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Office of the President

Most Reverend Timothy M. Dolan
Archbishop of New York
President

May 18, 2011

The Honorable Paul Ryan
United States House of Representatives
1st District, Wisconsin
Washington Office
1113 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-4901

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Thank you for your kind and enlightening letter of April 29, 2011.

I deeply appreciate your letter's assurances of your continued attention to the guidance of Catholic social justice in the current delicate budget considerations in Congress. As you allude to in your letter, the budget is not just about numbers. It reflects the very values of our nation. As many religious leaders have commented, budgets are moral statements.

As is so clear from your correspondence, the light of our faith – anchored in the Bible, the tradition of the Church, and the Natural Law – can help illumine and guide solid American constitutional wisdom. Thus I commend your letter's attention to the important values of fiscal responsibility; sensitivity to the foundational role of the family; the primacy of the dignity of the human person and the protection of all human life; a concrete solicitude for the poor and the vulnerable, especially those who are hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty; and putting into practice the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, here at home and internationally within the context of a commitment to the common good shared by government and other mediating institutions alike.

I am grateful as well for your letter's attention to the priorities I expressed in my letter of January 14, 2011 to all the members of Congress, as well as to specific concerns raised recently by my two brother bishops, Stephen Blaire, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Howard Hubbard, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace, in their letter of April 13, 2011 about the budget proposed by the House of Representatives which also expressed the very principles mentioned above.

It is clear that all of this correspondence reflects recognition of the foundational principles at work. Within the given parameters of such principles, people of good will might offer and emphasize various policy proposals that reflect their experience and expertise. The principles of Catholic social teaching contain truths that need to be applied. Thus, one must always exercise prudential judgment in applying these principles while never contradicting the intrinsic values that they protect.

A singularly significant part of our duty as pastors is to insist that the cries of the poor are heard, and that the much needed reform leading to financial discipline that is recognized by all never adds further burdens upon those who are poor and most vulnerable, nor distracts us from our country's historic consideration of the needs of the world's suffering people. The late Blessed Pope John Paul II was clear about this when he said: "When there is question of defending the rights of individuals, the defenseless and the poor have a claim to special consideration" (*Centesimus Annus*, 10, citing *Rerum Novarum*, 37). In any transition that seeks to bring new proposals to current problems in order to build a better future, care must be taken that those currently in need not be left to suffer. I appreciate your assurance that your budget would be attentive to such considerations and would protect those at risk in the processes and programs of such a transition. While appreciating these assurances, our duty as pastors will motivate our close attention to the manner in which they become a reality.

The principles of subsidiarity and solidarity are interrelated to one another. The late Pope reminded us that, "... *the principle of subsidiarity* must be respected: a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good. (*Centesimus Annus*, 48)." Thus you rightly pointed out Pope John Paul's comments on the limits of what he termed the "Social Assistance State."

Your letter is correct in observing that the Church makes an essential contribution to society when she raises up moral principles to help guide and inform decisions about public policy in a compelling way. We bishops are very conscious that we are pastors, never politicians. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us, it is the lay faithful who have the specific charism of political leadership and decision (*Lumen Gentium*, 31; *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 13). The high call to public service which you have nobly answered entitles you and all our elected officials to our respect and constant prayer. Thanks to you and your colleagues for accepting that call.

This exchange of correspondence will be, I trust, but the beginning of an ongoing dialogue, in service, I pray, of the country we love and the religious convictions that have always inspired sound citizenship and generous public service. If that dialogue might be furthered by meeting with Bishops Blaire, Hubbard and me, we would be pleased to make ourselves available.

With prayerful best wishes and renewed gratitude, I am,

Faithfully,


+ Most Reverend Timothy M. Dolan
Archbishop of New York
President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops