



May 17, 2023

Dear Senator/Representative:

As the President and congressional leaders continue discussions this week regarding the debt ceiling, we write on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities USA, and Catholic Relief Services to address the moral and human dimensions of the ongoing budget debate. In light of the national deficit and inflation, Congress faces difficult choices about how to balance needs and resources and allocate burdens and sacrifices. These choices are economic, political, and moral. This important national discussion requires wise bipartisan leadership, clear priorities, and moral integrity.

We write as pastors, service providers, and teachers, not experts or partisans. We acknowledge the difficult challenges that the Congress, Administration, and government at all levels face to get our financial house in order: answering the call of present economic difficulties and uncertainties; fulfilling the demands of justice and moral obligations to future generations; controlling inflation, future debt, and deficits; and protecting the lives and dignity of those who are poor and vulnerable.

As Catholic bishops and leaders, we represent a community that brings both moral principles and everyday experience to this discussion. In promotion of the common good, we defend the preborn, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, educate the young, welcome immigrants and refugees, minister to the sick, and care for our common home, both at home and abroad. As teachers of the faith, we offer several moral criteria to help guide difficult budgetary decisions:

1. Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity and safeguards the conditions for human flourishing.
2. A central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects “the least of these” (Mt 25). The needs of those who are hungry and homeless, 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.

A just framework for future budgets cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor and other vulnerable persons. It requires shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly.

In this letter we do not offer a detailed critique of present legislation, but we ask you to consider the human and moral dimensions of several key choices facing Congress.

We fear the human and social costs of substantial cuts to domestic programs that serve families working to escape poverty, especially food and nutrition, child development and education, and

affordable housing, as well as measures that protect the environment and provide energy security. We similarly fear substantial cuts to international assistance. We caution against indiscriminate reductions to such programs that demonstrate effectiveness in promoting life and dignity and advancing international solidarity and security.

It is imperative that we, as a society, exercise sound vigilance over the welfare of our economy, and that we responsibly steward our resources in the interests of those who are vulnerable and struggling now as well as future generations. In so doing, this budget debate must keep before it those who are jobless, hungry, fleeing violence, homeless or poor.

The Catholic bishops of the United States and undersigned leaders continue to stand ready to work with leaders of both parties for a responsible budget that addresses economic needs, protects poor and vulnerable people, advances the common good, and promotes human life and dignity.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Borys Gudziak
Archbishop of Ukrainian Catholic
Archeparchy of Philadelphia
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Rev. David J. Malloy
Bishop of Rockford
Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace



Mr. Sean Callahan
President
Catholic Relief Services



Sr. Donna Markham, OP, PhD
President and CEO
Catholic Charities, USA