

Charges dropped against 'Rotunda 11' protesters

by [Josef Kuhn](#) in the [November 15, 2011](#) issue

A city court in Washington, D.C., has dropped charges against a group of religious and civic leaders who were arrested in July during a prayer vigil for the poor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. The vigil, held at the height of the summer's debt ceiling debate, was aimed at stopping Congress from cutting funding to programs that benefit the most needy in the U.S. and abroad.

"We are guilty of one charge: the promotion of social righteousness," said J. Herbert Nelson, director of public witness for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). One of several clergy among the 11 people arrested for refusing to leave the rotunda, Nelson called the vigil an act of "civil disobedience."

The court-approved settlement, released October 11, dismissed misdemeanor charges of "intention to disrupt Congress" as long as the group stays out of the Capitol for six months and submits to a drug screening.

"While we accept the agreement to resolve the charges against us, we do not regret or apologize for our actions," said Bob Edgar, president of the advocacy organization Common Cause and a former general secretary of the National Council of Churches.

Jennifer Butler, executive director of the advocacy group Faith in Public Life, said the Rotunda 11 group has aims similar to the burgeoning Occupy Wall Street movement around the country. "We are working for an economy that protects the least of these and where the very wealthy pay their fair share," Butler said. "We pray for members of Congress that they will repent and turn to the

common good." —RNS