

People of Faith United for Justice

March 15, 2011

Madison WI

The State Budget Must Reflect Wisconsin's Values A Statement of *People of Faith United for Justice*

Every budget is a statement of values, especially budgets that are made in hard times.

The State of Wisconsin, like most states, faces very difficult budget decisions. As the national economy slowly recovers, anticipated revenues are not likely to be sufficient to maintain critical public services. To say that we face difficult decisions is not to say that we have no options. As *People of Faith United for Justice*, we call on our Governor and State Legislature to adopt a balanced approach to this challenge, and to remember core principles that should guide us all.

The state budget must protect our most vulnerable residents. As people of faith we believe that the needs of the most vulnerable in our state must be the most important consideration in crafting a state budget. Each of our faith traditions clearly mandates that the top priority of a civilized society is to protect and serve the well-being of “the least” among us. This includes those who are in need of health care, both for physical and mental health needs. It includes children, immigrants, the disabled and the elderly. The state must put the programs and policies that protect those most in need ahead of the desires of the wealthy, the powerful and the politically well-connected.

The state budget must protect the well-being of our communities. To thrive economically, we need government to maintain the infrastructure that makes our state function for the benefit of all. This includes quality schools and universities, police and firefighters and other public employees who deliver needed services, safe roads and a transit system that is accessible to all, and the protection of our natural resources. These are matters that cannot be handled by individuals or narrow interests, but are the public business of state and local government as they protect the common good.

The state has alternatives as it seeks to balance the budget. If Wisconsin seeks to minimize the suffering of the poor and vulnerable, and if it wishes to protect our public structures, it must look at every potential means of balancing the budget. If the state is sincere in promoting shared sacrifice, such sacrifice must extend to every sector, including the wealthy and well-connected. A few examples of alternatives available include:

- Many groups have pointed to significant tax loopholes that exist in our state tax code. Such loopholes should be closed, not expanded.
- There is no evidence that modest increases in sales or income tax (especially for the upper income taxpayers) would damage the state's economy.
- There is, however, significant evidence that Wisconsin drastically overspends in its Corrections budget because it incarcerates far too many non-violent offenders who would be more effectively dealt with in community programs.

People of Faith United for Justice is a collaboration among the Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee, the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin, Madison-area Urban Ministries, the Wisconsin Council of Churches, and WISDOM. These groups have come together to speak on behalf of their shared values in the state budget process.

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