



To Go Forth:
Encountering Christ in the Heart of the World
A Catholic Message to Congress



Hundreds of Catholic leaders from throughout our country are in our nation's capital for the 2015 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering. We come in response to the call of Pope Francis to encounter Christ "in the heart of the world."

Protect Poor and Vulnerable People in the Federal Budget. Reduce unnecessary military spending.

Every day in every corner of the world, the Catholic Church--Catholic Charities, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Relief Services, and thousands of schools, hospitals, parishes and NGOs--works to draw a "Circle of Protection" around the "least of these." The federal government is a vital partner in that work. Congress should eliminate sequestration and prioritize programs that help people living in poverty, both at home and abroad. After 13 years of war, we have learned that force alone does not achieve peace. Catholic Social Teaching tells us that integral development of peoples is the new name of peace and that peace is built on justice and solidarity.

International

Strengthen funding for poverty-focused international development and humanitarian programs that save lives, reduce crushing poverty and build peace. Protect international assistance from sequestration cuts or other reductions. Contrary to popular perceptions that it is 20% of the federal budget; it is only about one-half percent (0.6%) of the budget.

The plight of refugees fleeing Syria and Iraq, the Ebola outbreak and conflict in the Central African Republic and South Sudan are grim reminders of the lives at stake. U.S. international assistance protects human dignity, and it is an investment in long-term peace and stability that cannot be gained by military action alone.

We urge Congress to fund adequately humanitarian accounts: **International Disaster Assistance, Migration and Refugee Assistance, and Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance, Conflict Stabilization and Peacekeeping Operations;** and to strengthen efforts to **promote good governance, democracy, and peacebuilding** to address the root causes of conflict. We must also continue critical **development programs** that protect health; provide access to water and education, and help farmers connect to markets, to name just a few. Development programs provide security and opportunity for some of the most vulnerable people, including children in Central America who, without opportunity and security, may flee to the United States for protection.

Reduce unnecessary military spending, especially for nuclear weapons and modernization programs. An over-investment in military spending can rob us of the resources needed to reduce poverty at home and abroad and to address the root causes of war. Peace cannot be achieved by military force alone. Investing in nuclear weapons undercuts the long-term goal of working for a world free from nuclear weapons.

Domestic

Protect programs that alleviate hunger. Over 16 million children live in food-insecure households. **SNAP; Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC); School Lunches; and other food assistance programs** must be protected to eliminate the scourge of hunger.

Meet the unmet housing need. Housing is a human right, yet only 1 in 4 households that needs housing assistance actually receives it. The severe shortage of affordable housing for low-income people continues unabated. Congress must adequately fund homelessness, affordable housing, and community development programs.

Ensure access to life-affirming health care. Health care costs are major drivers of the nation's long-term fiscal challenge, and adjustments will be needed over time. **Medicare** can be reformed in ways that do not harm those who depend on the health care coverage it provides, especially seniors with modest means. Any savings in **Medicaid** should avoid changes that harm low-income beneficiaries directly, either by cutting benefits or eligibility, or indirectly by shifting costs to states. Funding for the **Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)** should be extended to ensure vulnerable children are protected.

Support sufficient decent job creation. Our economy simply is not creating enough decent jobs with just wages. Congress can support work by protecting **workforce development programs.**

Child Nutrition Reauthorization

Later this year, Congress will begin deliberations on the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. Congress must pass a reauthorization that continues to invest in the policies that address childhood hunger, as well as promote nutrition and healthy communities. In 2013, 49 million people in the U.S., including 16 million children, lived in food-insecure households. The Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC); School and Summer Lunches; and other food assistance programs, are essential to help ensure that hungry children, and expecting and breastfeeding mothers, have access to nutritious food throughout the year.

Child Nutrition Principles and Priorities:

- Improve access and flexibility for child nutrition and school-based meal programs to respond to local needs.
- Invest in resources and protect from harmful cuts and changes, the hunger and nutrition programs that feed hungry children, and expectant and breastfeeding mothers, throughout the year.
- Protect recent gains made in eligibility and certification so that more children get the food they need for their healthy development.

Finishing the Job on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

- **A Path to Citizenship** is not an amnesty--those who qualify would have to pay back taxes, a fine, acquire English proficiency, and wait their turn.
- **Family-Based Immigration** would reduce current backlogs in family categories. Oppose transferring permanent visas from the family categories to the employment categories.
- A **“Future Flow” Worker Program** would allow safe, legal entry and job portability while meeting the nation’s economic needs. Low-skill labor deserves appropriate workplace safeguards and an option to earn citizenship.
- **Address the Root Causes of Migration, such as poverty and conflict**, and seek long-term solutions.
- Instead of reversing executive action, pass legislation that supersedes it. We do not oppose a piecemeal approach, as long as all the pieces are there in the end.

Israel-Palestine

- **Support U.S. leadership for peace, and a 2-state solution** to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a secure and recognized Israel living in peace alongside a viable and independent Palestinian State. A 2-state solution will enhance Israeli security, preserve Israel as a Jewish majority democratic state, and give Palestinians the dignity of a state of their own. Peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel would contribute to stability in the region. It would also deny terrorists a highly symbolic issue that they now exploit.
- **Preserve FY 2015 assistance to the Palestinian people** so they can address their humanitarian needs, reduce economic desperation, continue improving security in the West Bank, and strengthen their capacity to build institutions for a future state. The \$400 million in assistance is in the best interests of both Israelis and Palestinians. Oppose Congressional efforts to “punish” Palestinians by cutting funding.

Additional Resources from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Federal Budget Antipoverty Priorities:

Office of International Justice and Peace: uscbb.org/about/international-justice-and-peace/
Office of Domestic Social Development: uscbb.org/about/domestic-social-development

Hunger and Nutrition

uscbb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/agriculture-nutrition-rural-issues/index.cfm

Comprehensive Immigration Reform:

Department of Migration and Refugee Services: uscbb.org/mrs
Justice for Immigrants Campaign: justiceforimmigrants.org

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