



## **United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3000

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG • FAX 202-541-3339

March 3, 2017

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

As Chairs of six policy committees of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, we wish to address the moral and human dimensions of the federal budget. It is understood that the budget and appropriations processes require difficult decisions. Our Committees offer the following moral criteria to help guide your decision making:

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

Our Conference supports the goal of reducing future unsustainable deficits, and believe our nation has an obligation to address their impact on the health of the economy. At the same time, a just framework for the federal budget cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor and vulnerable persons; it requires shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

Certainly, it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on. ... It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens, and intermediate bodies. (Nos. 1908-1910)

Two principles are particularly important: solidarity and subsidiarity. Solidarity recognizes that each of us is connected, and we all have the responsibility to care for one another, particularly for those who are poor and vulnerable. The principle of subsidiarity recognizes that issues should be addressed at the appropriate level of society with the capacity to do so. The community charged with promoting human life and dignity should be willing and able to meet its obligations as we collectively work for the common good. We urge you to approach the budget process honoring these principles.

Severe cuts to non-defense discretionary spending, which includes many domestic and international poverty-reducing and refugee-assisting programs, would result in millions of people being put in harm's way, denying access to life-saving and life-affirming services. Deep cuts could negatively impact our ability to build more resilient communities in light of the impacts of shifts in climate as well. Poor and vulnerable communities at home and abroad suffer disproportionately from hurricanes, floods, droughts, famines and water scarcities. Such resilience improves lives and

promotes stability and security. Congress should consider thoughtful and responsible alternatives that achieve the desired deficit reductions while protecting programs that serve our brothers and sisters in need.

The reconciliation process should not be used to achieve savings with restrictions to health care, nutrition, income security, or other antipoverty programs. The bishops have devoted their efforts to addressing the morally problematic features of health care reform while insuring that people have access to health care coverage.

As pastors, the everyday human consequences of budget choices are clear to us. Our Catholic community defends the unborn and the undocumented, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, educates the young, and cares for the sick, both at home and abroad. We help mothers facing challenging situations of pregnancy, poor families rising above crushing poverty, refugees fleeing conflict and persecution, and communities devastated by wars, natural disasters and famines. In much of this work, we are partners with government, and our combined resources allow us to reach further and help more. Our Church is present in every state and throughout the world serving some of the most remote and marginalized communities. Our institutions are locally rooted and trusted by local populations.

The moral measure of the federal budget is not which party wins or which powerful interests prevail, but rather how those who are jobless, hungry, homeless, exploited, poor, unborn or undocumented are treated. Their voices are too often missing in these debates, but they have the most compelling moral claim on our consciences and our common resources. The Catholic bishops of the United States stand ready to work with leaders of both parties for a budget that reduces future deficits, protects poor and vulnerable people, advances the common good, and promotes human life and dignity.

Sincerely yours,

- + Tim. Card. Dolan

His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan  
Archbishop of New York  
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities

+ Oscar Cantú

Most Rev. Oscar Cantú  
Bishop of Las Cruces  
Chairman, Committee on International Justice  
and Peace

+ Christopher J. Coyne

Most Rev. Christopher J. Coyne  
Bishop of Burlington  
Chairman, Committee on Communications

+ George V. Murry, SJ

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and Human Development

+ Joe S. Vásquez

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United States House of Representatives  
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