

## **The Gospel and Poverty: Next Steps**

When leaders of all the families of U.S. Christianity first gathered as Christian Churches Together (CCT) in 2007, they discovered strong consensus that God is calling our churches and nation to strengthen efforts to address the scandal of widespread poverty in the United States and around the world. They stressed the deep connection between the gospel of God's love for all people in Jesus Christ and economic justice for people struggling with hunger and poverty.

Overcoming poverty, especially in our own country, has turned out to be an abiding area of consensus at all the annual CCT meetings. CCT leaders have urged bipartisan action, proposed a specific goal to reduce poverty, and highlighted priority areas of policy. Over the last few years, CCT has helped diverse Christian leaders develop shared understandings on two related issues – immigration reform and mass incarceration.

In the U.S. budget debate of the last three years, many of CCT's leaders have worked together to maintain a Circle of Protection around public programs focused on poor people in this country and around the world. In the end, Congress and the President have reduced deficits, and the push for deep cuts in poverty-focused federal programs has been largely diverted to other budget-cutting measures. The Circle of Protection initiative also succeeded in getting both candidates for President in 2012 to make video statements in response to the question, "What would you propose to provide help and opportunity to hungry and poor people in our country and around the world?" The Circle of Protection steering group plans to ask Christian leaders to urge all presidential candidates in the primary and general elections of 2015 and 2016 to provide video responses to this question. People across the country will also be offered resources to help them raise attention to hunger and poverty in congressional elections. The year 2017 will give us a new president, a new Congress, and thus a new opportunity to make hunger and poverty a national priority.

Thankfully, the world as a whole continues to make unprecedented progress against hunger, poverty, and disease. The number of the world's people in extreme poverty has been cut in half since 1990. The economic crisis that began in 2008 has been a major setback, certainly in this country. But an international consensus is now emerging around the goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030. From the perspective of faith, the world's progress against poverty is an example of our loving God moving in our own history, and we welcome ambitious goals for our own country as well as the rest of the world. Making hunger and poverty a U.S. national priority is crucial to the progress that is possible worldwide as well as in the United States.

Therefore, leaders from all the families of Christianity gathered together as Christian Churches Together in 2014, resolve to:

- encourage Christian communions, denominations, and organizations to promote realistic and ambitious goals for ending poverty in our country and worldwide – perhaps joining the world community in working to end extreme poverty and hunger by 2030 and helping to make hunger and poverty a priority for the U.S. government by 2017;
- encourage Christian leaders to join together in asking all presidential candidates in 2015-2016 to make video statements about how they propose to provide help and opportunity to hungry and poor people in our country and around the world; and
- request the participants and staff of CCT to help promote and share information about these efforts.