



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Office of the
Presiding Bishop

October 26, 2005

Dear Members of Congress,

We write to you as religious leaders seeking justice for millions of vulnerable and dispossessed people in our nation. As Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America we represent diverse regions but speak with one voice about the fundamental responsibility of the government, as an expression of the will of the people, to protect the least of its citizens and provide for the poorest in our society. In this spirit we ask specifically that you oppose any attempt to move forward on the budget reconciliation measures now before Congress.

Cuts to mandatory spending called for in the reconciliation package would decrease valuable assistance to millions of low-income families, children, elderly and people with disabilities. Even as the number of people living in poverty and without insurance has increased dramatically in the past five years, the last few tragic weeks in the Gulf Coast area have put a face, indeed, thousands of new faces, on poverty in the heart of our society. Programs such as Food Stamps, Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) help to keep struggling families together and assist low-income working families in moving to higher economic ground. This is not the time to cut such important programs while using the cuts to pay for tax breaks for those who don't need them.

The Biblical record is clear. The Scriptural witness on which our faith tradition stands speaks dramatically of God's concern for and solidarity with poor and oppressed communities while speaking firmly in opposition to governments whose policies place narrow economic interests driven by greed above the common good. Jesus speaks and acts unequivocally on behalf of those on the margins of society. St. Paul writes forcefully about the importance of community and expands the definition of those we call brothers and sisters in Christ. As Americans open their homes to embrace neighbors from Gulf Coast states, as non-profit and religious organizations provide relief services, we strongly urge you to reflect on your role as a government official in providing for the least in our society and ask that you oppose any attempt to move forward with the budget reconciliation process.

Peace Be With You,

Bishop Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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