

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110
Phone: 216.736.3700
Fax: 216.736.3703



Mari Castellanos

Witness for Justice #538

July 25, 2011

Forgive us our debts...

Mari Castellanos

I grew up reciting the Lord's Prayer in Spanish. In the Spanish translation of the original text we ask God to, "forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors." When I came to the States as a youngster, we still prayed in school every morning. So, I was confused by the King James language: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Why would we ask God to forgive us for stepping on somebody else's property? Trespassing is most commonly used as a legal term for an unauthorized entry upon the land of another. Google will tell you it means "intrude", "infringe", or "encroach"; not everyday offenses. Most folks don't go into their neighbor's home uninvited. Why then should we be constantly asking God to forgive us our trespasses? The answer is that the term comes from the language used in the British Court 400 years ago, when it was used in a much broader sense. Modern Bible scholarship tells us that the terms used by Matthew were "debts" and "debtor," while Luke asks God to "forgive our sins as we forgive those who are indebted to us."

We Americans are serious debtors. Many of us carry large personal debts like mortgages, car loans and credit cards, and our nation

owes trillions of dollars. The weight of this debt has a serious impact on our economy, as more and more of our revenue needs to go to pay for what we owe. Congress and the President are at odds about the federal budget. Republicans and Democrats have different ideas about where to make the cuts in the budget and opposite views on raising taxes.

Those who hold our national debt don't necessarily see eye to eye with God on payment plans and debt forgiveness. It is unlikely that any of the nations and institutions to whom we owe all those trillions of dollars will tear up the chit. Why would anyone forgive the debts of the wealthiest nation? Therefore, we need to cut our spending. This seems reasonable enough. The question is where to make those cuts? Many members of Congress are determined to cut Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and many programs that protect the most vulnerable of our citizens to bring down the debt. An alternative would be to take away some tax breaks from the wealthiest of all Americans in order to preserve the social safety net. But the same members of Congress who want to cut social programs are adamantly opposed to anything that remotely resembles a tax hike, even on the tiniest percentage of Americans: those at the very top of the economic ladder.

You can make a difference by telling your member of Congress that it was not the poor who brought us to this economic crisis. The poor should not bear the burden of solving it. Call the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 to be connected with your Representative's office and demand that s/he defends those social programs that protect the most vulnerable Americans.

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,300 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.