



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

June 21, 2023

Dear President Biden and Members of Congress:

When Jesus spoke with his disciples about the judgment of nations (Matthew 25:31-46), he said that we will be judged by how we respond to people in need—people who are hungry or thirsty, strangers, people who can't afford proper clothes, prisoners. The Circle of Protection includes a broad array of church bodies and ministries. We are working on the frontlines of human need. We are a Matthew 25 coalition, asking our nation's elected leaders to give priority to people in need.

As pandemic response programs have ended, communities across the country are experiencing wave after wave of increasing need. According to Census Bureau data, the percentage of families with children who don't have enough to eat increased by a third between October 2021 and May 2023.

We are grateful that the President and members of Congress from both parties worked together to avert default. A financial crisis would have done far-reaching damage to the U.S. and global economy, with especially harsh consequences for people in need. But we regret that much of the deficit reduction in the Fiscal Responsibility Act will come at the expense of families who are already struggling.

Between now and the end of the year, we will be working with you to secure:

> **Appropriations decisions that give priority to poverty-focused programs such as WIC, housing, and international aid.** Ongoing pressure to reduce non-defense discretionary spending beyond the level agreed in the bipartisan compromise would likely lead to harsh impacts on low-income and hungry people. WIC is a notable example. This bipartisan program for babies, small children, and lactating women needs increased funding to keep up with food prices, meet increased demand, and continue providing fruits and vegetables. We're also especially concerned about international aid. Extreme hunger around the world has more than doubled since 2019, and the United Nations estimates that 49 million people are on the brink of famine. We urge Congress to find ways to provide adequate appropriations for poverty-focused programs.

> **Tax legislation that contributes to a more just society.** Based on biblically grounded principles, we favor increases in taxes from high-income people and corporations in order to maintain needed government functions and address our long-term fiscal challenge. Certainly, Congress should not approve any new corporate tax breaks unless they are paired with an expansion of the Child Tax Credit that is focused on children in low-income families.

> **A Farm Bill that will reduce, not increase, hunger and poverty.** Congress should steer clear of cuts and harmful changes to SNAP food assistance and international food aid. There are also opportunities for poverty-reducing improvements in the Farm Bill.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 urges prayers for “all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” We pray for all of you.

Sincerely:

Rev. Dr. Paul Baxley, Executive Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Rev. Dr. David Beckmann, Dean’s Advisor for Political and Economic Justice, Virginia Theological Seminary; Coordinator, Circle of Protection

Sean Callahan, President and CEO, Catholic Relief Services

John Carr, Founder, Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, Georgetown University

Rev. Eugene Cho, President and CEO, Bread for the World

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church

Rev. Walter Kim, President, National Association of Evangelicals

Rev. Dr. Jo Anne Lyon, General Superintendent Emerita, The Wesleyan Church

Rev. Carlos Malavé, President, Latino Christian National Network

Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD, President and CEO, Catholic Charities USA

Bridget Moix, General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, President and General Secretary, National Council of Churches

Rev. Ted Penton, SJ, Secretary of Justice and Ecology, Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States

Monica Schaap Pierce, PhD, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together

Bishop A.J. Richardson, Senior Bishop, Tenth Episcopal District, African Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. Amy E. Reumann, Senior Director, Witness in Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Dr. Gabriel Salguero, President and Founder, National Latino Evangelical Coalition

Rev. Lori Tapia, National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada

Rev. Adam Russell Taylor, President, Sojourners

Rev. Jim Wallis, Inaugural Chair and Founding Director, Center on Faith and Justice at Georgetown University

Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Convener, National African American Clergy Network; President, Skinner Leadership Institute