vulnerable citizens. . .

—General Synod 25, 2005, Resolution for the Common Good

map, with long budgeting delays, and with competition among the states that were affected, Barbour cannot plan loan co-payments or implement rebuilding programs.⁸ Congress has said it will require that added hurricane relief must be offset by budget cuts, primarily

from human services, which further hampers state and local restoration.⁹

Money to address the problem cannot come at the expense of programs to address basic human needs. Money without thoughtful planning and capable administration is wasted. Money to profiteering companies is a travesty atop a national disaster.

Today, displaced residents are being encouraged to return to a region that remains largely uninhabitable. Painted wood, moldy furniture, and unidentified cleaning supplies are being dumped into a landfill in the Gentilly area of New Orleans, a landfill not prepared for hazardous waste. Electricity has not been restored to much of the area. The levees are not repaired, much less rebuilt to withstand Katrina level winds.¹⁰

Where is the vision to correct these problems? Levees for lowlands can be well built; we know this from the Dutch. Hurricane planning can be thoughtful; we know this from our own citizens. We are not prepared. We are barely preparing.

In five months, our Gulf Coast will re-enter hurricane season.

PRAYER

God, help us to be good stewards of the resources we have to offer. Hold us accountable for our work. May we be strong and brave, clearly articulating our responsibilities as individuals and as a people. Amen

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. How can we monitor planning and progress in the rebuilding programs for the Gulf Coast?
2. What are our personal responsibilities to address the profound needs that have resulted from this disaster?

3. How can we become a personal presence in this situation?
4. Are we willing to maintain regular contact with our elected representatives in order to encourage public notice, planning, and accountability?

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The Environment

Rev. Carlos J. Correa Bernier, Minister for Environmental Justice

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S PHILOSOPHY on the environment has been the antithesis of the concerns of many environmentalists in the United States and other countries around the world. The administration has prioritized neither preservation nor regulation to slow down the world's worst polluters.

This administration has developed its anti-environmental reputation by catering to big corporations, the same corporations that by their ecological practices have put the health of our residents and the world's health and natural heritage at risk¹. Many scientists and environmental specialists agree that the Bush administration has done more damage to our environmental protections

than any other administration in U.S. history.

The president's proposed Fiscal Year 2007 budget slashes total federal spending for the environment and for natural resource conservation. The president's budget has undercut his promise in the State of the Union Address to break our "addiction to oil" by 2025. While in his speech the president pledged to increase funding for alternative energy by 22 percent, his budget cuts the very programs that would help us reach this goal. Overall cuts in energy efficiency and conservation are mirrored by a 13 percent reduction in environmental funding, and by proposals to raise money by selling public lands.²

Be it further resolved that the United Church of Christ in all its settings will work to make our culture reflect the following values: that the integrity of creation and the health and sustainability of ecological systems is the necessary foundation for the well-being of all people and all living things for all time.—General Synod 25, 2005, Resolution for the Common Good

“The fiscal year 2007 budget slashes funding for the National Oceans Service by 23.5 percent, the National Marine Fisheries Service by 5.4 percent and Atmospheric Research by 4.8 percent. These drastic cuts in oceans funding . . . will prohibit implementation on any of the recommendations from the Pew and U.S. Oceans Commissions,” said David Bard of the National Environmental Trust, “although these recommendations to restore health to the nation’s ocean ecosystems were largely endorsed by the president’s own ocean action plan.”

The FY 2007 budget essentially abandons a commitment to protecting public lands. Even though the president acknowledged the United States’ “addiction to oil” in his State of the Union Address, the budget assumes the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge will be leased to oil companies for \$7 billion.⁴

The innocent victims of Bush’s environmental budget proposals will be our indigenous and working communities, as well as our wildlife habitats. The proposed budget weakens U.S. compliance with international treaties and diminishes U.S. commitment to sound environmental policies. The 2007 budget will increase threats to our planet, including but not limited to global warming, species extinction and illegal logging. The FY 2007 budget will contribute to an environmental policy that contradicts necessary steps to guarantee a healthier planet for future generations. It is a legacy that is disturbing, however not at all surprising.

PRAYER

God, give us minds to understand and hearts to appreciate the fragility, complexity, and beauty of

your creation. Give us wisdom to protect and preserve the earth, the air and the water. Help us remember that the future will depend on whether we can learn to respect the balance of the natural world. Amen.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. What is the relation between habits of consumption in the United States and the following environmental concerns — finding alternatives to fossil fuels, reducing overall energy consumption, restoring the health of lake and ocean ecosystems, preserving public lands, and moving environmental hazards away from the poorest and most marginalized communities? What steps can be taken by the federal government and in the budget to address the concerns you have raised?
2. What are the most effective ways your congregation can bring your concerns about the environment to your elected representatives?

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“The Wolf Shall Live with the Lamb”: A Reflection

Rev. Mari Castellanos, Minister for the Justice and Peace Action Network

Another World Is Possible

POLITICS IS THE PROCESS WHEREBY a society decides how to allocate its material resources. The federal budget proposal is the arena for engagement—spiritual engagement.

Few biblical images are dearer to us than the prophetic representation of the fullness of the Reign of God, where the wolf dwells with the lamb, and the lion, the calf, the leopard and the kid lie down together:

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. (Isaiah 11:6-8)

The unlikely image even includes children playing and leading the fiercest beasts. The vision conveys a sense of contentment and utter peace. It also defies all our pre-suppositions. Yet it evokes a deep desire for what could, or even ought to be. All together it's not that different than yearning for world peace after watching the evening news: a present and far fetched longing.

What would it take for the wolf and the lamb to dwell together? For one thing it would require good pastures for the sheep and an alternative source of protein for the wolf. Contrary to Aesop and all other popular misconceptions, wolves are not intrinsically aggressive, but a hungry wolf does not make a good neighbor. Nor does a hungry lamb. Perhaps we ought to send this rather simplistic observation to the Congress.

The Messianic vision of Isaiah is a vision of righteousness and justice; it requires that the rulers “decide with equity for the meek of the earth.”

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. (Isaiah 11:3-4)

Peace comes as a result of justice in the biblical vision of the Reign of God. The Ruler, does not “judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear.” He or she will not be deceived by appearances. The Ruler makes determinations with righteousness

Our Christian faith speaks directly to public morality and the ways a nation should bring justice and compassion into its civic life.
—General Synod 25, 2005, *Resolution for the Common Good*

To act with righteousness is to do what is right. What hope do we have that our leaders will act with righteousness when they allocate the resources of the land? The

2007 budget the president sent to Congress asks for an increase of 6.9 percent in defense dollars, for a total of \$439.3 billion not counting the Iraq war, and for cuts of 3.8 percent in education, and 2.3 percent in health and human services. The budget

seeks to make tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans permanent, while reducing the allocations for programs that help the poor insulate their homes. It increases the funding to keep out immigrants, while decreasing the funds for environmental protection. How far does this go toward enabling wolves and lambs to live together?

The ethics of the commonwealth of God require that all have enough. In an election year, the Congress might be persuaded to engage in budgetary examinations of conscience. Will our leaders act with righteousness, seek equity for the poor of the land?

We seem very far away from the Messianic vision. Hunger and anger have made terrible partnerships. So have power and greed. We live with the disparities and violence in our country and in our world. As a people, a nation, a church, we too—not only the Congress—need to respond to this proposed budget. May we be savvy enough to keep in mind the hungry wolves and the hungry lambs. May we be bold enough to demand the equity that leads to peace.

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