



Circle of Protection
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Press Release

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CONTACTS:

Tim King, **Sojourners**, (202) 631-7763, tking@sojo.net

Sarah Kropp, **National Association of Evangelicals**, (202) 789-1011, skropp@nae.net

Christians on Deficit Reduction: Don't Make the Poor Poorer This Holiday Season

*Christian Leaders, Charity Heads Release Open Letter to Congress,
President Calling for a Budget Deal that Protects the Poor*

Washington, D.C., November 20, 2012 - In the midst of the deficit reduction debate Christian leaders and the heads of some of the nation's largest charitable organizations, including Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army, released an open letter to Congress today calling for a plan that protects low-income families. The letter states:

"We pray during this season, in which we give thanks and offer gifts, that you will advance policies that protect the poor — not ones that make them poorer."

The Christian leaders are members of the Circle of Protection, an unprecedented coordinated campaign that aims to ensure any deficit reduction deal includes protections for low-income people. COP members will call on churches to include letters to their elected officials in addition to their traditional baskets and boxes of food for those in need. They wrote:

"Not only will we ask the members of our congregations and organizations to collect food and clothing for those in need this holiday season, but we will ask that they raise their voices. We will be delivering their letters and concerns to our political leaders with messages calling for a moral budget that protects those who Jesus called "the least of these."

The Christian leaders who signed the letter say the challenges facing their most vulnerable neighbors are already daunting. Congress should not make it harder for families and individuals already struggling to get by.

"As we do all we can to help hardworking families and individuals living in poverty, we need our elected leaders in Washington to do the same," they wrote.

Audio from the call will be available by request. Quotes from signatories and speakers can be read below and the full text of the letter and signers is available [here](#):

Call Speakers:

Galen Carey, Vice President, Government Relations, National Association of Evangelicals: *"The Bible is clear that governments as well as individuals, families, churches and businesses have responsibilities for maintaining a just economy in which all members of the community have the opportunity to contribute and flourish. Charity at the holidays, or even throughout the year, is by itself insufficient. Our social safety net, supported by and available to all Americans, is essential. A short, hand-written letter expressing our commitment to the circle of protection may be the most important gift we give to those struggling at home and abroad this holiday season."*

Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Chair, African American Clergy Network: *"This holiday season, African-American churches and pastors are doing everything they can to help low-income people in their communities. But, it is simply not enough without the governments help to stem the rising tide of poverty."*

Rev. Gabriel Salguero, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition: *"Protecting poor and hungry people was always a part of the Jesus' agenda. It is a moral imperative to protect the most vulnerable in our societies. At the end of the day history will judge nations by how we treat those Jesus called "the least of these." Our*

churches will continue to do our part this holiday season. We urge our elected officials to join us in a bi-partisan effort to provide a "Circle of Protection" for the most vulnerable."

Rev. Jim Wallis, President and CEO, Sojourners: *"We need to find some higher ground in the deficit debates, where both parties can come together. And the high ground in the fiscal debates would be a bi-partisan commitment to protect the poor and vulnerable in our decisions about the nation's financial future. That is what our faith commitments require of us—faith commitment shared on both sides of the aisle. This is not just about a "fiscal cliff" but about the fiscal soul of the nation."*

Additional Signers:

Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World: *"This holiday season, we ask that Congress and the president give poor and hungry people the gift of not cutting programs vital to the least among us. Instead, they should protect these programs and give poor working families a way out of hunger and poverty."*

Bishop Stephen E. Blaire, Bishop of Stockton and Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: *"It is important that Christians help our brothers and sisters who are hungry and living in poverty by providing food especially during the Christmas season. It is also essential that we advocate for budgets and programs that serve the common good and help those living in poverty. The Christian path requires that we walk with both feet- the foot of charity and the foot of justice."*

Bishop John R. Bryant, Senior Bishop, African Methodist Episcopal Church: *"In this season the Christian Church focuses on the great gift of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus taught that he came to bring good news to the poor. In this season of joy we the believers must be that good news."*

Mark Hanson, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church In America (ELCA): *"In a time of difficult budget negotiations, we believe the first commitment is to those who live in poverty. Compromises should not be at the expense of the programs that support those who live with the reality of hunger and poverty. As churches, we will continue to serve those who live in poverty, but we need the leadership of elected officials."*

Kathryn Lohre, President National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.: *"Poverty is the real-life fiscal cliff facing 46 million Americans every day. As people of faith, let us raise our voices to demand that our leaders return to the table not for the sake of elusive bi-partisanship, but for the common good"*

Brian McClaren, Author and Speaker: *"The first Christmas, anticipating the birth of Jesus, Mary sang that God will "fill the poor with good things" and send the rich away hungry. In our nation, we have for decades been faithfully doing the reverse - sending the poor away hungry and giving the rich more and more good things. This Christmas, we hope our national leaders will honor Mary - and her blessed Son - by honoring God's preferential option for the poor."*

Rev. John McCullough, President and CEO, Church World Service: *"Children and adults in the US and abroad who are poor, hungry and vulnerable did not cause the budget deficit, and they need not and should not be made to suffer more as a result. America has long understood the importance of providing a safety net and hope for the poor. This generation of American leadership must accept nothing less."*

Bishop Richard Pates, Bishop of Des Moines and Chairman of Committee on International Justice and Peace, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: *"Sharing unprecedented abundance with our suffering and hungry global sisters and brothers truly reflects the generous American heart."*

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The Circle of Protection is composed of more than 65 heads of denominations, relief and development agencies, and other Christian organizations. For more information, please visit www.circleofprotection.us.