

Op/Ed

BRINGING MORALITY INTO BUDGET PROCESS

By **The Record**
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Last week, a broad coalition of San Joaquin County religious leaders released a statement urging state lawmakers to consider the poor when deciding the fate of the state budget. It was signed by representatives of more than 40 Christian churches and Stockton's Temple Israel.

A list of those who signed as well as a list of legislators the group is asking be contacted about the budget is available online at recordnet.com.

Here is the group's statement:

Statement from San Joaquin Valley religious leaders

July 2008

We, the undersigned, are religious leaders serving dioceses, synods, conferences, synagogues, churches, parishes, districts and congregations in the Central Valley of California. We care deeply about the families, businesses, farms, workers and public institutions that make up our community. Our various faith traditions call us to be especially attentive to those who are most vulnerable, those least able to care for themselves, those who live in poverty and deprivation. Many of our churches have programs and emergency services focused on those in need.

This statement has emerged from our conversations and experience with individuals and families in our various communities of faith. Families needing assistance are experiencing longer lines for simple necessities like food and health care. They find little assistance for rent and house payments. Their health care insurance may be being cut or eliminated. Some express shame and/or anger over losing their homes to foreclosure or jobs that once provided a living wage. And now, just when they most need the assistance of state or county services, the state's budget crisis has compounded their challenges. We are seeing increasing frustration and pain.

As religious leaders, we have come to believe that the situation being faced by increasing numbers of people in our community demands a common response from the faith community.

In particular, we are dismayed and disappointed at the way some of our state political leaders are dealing with the financial crisis. Our state faces a \$15 billion deficit, and yet the major solution that has been put forth to date is to reduce or cut services for those least able to pay and an unrealistic proposal to borrow against future lottery income.

From our perspective, these proposals being promoted with the public are shortsighted and will:

Drive our state even more deeply into debt.

Do more harm to already struggling local businesses.

Threaten the health and security of working families.

And attempt to balance the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable in our community - children, seniors, the disabled and the working poor.

We believe these solutions reveal an impoverishment of vision and values that weakens California by passing on to future generations a crushing debt and forcing those least able to pay to bear the burden of reduced revenues.

We therefore call on leaders on both sides of the aisle, Republican and Democratic, to create a budget that is fair and just, provides for the common good and reflects the best values and beliefs of Californians.

To that end, we offer the following principles for creating a "moral budget" for the state of California:

A moral budget will:

Provide opportunities for all Californians to secure the basic needs for themselves and their families:

Food, clothing and housing.

Safety.

Health care.

Educational opportunity.

Gainful and meaningful employment.

Protect the health, safety and security of the most vulnerable in our society: children, families, seniors, the disabled, orphans and the working poor.

Assure sustained investment in education, health care, infrastructure, safety and business development.

Present a fair and balanced budget solution that calls on all citizens of California to invest in and be responsible for the common good by:

Closing loopholes in the tax code.

Reducing spending where possible.

And increasing revenues where necessary.

We call on the governor, state senators and Assembly members who have been elected by the people to use these principles as they make decisions for the common good of all Californians - for the whole community.

We call on all citizens of good will to join us in support of these principles and ask that they also communicate with elected officials to communicate the desire for a fair and just approach to resolving the budget crisis in our state.