

Demonstrators for poor arrested inside Capitol

News in the [August 23, 2011](#) issue

Making pleas to Washington to avoid drastic spending cuts that would hit the poor and most vulnerable hardest, mainline Protestant leaders, Catholic bishops, progressive evangelicals and other faith leaders tried petitions, joint statements and meetings with lawmakers as the budget deficit deadline approached.

On July 28, several days before the default deadline, some advocates reverted to a modest act of civil disobedience. Eleven protesters, who sat in a circle singing songs and praying inside the Capitol Rotunda and who for an hour refused to disperse, were arrested by police.

The 11 included organizer Bob Edgar, a former general secretary of the National Council of Churches and now president of Common Cause. Another was Michael Livingston, director of the NCC's poverty initiative, who lamented that Congress was paralyzed by "toxic partisan politics [and] protecting corporations and wealthy individuals while shredding the safety net for millions."

Jim Winkler, who heads the UMC's social action agency, told the United Methodist News Service, "We felt that we needed to do something dramatic to illustrate that people of faith want this crisis resolved."

Even as Congress and the White House appeared to avert the immediate debt crisis, Winkler—a veteran administrator in Washington—says he advises church members that lawmakers pay attention to phone calls, e-mails and letters they get daily. "They are scared to death of running into a firestorm or an uprising from people back home," he said.