



WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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“.....and How Are the Children?”

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Children’s Sabbath, scheduled for October 18-20, is a designated time of education, reflection, and action among many religious communities. When Children’s Sabbath comes around each year, I am reminded of two important messages. An African proverb, “and how are the children?” and a quote by distinguished theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said, “The test of the morality of a society is how it treats its children.” This year, I would have to confess that our nation, the richest nation in the world, has failed this moral test.

I wrote a Witness for Justice over five years ago asking that we pay attention to the needs of our children here and throughout the world. When reflecting on that message, I must sadly say that it appears that the well-being of our children is even more at risk that it was then. While our elected Congressional leaders engage in back-biting, stubborn rhetoric, children are the objects of a pending financial calamity.

For example, let’s consider the numbers of federal employees who have been furloughed in the government shutdown, now in its second week. These neighbors are often the sole wage earners in families; they are people who need this monthly paycheck to take care of essential expenses such as rent, food, heat and lights, day care, etc. They are parents and caregivers on whom our children depend.

If the federal government cannot continue to borrow adequate dollars to meet our existing needs, millions of children will be affected. Imagine being one of the nearly 16 million children who are part of households that struggle to put food on the table. Think about the 24 million children who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This may seem like a lot of children, but we must keep in mind that these programs only are able serve a portion of those in need. These basic needs are not the only programs at huge risk if Congress does not reach agreement about the debt ceiling.

It seems to come down to is the question – what is the purpose of government? Moreover, what is the responsibility of government that is based on the values of democracy? The argument we hear from our elected leaders is whether the government should be responsible for the common good. Well, I suggest that the real question is whose good do we care about most? It certainly is not the children, unless of course, the child is fortunate enough to live in a household with adequate resources to meet their basic needs.

The democracy I believe in goes beyond the investment in basic constitutional rights where our freedom of speech and the right to bear arms are readily touted. The democracy I yearn for is one that establishes a high value for the common good; a common good that ensures that public policies support our mutual responsibility for the basic human needs of all people, especially the children.

Children are at the heart and soul of a responsible society. It is time for our elected leaders to stop and listen long enough to find out how the children really are.

In honor of Children's Sabbath, take action and add your voice:

<https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=1205>

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