

'Circle of Protection' fights budget cuts

by [Nicole Neroulis](#) in the [May 31, 2011](#) issue

Catholic, evangelical, mainline Protestant, black and Latino Christian leaders have formed a "Circle of Protection" against U.S. cuts to poverty-fighting programs, gearing up for a high-stakes budget battle as Congress reconvenes.

While recognizing the need for "fiscal responsibility and shared sacrifice," the 50 leaders argue that Christian values require them "to resist budget cuts that undermine the lives, dignity, and rights of poor and vulnerable people."

"Every budget decision has to be assessed on whether it protects or threatens human life or dignity," said Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, California, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' domestic policy committee. "The central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects the least of our brothers and sisters, the needs of those who are hungry or homeless, those who are without work, those who live in poverty."

The Circle of Protection campaign will range from lobbying elected officials to mobilizing grassroots efforts in the pews. It includes representatives from the National Association of Evangelicals, National Council of Churches, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and Catholic Charities USA.

More than 36,000 activists and two dozen members of Congress protested the current budget cuts by participating in a hunger fast that ended on Easter, led by Circle of Protection members Ambassador Tony Hall, executive director of the Alliance to End Hunger, and *Sojourner* founder Jim Wallis.

Deeper

cuts to programs that feed, shelter and provide medical care for people at home and abroad are unacceptable, the coalition argues, especially while areas like military spending, tax breaks for vacation homes and corporate subsidies remain intact.

Commented Barbara

Williams-Skinner of the National African American Clergy Network:

"Cutting the budget on the backs of the poor, the vulnerable and sick and children without spreading the sacrifices is simply not worthy of a great nation like ours."

While some parishioners may vote

conservatively on social issues, Circle of Protection leaders believe that Christian economic principles go beyond political affiliation and partisan conflict. "This is about faith, and what God requires of us," Wallis said. "Our duty before God is to defend the people that Jesus called the 'least of these.'" —RNS