

Statement on the President's FY 2006 Budget

Rev. John H. Thomas, President and General Minister, United Church of Christ
(given by Rev. Ron Stief, Director, UCC Washington DC Office)

It was the hope of many of us in the United Church of Christ that the President would use the FY06 federal budget to showcase how government could enact the values of compassion, hope and justice spoken by tens of millions of voters in the 2004 election. We believe that there is no more important moral value in this country than supporting families, especially those who are poor. But, the President's budget is anything but good news for the poor. If enacted as is, it will dig an even deeper hole of despair for those currently caught in the day to day struggle to make ends meet.

Our UCC Washington DC Office formally opposed the 2001 tax cuts because they disproportionately benefited wealthy Americans and were projected to plunge our nation into debt. Now, in this budget, we are beginning to see the negative impacts of this loss of revenue as pressure mounts to cut programs which will exact an even bigger moral deficit in this nation. Proposed cuts to critical safety net programs such as Medicaid, Food Stamps, Veterans' Health Services, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, and the Earned Income Tax Credit, among many others, signal a new era of government irresponsibility.

In today's press conference, we wish to address how many of those caught in this struggle to escape (or avoid) poverty are women. Despite the fact that nearly one in five (18%) of all women ages 18-64 currently have no health insurance, the Administration has proposed to cut Medicaid by \$60 billion over ten years. We are dismayed that the President's budget projects reducing the rolls of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children by 660,000 in 2010. The Food Stamp program would be cut by \$1.1 billion over 10 years.

This budget holds back women who are trying to establish careers or working to head their households. Rental assistance vouchers, 84 percent of which go to female-headed households, will be cut back, eliminating housing assistance for 370,000 families by 2010. High school vocational education, which has been a first step for women and girls to gain jobs and careers in areas where they have been traditionally excluded, are entirely eliminated in this budget.

We are alarmed at the direction this nation would take under this budget, and call on Congress to resist using global spending caps, outright cuts or the budget reconciliation process to enact it in its current form. We pray that our President considers what he means when he uses the words "values," and that he finds room in his heart for the millions of our nation's poor who will be hurt by this budget.