

## ***Recent Letters Echo Bishops' Consistent Message that Federal Budget Must Form 'Circle of Protection' around 'the Least of These'***

*(Taken from the May 2012 issue of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men J/P Alert)*

**WASHINGTON**—As Congress began working on the FY 2013 budget and spending bills this week, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) wrote several letters that repeated and reinforced the bishops' ongoing call to create a "circle of protection" around poor and vulnerable people and programs that meet their basic needs and protect their lives and dignity. The bishops' message calls on Congress and the Administration to protect essential help for poor families and vulnerable children and to put the poor first in budget priorities. The bishops' letters oppose measures that reduce resources for essential safety net programs.

In the letters, Bishops Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, California, and Richard E. Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, chairmen of the Committees on Domestic Justice and Human Development and International Justice and Peace, respectively, urged Congress to resist proposed cuts in hunger and nutrition programs at home and abroad saying that "a just spending bill cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor and vulnerable persons."

On April 4, Bishop Blaire cautioned that "at a time when the need for assistance from [affordable housing] programs is growing, cutting funds for them could cause thousands of individuals and families to lose their housing and worsen the hardship of thousands more in need of affordable housing." He also reminded Congress that the Catholic community is one of the largest private, nonprofit providers of affordable housing in the country and is deeply involved in meeting the health housing and nutrition needs of families across the nation. Bishops Blaire and Pates reaffirmed the "moral criteria to guide these difficult budget decisions" outlined in their March 6 budget letter:

1. Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity.
2. A central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects "the least of these" (Matthew 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.

Just solutions, however, must require shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and fairly addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs.

In April 16 and April 17 letters to the House Agriculture Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee addressing cuts required by the budget resolution, Bishop Blaire said "The House-passed budget resolution fails to meet these moral criteria." Bishop Blaire also wrote that cuts to nutrition programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP- food stamps) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC) will hurt hungry children, poor families, low-income workers and other vulnerable people. Additionally, he wrote that if cuts

to the federal budget need to be made, savings should first be found in programs that target more affluent and powerful interests.

The housing letter is available at: [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/housing-homelessness/upload/Letter-to-House-Appropriations-on-FY-2013-2012-04-04.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/housing-homelessness/upload/Letter-to-House-Appropriations-on-FY-2013-2012-04-04.pdf)

The SNAP/food stamps bill letter is available at: [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/hunger-food-nutrition/upload/Letter-to-House-Committee-on-Agriculture-2012-04-16.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/hunger-food-nutrition/upload/Letter-to-House-Committee-on-Agriculture-2012-04-16.pdf)

The agriculture spending letter is available at: [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/hunger-food-nutrition/upload/Joint-Letter-to-Senate-2012-04-16.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/hunger-food-nutrition/upload/Joint-Letter-to-Senate-2012-04-16.pdf)

The Child Tax Credit letter is available at: [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/poverty/domestic/upload/Letter-to-House-Ways-and-Means-on-CTC-2012-04-17.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/poverty/domestic/upload/Letter-to-House-Ways-and-Means-on-CTC-2012-04-17.pdf)

The March 6 letter on the federal budget is available at: [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/federal-budget/upload/Letter-to-Congress-Federal-Budget-2012-03-06.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/federal-budget/upload/Letter-to-Congress-Federal-Budget-2012-03-06.pdf)