

Budgets are Moral Documents

Our Baptismal Covenant clearly calls each of us to “respect the dignity of every human being.” Our faith traditions teach us that every person is created in God's image and that we are all part of God's family. We are called by God to care for each other, both individually, as a state, and as a nation.

As people of faith and responsible citizens, we must examine our local and national budgets closely to determine whether their provisions are fair and just. We must ask specific questions to discover whether the budget that our Governor and our President is equitable and moral.

In January of 2005 when our national congress was considering a new budget, I supported a statement endorsed by religious leaders throughout the United States that put political budgets into a biblical perspective by claiming that budgets were in fact moral documents. The questions we asked then still stand, and perhaps can be seen as a screen by which we can evaluate the morality of budgets that are currently being set before us. Here are the questions:

1. Does the budget provide those in need with the assistance necessary to build self-reliant, purposeful lives?
2. Does the budget provide adequately for all of God's children, including the poor and sick, the old and very young?
3. Does the budget strengthen the foundations of our country in order to make us safer and more secure?
4. Does the budget protect God's creation, the environment?
5. Does the budget spread its burdens and rewards fairly, or are some groups given special unearned privilege, while others are excluded from America's bounty and opportunity?
6. Does the budget promote justice and equality by providing for basic human needs in health care, education, housing and other areas?

We live at a time of extreme financial austerity. For many of us that is new. For others it is not. What is clearly wrong is to put the burden of austerity primarily on the poor and middle classes. We live at a time when the rich continue to get richer and the poor get poorer. Cutting health care for the most vulnerable people in society and taking away workers' rights to bargain are values that do not square with the traditions of Christianity, Judaism, or other faith groups. As the picket signs outside our state Capitol say, “All religions believe in justice.”

The protests over Walker's attempt to strip public workers of their collective bargaining rights is where the powerful forces of politics are engaged in an enormous struggle. The voices of the low-income parents, the disabled, the elderly, and the children are barely breaking through. As Jim Wallace of Sojourner's magazine has recently said, “When politicians attack the poor, it is not partisan to challenge them; it is simply our Christian responsibility.”

My wife, Ira and I are planning on participating in the “People of Faith United for Justice” at the Capital on Tuesday March 15 which will begin at Bethel Lutheran Church (ELCA) and end with a rally at the Capital and an opportunity to be in conversation with our legislators. If you would like to know more about this event (sponsored by our Wisconsin Council of Churches) or participate in it go to this website <http://www.wichurches.org/advocacy/advocacy-days/> .

Together in Christ,

+Ed Leidel

Bishop Provisional

Episcopal Diocese of Eau Claire