

Imagine . . .



Another World  
is Possible

*Faith Reflections on the  
President's Proposed Federal Budget 2008*

JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES—UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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## INTRODUCTION

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

SOME OF US ARE OLD ENOUGH to remember the bumper sticker that expressed the sentiment many of us hold, “Imagine a world in which schools would have all the money they need, and the army would have to hold a bake sale to build more bombs.” That sentiment challenges the priorities of our nation. Now in 2007, ironies continue to abound: the U.S. Senate could not even pass a minimum wage bill without stipulations that would protect the McDonalds of our nation; with escalating social needs in our country and global community, the President is “surging” his war in Iraq at costs measured in the billions; we pour billions into strengthening our borders, and refuse to see the social and political misery that lie at the root of terrorism and hatred; we pay out billions in agricultural subsidies to the biggest corporate farms and turn our backs on the rapidly diminishing number of small farmers who form the bedrock of many a rural community.

While we have been highly critical of President Bush’s

spending priorities, I would maintain this is not about President Bush—it is about us. In a true democracy, as naïve as it may sound, the federal budget is a reflection of *all* of us. Pogo was right: we have met the enemy and it is us. In his recounting of the famous Cochabamba water wars of 1999, Oscar Olivera distinguishes between elective democracy and participative democracy. Many, he maintains, believe their responsibility in the democratic process is over once they cast their ballot. He sardonically reveals how votes are bought and sold in Bolivian politics. On the other hand, he contends true democracy is obtained when the people participate actively in political decision making.

Our commitment is to help you participate in our democracy by sharing information we hope will help. Our purpose will not be accomplished by your reading these pages. Rather, we will have done our work if you are moved to speak, advocate, and live out your faith.

## Overview of the President's Budget Proposal for Fiscal Year 2008

Edith Rasell, Minister for Labor Relations and Community Economic Development

THE FEDERAL BUDGET DIRECTS how some \$2.9 trillion will be spent and raised through taxes and fees. In 2007, this is nearly one-quarter of the entire \$13 trillion U.S. gross domestic product (GDP). How this money is spent—on

what?—and how the taxes and fees are raised—who pays?—say a lot about our country. The federal budget is a concrete manifestation of our nation’s priorities and values, and clearly reveals what the nation thinks is important. As people of

faith living in a democracy we are obligated to make our views known, and to speak out and express our values so that they are reflected in the federal budget.

General Synod 25 called on all settings of the UCC to:

- uphold the common good as a foundational ideal in the United States;
- reclaim the imperative to share God's resources equitably and sustainably with all God's children;
- affirm the role of public institutions paid for by taxes for ensuring essential services and protecting the good of the wider community; and
- honor and uplift the integrity of God's creation.

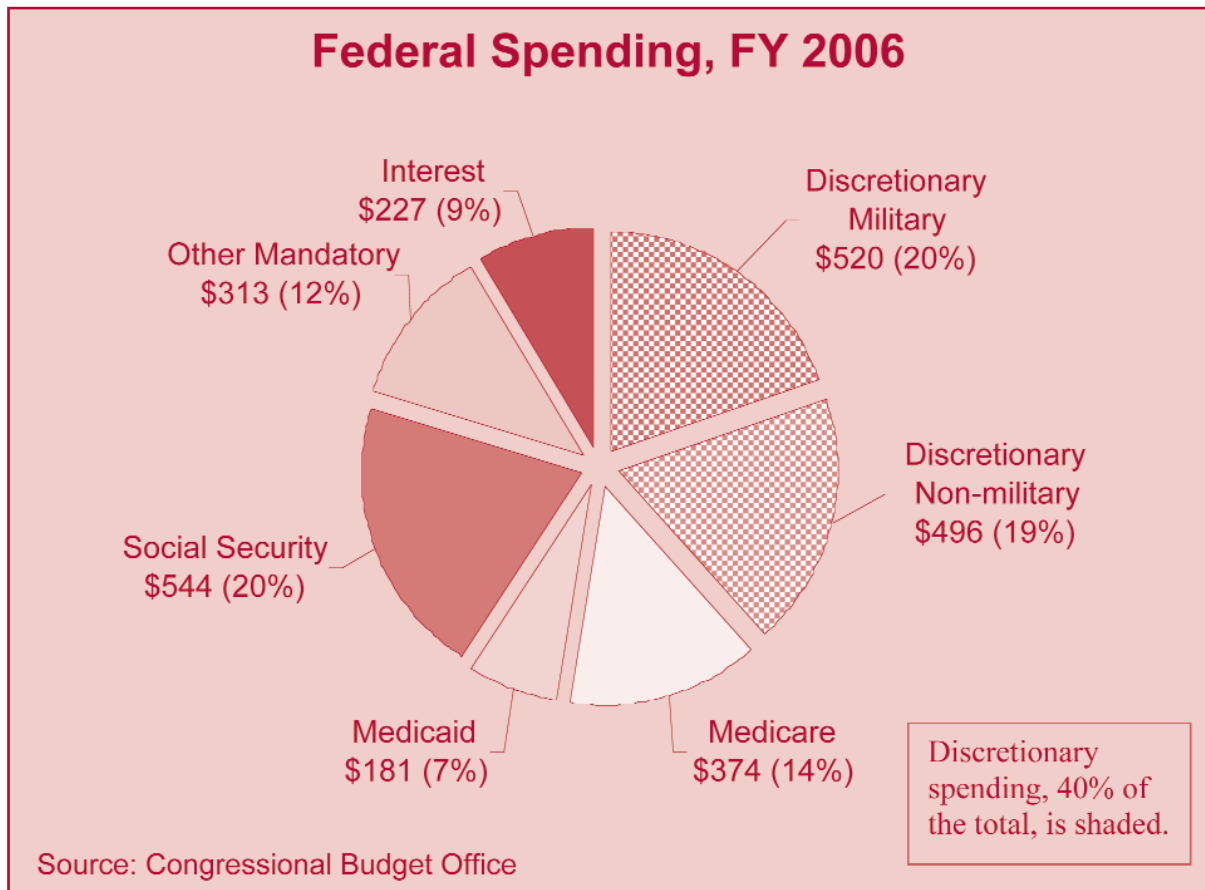
The full text of the resolution is posted at <http://www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions/gsrev25-5.pdf>.

We examine the major features of the President's FY 08 budget proposal in light of this call.

## THE COST OF WAR

One predominant feature of the budget proposal is the very large amount budgeted for war and other military and security activities. The majority of this money is earmarked for the Department of Defense. In FY 2008, President Bush proposes to spend \$624 billion on the military activities of the Department of Defense, more than twice the amount budgeted in 2000.<sup>1</sup> Included in this figure is a request for \$145 billion in supplemental funding for the Iraq War. Total spending on military and security activities including national defense costs for the Department of Energy and the Departments of Homeland Security, Veterans Affairs, and State totals \$802.9 billion for FY 08 or about 28% of the total federal budget.<sup>2</sup>

Given the fabricated rationale for the war, the destruction it has wrought on the Iraqi people and their country, the instability it has fostered in the Middle East and other parts of the world, the horrific losses it has inflicted on the women and men in the armed forces of the United States and our allies, and the desire of the majority of Americans to withdraw from Iraq, these funds would be better used to end the war and rebuild the country.



## TAX CUTS

The President continues to propose to make permanent the temporary tax cuts enacted in 2001 and 2003, cuts which are sharply skewed to favor the wealthy. These cuts were instituted in stages, some provisions have yet to take effect, and nearly all are due to expire in 2010. As a result, the cost of the tax cuts has been constrained, thus far. (For more information, go to *Winners & Losers 2005*, page 4, <http://www.ucc.org/justice/Winners%20and%20Losers.pdf>.)

However, if the cuts are made permanent, the revenue losses increase dramatically. The loss in revenue over the five years from 2008 to 2012 is \$374 billion. But over the following five years, 2013 to 2017, the loss is \$1,617 billion or over four times greater.<sup>3</sup> In the face of so many unmet needs in the United States and the world, providing wealthy people with a huge tax break is unconscionable. Moreover, in the face of very large and growing income inequality, if tax breaks are given they should not benefit the wealthy.

## SPENDING ON OTHER PROGRAMS

With tax cuts squeezing revenue and the military taking a larger share of the budget, many other important programs are being cut. For example, non-military, discretionary<sup>4</sup> spending for programs in the U.S. will decline next year by \$13 billion after adjusting for inflation.<sup>5</sup> The cuts will deepen each year reaching \$34 billion in 2012. Important programs including veterans' health care, natural resources and the environment, K-12 and vocational education, and training and employment will all be cut.<sup>6</sup> Medicare and Medicaid funding will decline by \$102 billion over five years.<sup>7</sup> The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), the source of health insurance for 6 million children, plus pregnant women and adults will receive an additional \$675 million in 2008. But an additional \$12 to \$15 billion is needed over five years to fully fund the program and pay for the additional two million children who are eligible but not enrolled.<sup>8</sup>

## DEFICIT

When we spend huge amounts on wars and other security initiatives without a comparable increase in taxes or other revenues, then even cuts in needed services fail to prevent a growth in the deficit. The FY08 budget proposal seriously worsens future deficits. In January 2007, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office estimated the sum of the deficits for FY2008 through FY2011 at \$363 billion.<sup>9</sup> The Bush budget proposal issued in February 2007 would raise the four-year total to \$574 billion, an increase of nearly 60%, and experts believe this underestimates the true impact.<sup>10</sup> Currently, the cost of interest on the federal debt is 9% of the budget, or \$244 billion in 2007.

The last budget of the Clinton Administration (for FY2001) had a surplus of \$128 billion—the federal government was paying down its debt.<sup>11</sup> The following year, the first budget of the George W. Bush administration (FY2002) had a deficit of \$158 billion. The deficit rose even higher in the next two years – to \$377 billion in 2003 and \$412 billion in 2004 – and it continues to exceed \$200 billion a year. This huge reversal in the fiscal health of the U.S. government was largely due to tax cuts that primarily benefited the wealthy and increased spending on the military and homeland security. [For more information, go to *Winners and Losers FY2007*, page 7 at [http://www.ucc.org/justice/pdfs/winners\\_losers\\_07.pdf](http://www.ucc.org/justice/pdfs/winners_losers_07.pdf).]

Cuts in the core functions of government, the further weakening of an already shredded safety net, and an explosion in military spending are not features of a federal budget that many people of faith would support. But informed and vigorous interactions with our elected representatives can change the government's priorities toward those that benefit the common good.

## NOTES

1. Office of Management and Budget, Budget for Fiscal Year 2008, Historical Tables, Table 5.1
2. Center for Defense Information, The 2008 National Security Budget and Briefing Slides. [http://www.cdi.org/program/document.cfm?DocumentID=3828&from\\_page=../index.cfm](http://www.cdi.org/program/document.cfm?DocumentID=3828&from_page=../index.cfm)
3. Office of Management and Budget, Budget for Fiscal Year 2008, Table S-6.
4. For a description of discretionary and mandatory spending, see *The Federal Budget Process* at
5. Parrott, Sharon and Matt Fiedler, 2007, *President's Budget Calls for Deep Cuts in a Wide Range of Domestic Programs*, Washington, DC: Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, [http://www.cbpp.org/2-8-07bud.htm#\\_edn1](http://www.cbpp.org/2-8-07bud.htm#_edn1)
6. For more on specific programs that will lose funding, see Coalition on Human Needs, "The Bush Budget: Less Help for People in Need, Needless Help for Those with High Incomes; February 8, 2007; <http://www.chn.org/pdf/2007/bushbudget08.pdf>
7. Budget Plan Hits Health Sector in the Market Basket By John Reichard, CQ HealthBeat Editor [http://www.cmwf.org/healthpolicyweek/healthpolicyweek\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=464096#doc464099](http://www.cmwf.org/healthpolicyweek/healthpolicyweek_show.htm?doc_id=464096#doc464099)
8. The Debate Ahead on SCHIP by Mary Agnes Carey, CQ HealthBeat Associate Editor. Posted on [http://www.cmwf.org/healthpolicyweek/healthpolicyweek\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=464096#doc464099](http://www.cmwf.org/healthpolicyweek/healthpolicyweek_show.htm?doc_id=464096#doc464099) (Commonwealth Fund)
9. Orszag, Peter, "The Budget and Economic Outlook: Fiscal years 2008-2017," Testimony before the Committee on Budget, U.S. House of Representatives, January 30, 2007, Table 1.
10. Office of Management and Budget, Budget for Fiscal Year 2008, Historical Tables.
11. *Ibid.*

# The Process of Creating the Federal Budget— How You Can Influence the Outcome

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THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS will work on the budget for nearly the entire year. However, there are three key points in this process when the voices of concerned citizens can have the greatest impact.

► **First:** The process of constructing the federal budget begins when the President’s Budget Proposal is presented to Congress and the nation in early February. While the proposal is not binding on Congress, it is nonetheless given serious attention since the budget that is approved by both houses of Congress must also be signed by the president before it becomes law. *Winners and Losers: Faith Reflections on the President’s Proposed Federal Budget 2008* presents Justice and Witness Ministries’ assessment of the proposal. Communicating with your members in Congress, about the President’s budget proposal lets them know how you would like Congress to handle the budget.

► **Second:** Congress begins its work on the budget by establishing the levels of total spending and revenue (taxes and fees). These figures are set forth in the *Budget Resolution* which also establishes spending levels in each of 19 “functional categories” like National Defense, Income Security [which includes many social programs like public housing, food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and energy assistance] and Health (which includes Medicaid). Once the spending levels for functional categories are established, a program within a category can receive additional funding only if another program in the same category receives less.

For example, consider military spending which is in the functional category called National Defense. If spending on a particular weapon were reduced, the money could not be used for public housing (in the functional category Income Supports) or health care for the poor (in Health). The money could be spent only on other programs within the National Defense category. Therefore, establishing the appropriate spending level for each category is very important; it is very difficult to change it later in the process. The Budget Resolution is supposed to be completed by April 15 but frequently it takes longer. March and April are important times to be in touch with Congress about the Budget Resolution.

► **Third:** Once the Budget Resolution is adopted, congressional committees prepare 13 *Appropriations Bills* which specify how the money that was allocated to each functional category will be distributed across the many programs within the category. This is another time of heightened importance when concerned citizens can influence Congress to ensure needed programs get the necessary financial support. These bills typically are being considered from mid- to late-summer and into the fall. Theoretically, Congress must agree on a final version of the budget (that is, the 13 Appropriations bills) on or before September 30, the last day of the fiscal year.

Being engaged with Congress at key decision-making times enhances our ability to shape a federal budget that more closely mirrors our values and priorities. For more information about the budget process, go to <http://www.ucc.org/justice/fbprocess.htm>

The church must speak today about the public space where political processes are the way that we organize our common life, allocate our resources, and tackle our shared problems. Politics is about the values we honor, the dollars we allocate, and the process we follow so that we can live together with some measure of justice, order and peace.

<b>Discretionary</b>		
Military	\$520	20%
Non-military	\$496	19
<b>Mandatory</b>		
Medicare	\$374	14
Medicaid	\$181	7
Social Security	\$544	20
Other Mandatory	\$313	12
<b>Interest on debt</b>	\$227	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,654</b>	<b>100%</b>
*Out lays		
Source: Congressional Budget Office		

# Military Budget and the Iraq War

Rev. Wallace Ryan Kuroiwa, Minister and Team Leader,  
Cleveland-based Team

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THE FY 2008 PROPOSED BUDGET for defense and homeland security is \$658 billion.<sup>1</sup> This constitutes almost 23% of the \$2.9 trillion proposed federal budget. You may see different figures as you read other sources. And the different figures may indeed be accurate, depending on what is being counted. The proposed request for Pentagon related costs, the bulk of the spending, is \$624.6 billion. Others legitimately add the \$141.7 billion that the president is asking for 2008 war costs in Iraq, as well as an additional \$93.4 billion for 2007 war-related costs. Still other figures include \$36.4 billion for homeland security. One can also add the \$84.4 billion for the Department of Veteran Affairs. What about the \$22.6 billion for national defense costs for the Department of Energy and other federal agencies? *If you tally all of these, it totals a staggering \$802.9 billion budget<sup>2</sup> or 28 percent of the total federal budget.*

As noted above, the President is asking for another \$141.7 billion for the war in 2008. Also above, we can see that the president is also proposing another \$93.4 billion for 2007 costs over and above what is included in the 2007 budget. If approved, *the total spending for the Iraq war over its duration will be \$661.9 billion.* The figures, however, may be misleading. The \$141.7 billion is based on pre-“surge” estimates. It is likely, then, that the figure will be significantly higher.<sup>3</sup>

What does this mean to us as people of faith? Another way to ask this question is to ask “How does this budget reflect our values as Christians?” We are spending as much in one day as our foes spend in a year.<sup>4</sup> After four years of war, the situation does not seem to be any better. American personnel and Iraqi people continue to die without any end in sight.

Our faith asks us to look at the root causes for human conflict. This contrasts with our present strategy. What we seem to do is to react to those who would violate us. If terrorists attack, we try to build more secure borders, punish the offenders, and create more security measures. Is this the way to a truly lasting peace?

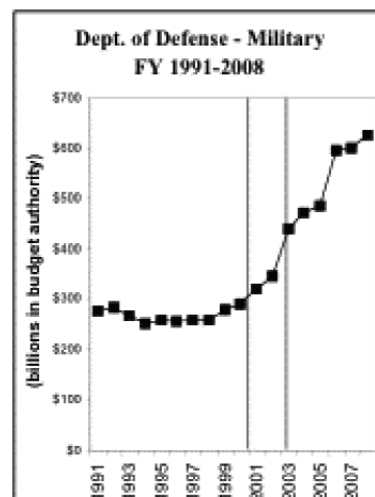
Imagine a world in which we place the enormous resources we have dedicated to the war in Iraq to alleviating hunger, disease, and other aspects of global poverty?

In contrast, what would happen if we seek to address the animosity that others seem to hold against us? What would occur if we “beat our swords into plowshares?” Imagine a world in which we place the enormous resources we have dedicated to the war in Iraq to alleviating hunger, disease, and other aspects of global poverty?

We are not so naïve as to believe that if we do so all wars would cease. But it certainly is our conviction that it would remove one source of support and justification for acts of violence and destruction. We spend almost twice as much on the military as our allies—combined. We spend three times as much as Russia, China, and rogue states—combined. And as one politician has asked, do you feel any safer now?

## NOTES

1. Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, February 6, 2007, p.A1.
2. Center for Defense Information, [www.cdi.org](http://www.cdi.org).
3. Ann Scott Tyson, *Washington Post*, February 6, 2007.
4. Op. cit., Center for Defense Information.



Source: Office of Management and Budget, the White House.

THE SPONSORS OF THE NOW FIVE-YEAR-OLD No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) said the law's goal is to eliminate the soft bigotry of low expectations. While no one can argue with this goal of high expectations, a more central question connects NCLB to the federal budget: what about the hard bigotry of quickly raising expectations without providing money for smaller classes and enriched curriculum in the schools serving very poor children? Whether our nation is serious about improving the public schools serving our poorest children can be judged by the degree to which the federal budget funds federal requirements to strengthen public schools.

The late Paul Wellstone, the only senator to vote against NCLB, believed under-funding NCLB was a moral issue: "It is simply negligent to force children to pass a test and expect that the poorest children, who face every disadvantage, will be able to do as well as those who have every advantage."<sup>1</sup>

The UCC General Synod 18 recognized that budgetary matters are central to justice: "More and more of our city schools, forced to rely on a shrinking and aging tax base . . . find themselves unable to offer education of the quality to be found in suburban schools . . . often only a few miles away geographically but light years away in their educational opportunities."<sup>2</sup> General Synod 25 proclaimed, "Our society leaves behind the children of the poor while providing a generous education for children of privilege," a situation that undermines the common good.<sup>3</sup>

The President's proposed 2008 budget for the Department of Education is \$56 billion—higher than the President's proposal of \$54.4 billion for 2007, but 2.6 percent less than the \$57.5 billion Congress eventually allocated for 2007.<sup>4</sup>

The President proposes adding \$1.2 billion to Title I, the largest federal education program,<sup>5</sup> which in the past supported enriched programming in schools serving a large number of children in poverty. However, today under NCLB, 20 percent of Title I funds must be set aside for parental choice programs, to transfer children from failing schools to other public or charter schools and to pay for supplementary tutoring conducted primarily by private firms. Despite that many eligible elementary and middle school students are not receiving Title I services, because Title I has never been fully funded, the \$1.2 billion increase for Title I in this year's budget is earmarked for new NCLB mandates in high schools.<sup>6</sup> And this year, despite the fact that Congress has never passed his budget line for private school vouchers, the President asks for \$300 million for vouchers, three times more than last year's budget request.<sup>7</sup>

Particularly troubling in the 2008 budget is a proposed cut in funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The 2008 IDEA funding proposal is more than \$100 million less than what Congress spent in 2007 and 2006.<sup>8</sup> Because federal funding for expensive federal special education requirements is between 17 and 18 percent of the cost of those requirements,<sup>9</sup> this reduction in federal IDEA funding will be felt in all the nation's 90,000 public schools.

Although NCLB claims to improve public education, instead the proposed 2008 federal budget emphasizes regulation through testing and ranking and then too often prescribes privatization. The Department of Education should immediately undertake a comprehensive national study to cost-out the requirements of NCLB for states and school districts. If the federal government is serious about public school improvement, it should budget for the cost of its own requirements.

## NOTES

1. "Wellstone on Testing: A Harsh Agenda," *Rethinking Schools*, Winter 2002–2003, vol. 17, No. 2.
2. General Synod 18, "1991 Pronouncement: Support of Quality, Integrated Education for All Children in Public Schools."
3. General Synod 25, "Resolution for the Common Good."
4. Alyson Klein, "President's Budget Seeks Help for High Schools, but Again Targets Cuts in Many Areas," *Education Week*, on-line, February 5, 2007, [http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/02/05/22budget\\_web.h26.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/02/05/22budget_web.h26.html).
5. Don Gonyea, "Patterns in Bush's Approach to the Federal Budget," *National Public Radio*, February 12, 2007. Larry Abramson, "Education," p. 4, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyID=7226730>.
6. Don Gonyea, "Patterns in Bush's Approach to the Federal Budget," *National Public Radio*, February 12, 2007. Larry Abramson, "Education," p. 4, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyID=7226730>.
7. Alyson Klein, "President's Budget Seeks Help for High Schools, but Again Targets Cuts in Many Areas," *Education Week*, on-line, February 5, 2007, [http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/02/05/22budget\\_web.h26.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/02/05/22budget_web.h26.html).
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9. Alyson Klein, "House OKs 2007 Budget Hike for Education," *Education Week*, February 7, 2007 p. 19.



Barbara T. Baylor, Minister for Health and Wellness

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THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET PROPOSAL for FY 2008 once again proposes reductions or total elimination of important health care services that fall under the Preventive Health Services Block Grant. These include public and community health programs which help state and local agencies in their efforts to prevent or reduce the incidence of various health problems, including heart disease and stroke, obesity, diabetes, nutrition, cancer prevention, arthritis and other chronic diseases, tobacco use, and lead poisoning.<sup>1</sup>

Amidst the downward spiral of a failing health care system, the continued challenge for the faith community will be to keep the moral imperative of health care for all as our polar star.<sup>2</sup> Our faith propels us to be our brother's and sister's keeper. The United Church of Christ's campaign, "Health Care for All" is still a priority. Key General Synod resolutions and pronouncements affirm the moral and justice imperatives of equal access for all people in the United States. The Tenth, Eleventh, and Eighteenth Synods all call for a national health policy for the United States that emphasizes quality, affordable health care for all.<sup>3</sup>

As health care costs continue to rise rapidly, the Administration struggles to restrain costs. Data released by the Census Bureau show that the number of uninsured Americans stands at 46.6 million, an increase of 1.3 million in 2004. Increases in the number of uninsured have largely occurred because of the decline in employer-sponsored coverage.

The President's proposed 2008 budget recommendations for health care put children and low-income individuals at even greater risk of losing the narrow access to care they may now have.<sup>4</sup> Implications include:

#### **State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).**

The proposed reductions to this program will fail to provide sufficient funds to continue insuring the same number of children as the program insures today unless SCHIP funding is reauthorized for this year. The insufficient funding will most likely mean a shifting of Medicaid costs to states, leading to Medicaid cutbacks in eligibility or restricted health care services for low-income children.

**Reforming the Health Care Marketplace.** The President proposes replacing the existing exclusion for employer-sponsored insurance with a flat deduction for those with at least catastrophic health insurance (qualifying health insurance). A family of four will be able to deduct the first \$15,000 from

their income (\$7,500 for an individual). As long as your plan costs are less than the deductible, you may be entitled to a tax cut. The plan does not address the inefficiencies in health care that contribute the rising costs, and it has the potential of undermining the employer-sponsored system by putting more people into individual markets where the risks are greater.

#### **Fostering Affordable Choices in the Health Care System.**

The President proposes a recommendation to redirect funds from health care institutions to states in order that they might subsidize the purchase of private insurance for low-income individuals. Unfortunately, hospitals are the safety net for many low and middle-income families. The proposed plan will take away approximately \$30 million dollars from the existing safety net—our public hospitals—and give it to the states to craft innovative solutions to move people into affordable insurance. Hospitals would be forced to deal with shortages of funds and personnel.

Perhaps it is time to begin advocating for quality, affordable, accessible health care for all. Congress should begin a serious dialogue on a national health insurance. Rather than promoting growth of the individual insurance market at the expense of employer-sponsored plans, the Administration's first priorities should be structuring reform efforts to help the uninsured acquire health insurance and reducing overall health care spending.<sup>5</sup> Until such a time, we all have an ultimate responsibility to care for one another and to assist in ensuring the well-being of society as a whole by eliminating those factors that prevent health care from being accessible to all.

#### **NOTES**

1. *Despite the Rhetoric, Budget Would Make Nation's Fiscal Problems Worse and Further Widen Inequality.* Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (<http://www.cbpp.org/2-5-07bud.htm>).

2. *Seeking Justice in Health Care: A Guide for Advocates in Faith Communities.* Frisof, K. et.al. Universal Health Care Action Network, 2006.

3. <http://www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions>

4. Budget of the United States Government. (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2008/hhs.html>).

5. The President's Health Care Proposal: All Risk, No Reward. Joint Economic Committee, Economic Policy Brief, January 2007.

# Hurricane Katrina Relief

Rev. Bentley DeBardelaben, Minister for Racial Justice

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IN THE FALL OF 2005, the Administration pledged to do whatever was necessary to rebuild the devastated communities and psychically traumatized victims of the Gulf Coast. Thus when the FY 2007 proposed federal budget was announced, with \$18 billion marked for hurricane relief, some scoffed at the small amount, yet others hoped that by 2008 a larger amount might be proposed so that the very slow progress of recovery might gain actual momentum. To the dismay of many, the emphatic commitment made by President Bush in September 2005 to rebuild the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Katrina is scarcely reflected in the President's proposed FY 2008 federal budget.

The President's proposed FY 2008 budget includes \$100 million to improve disaster response by the Federal Emergency Management Agency as part of the 2008 funding for homeland security. However, little or no steps have been taken to address the bureaucratic red tape that is preventing needed federal funds from reaching affected areas for basic infrastructure repairs and residential building. According to the *Katrina Index*, a report issued monthly by the Brookings Institute monitoring the progress of recovery, as of the spring 2007, the number of operational buses and public transportation routes has remained virtually stagnant. Despite the pressing demand, 76 school facilities remain



closed and no additional hospitals have opened in Orleans, St. Bernard or Jefferson counties.

It is this very weakness in basic social infrastructure that led to so many people being vulnerable to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. The immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina revealed huge holes in the social safety net that exacerbated the death and destruction along the Gulf Coast. Sadly, that reality still has yet to be addressed and appears to be getting worse. In the context of a society that

places individualism and privatization over the common good, "a blame the victim" perspective emerges that prevents a serious look at infrastructure needs.

After four years of war in Iraq, the U.S. government continues to allocate billions of dollars for war-related spending. Yet fundamental services like the restoration of electricity, running water, a safe sewage system for much of New Orleans Lower Ninth Ward are still not a budget priority. Authorities have forced residents out of public housing declared unrecoverable after the storm, yet few alternative low-income housing units exist. With a new hurricane season just around the corner, concerns about levee repairs continue to be raised. A review of the President's proposed FY 2008 federal budget leads one to wonder if the promise to rebuild the Gulf Coast has become yet another promise forgotten.

# Homeland Security

Rev. Sala W. J. Nolan-Gonzales, Minister for Criminal Justice and  
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PRIORITIES IN THE PROPOSED budget are fundamentally geared toward terrorism prevention (\$227 million) and incarceration (\$152 million), with substantially lower allotments to border security and drugs (\$89 million), crimes against children and obscenity (\$25 million), and other concerns. Funding for state and local government law enforcement is scheduled for substantial cuts beginning in 2008. Over the five year period, funding for enforcement will be cut by \$9.4 billion, relative to 2007—a cut of 45% in each of the five years. To do this, 20 law enforcement grant programs will be consolidated into three, with substantial cuts in overall allotments. Essentially, funding for prevention, diversion programs, community policing, and other protective justice functions will be dramatically reduced.

This comes at a time when prisons, which now hold well over 2 million inmates, are being privatized. Oversight of the justice system at home is more limited with each passing day, and the resources we have had to work for prevention and maintaining public order have been diverted. Now that mandatory minimums are coming of age, prisoners sentenced under these laws and with drug convictions are being released back to communities at a rate of more than 700,000 each year. They are returning to communities which are less and less able to sustain them, because the resources for food

and shelter, drug rehabilitation, medical care, employment, and community policing are disappearing. These funds have diverted to other justice activities related to incarceration and war spending, both at a far remove from public scrutiny.

Would our homeland be more secure if the resources available to us were directed toward meeting the basic needs of people? What would it mean for us to use the funds available to prevent crime? It would mean support for education, for housing, for nutrition, for training programs, for health care.

The fundamental concerns of human rights are simple. They have to do with support of life, in all the areas in which we, as a society, are responsible for one another. Food and shelter, opportunities to live up to our potential, freedom from fear, freedom of speech and action. Fundamentally, justice means the fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of life. In reviewing the budget proposal, we must ask ourselves, does this suggested budget redistribute benefits or lay burdens in an equitable way? What remains are tax cuts for the most affluent, and a focus on mass incarceration at home and abroad. What is gone are resources that would reinstate formerly incarcerated persons to community, and that would protect families suffering from the loss of fathers and mothers to incarceration.

**Our Christian faith speaks directly to public morality and the ways a nation should bring justice and compassion into its civic life. In the story of the last judgment, Jesus tells us that nations will be judged by how they care for their most vulnerable citizens, those Jesus describes as, “the least of these who are members of my family.” This story in Matthew (Matthew 25: 34–45) is not about salvation; rather it is presented as a story of the judgment of nations.**

**For the Common Good, UCC General Synod 25**

# The Environment

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

Another World Is Possible

JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

THE FY 2008, \$2.9 TRILLION BUDGET PACKAGE sent to Congress by President Bush falls far too short of what we need for environmental protection and environmental justice.

**On Fresh Water:** The FY08 budget provides just three percent of what the nation needs to keep our water clean. This represents a cut of nearly half in the past 10 years.

**On Ocean Protection:** There is less money in the FY08 budget than was proposed two years ago for ocean protection, even though the President just signed a law that promises increased protection for our oceans.

**On Energy:** The budget includes big increases for defense spending. There are the assumptions that tax revenues will increase and that the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will be leased for oil and gas development. The increases sought for fuel reprocessing as part of the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership funding is larger than the entire proposed research and development budget for solar energy. The Administration seems prefer energy experimentation over conservation, even though reducing energy use is the cheapest way for society to ease the demand for fuels.

**On Fossil Fuels:** The fossil energy research and development program would be cut by \$25 million, from \$592 million in the 2007 CR to \$566 million in Fiscal Year 2008, funding for oil and gas research would be eliminated.

**On the EPA:** Spending for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would be cut by \$509 million, from \$7.7 billion in the 2007 CR to \$7.2 billion in Fiscal Year 2008.

**On Environmental Justice:** The FY 2008 Budget Request for the U.S. EPA is \$7.2 billion. The Agency will focus its environmental justice efforts on the following eight priorities: (1) Reducing asthma attacks; (2) Reducing exposure to air toxics; (3) Increasing compliance with regulations; (4) Reducing incidence of elevated blood lead levels; (5) Ensuring that fish and shellfish are safe to eat; (6) Ensuring that water is safe to drink; (7) Revitalizing brown fields and contaminated sites; and (8) Using collaborative problem-solving to address environmental and public health concerns.

Our question is how such a challenging environmental justice agenda will be implemented when the budget proposes \$4.5 million for the environmental justice work, representing a cut of nearly \$1 million.

There is some good environmental news in the FY08 budget. As part of its National Parks Centennial Initiative, the Bush Administration proposed to increase funding for the Park Service to \$2.365 billion, an increase of \$35 million over the 2007 CR level. Unfortunately the funding increase is tied to revenue that would come from leasing the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil companies for drilling. From an environmental justice and an eco-justice point of view, the FY08 budget falls too short of what the country needs: environmental protection and justice.



## JOINT DENOMINATIONAL LEADERS LETTER TO CONGRESS

The President has now sent his proposed FY '08 Federal Budget to the 110th Congress. Much will be written and said in the coming weeks and months about the content of that \$2.9 trillion budget. As the leaders of five denominations whose members helped shape the core values of this nation from its founding, we believe the Federal Budget must represent a shared vision of justice and compassion for all of God's people, both in our own nation and around the world.

Not surprisingly, we find that the FY '08 Federal Budget meets our vision in some areas but decidedly not in others. We call upon the 110th Congress to work to both sustain this budget where it is just and compassionate and to improve upon it where it is not.

One cannot consider this budget without the backdrop of the cost of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan - \$145.2 billion in 2008 - and of permanently extending the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts costing \$374 billion over the next five years. Those figures are staggeringly large, especially as compared to the very small amount for domestic discretionary spending once homeland security funds are subtracted.

One of the gifts of our work is that we travel the world, knowing that our mission is to seek and serve those both at home and abroad. We believe that our government must do likewise. In this budget we find that while it cuts spending for those at home, it expands funding for the critical fight against deadly poverty and disease in poor countries around the world. Even in difficult financial times, policymakers should not be forced to pit the needs of vulnerable people at home against our nation's moral obligation to respond to the life-and-death struggles of people around the world. We are grateful for increases in international-assistance programs, and call upon Congress to ensure that equally critical domestic spending receive similar increases. Those increases must not come, however, at the expense of the unprecedented advances this budget makes in fighting poverty and disease abroad.

Specifically, we ask Congress to fight these cuts in domestic discretionary spending:

- Nutrition: Commodity Supplemental Food Program - termination of food assistance to 440,000 low-income seniors in an average month
- Energy Assistance: Despite recent increases in the cost of heating and reaching only 23% of eligible households in FY '06, energy assistance to poor families, the elderly and the disabled would be cut.
- Children's Health: Allocated funds in the budget would not cover all those presently enrolled in SCHIP much less expand coverage to eligible others.

- Child Care: Funding for child care for children in low- and moderate-income families would be frozen even as inflation causes the cost of providing child care to rise
- Head Start: Funding cuts would leave programs with the choice of reducing the number of children served or the quality of the programs.
- Housing: Programs for the low-income, elderly and people with disabilities would be cut.

These cuts are especially disheartening when combined with the fading from view of the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. We have forgotten all too quickly the stark portrait of poverty in America that emerged from those disasters.

In international spending, we applaud:

- HIV/AIDS: an unprecedented increase to \$5.4 billion
- Millennium Challenge Account: increased to \$3 billion
- Sudan: an increase for humanitarian and peacekeeping programs.

Within the international budget, we urge Congress to maintain these critical increases while also working to maintain the momentum of key international-development accounts that did not fare as well but which are equally critical in fighting extreme poverty and disease abroad. Spending on humanitarian and development programs abroad is especially important at this time, not only because of the catastrophes that are unfolding daily before us, but because of the need to show that the United States sees all God's people as its neighbors and seeks to serve human need wherever it occurs.

In Matthew 6 it is written: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We in the United States are blessed with many treasures. And there are many demands on just where and how those treasures should be spent. It is our prayer that our federal budget will put our treasure into programs that show our hearts to be compassionate and just. For in doing so we will strengthen all of God's people and in return our nation.

THE REVEREND MARK S. HANSON  
*Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

THE MOST REVEREND KATHARINE JEFFERTS SCHORI  
*Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church*

THE REVEREND DR. CLIFTON KIRKPATRICK  
*Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

BISHOP BEVERLY SHAMANA  
*President of the United Methodist General Board of Church & Society*

THE REVEREND JOHN H. THOMAS  
*General Minister and President, United Church of Christ*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

*“Theologian Marcus Borg explains how God’s unconditional love connects to our responsibility as citizens in society outside the church. As citizens we are called to do justice as a public expression of our love for God and all whom God has created: The God of love is also the God of justice. The two are related, for in the Bible justice is the social form of love.”*

*(General Synod 25. Resolution for the Common Good, 2005)*

- What is the purpose of government? If the church were fulfilling its call to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, etc, would there still be a need for government in these roles?
- What is the appropriate balance between spending on the military and on social programs like Social Security, environmental protections, education, and unemployment insurance?
- What should be the goal of tax policy in the economy?
- “For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.” (Matthew 26:11) This often-quoted verse in Matthew 26 is sometimes used to justify the inevitability of poverty, leading to the argument that the poor are to blame for their circumstances. More often emphasis is placed on the first part of the verse, while the second receives less attention. How would this verse read differently if it were read as a call to action, a call to embody Jesus’ ministry of transforming unjust social, political and economic systems? Is there an overlooked and implicit call to move from charity to justice in this verse?
- What is God calling you to do individually and as a church in these difficult times?



## PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE

Loving God, we thank you for the blessing of living in a democratic nation where our voices can make a difference. Guide our hearts and minds to understand your vision for the earth. Help us to be good stewards of the resources we have to offer. Hold us accountable for our work. Give us the strength and determination to live out of this vision and to be, with you, co-creators of a better world. May we be strong and brave, clearly articulating our responsibilities as individuals and as a people. Amen.

## ADVOCACY TIPS

Remember that advocacy involves building relationships with decision-makers and their staff members. Staff members and aides are very important contacts. Town meetings and other in-district events are great opportunities for relationship-building and for raising the issues that are important to you.

Remember that you can provide valuable information, insight, and resources to a particular issue. Make your presence known. Give them something they can use- a sound bite, story, anything. Demonstrate your commitment, thoroughness and integrity, even if you disagree.

You can help build your relationship with your legislator by thanking him or her publicly for an action they have taken that you support.

Remember your ABCs:

Ask for something specific

Be persistent

Courtesy – be appreciative

Think about the best angles with which to engage your particular lawmaker. Are they fiscal conservatives, supporters of environmental issues, part of the human rights caucus?

Ask where you can reinforce the work a lawmaker has already done. Help identify points of new possibility for action.