



**Prepared Remarks on the Proposed FY 2018 Budget
Circle of Protection Press Conference
June 21, 2017
By Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland Tune**

Washington, D.C.—Good morning. My name is Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland Tune and I am the director of the Ecumenical Poverty Initiative. I am grateful to be able to stand before you as a part of the larger Christian family to talk about how the fiscal year 2018 budget will negatively impact the most vulnerable in our nation. Our presence today is a sign and a signal that we refuse to be silent about a budget that would devastate individuals, families and communities.

To be clear, when we say the most vulnerable or the “least of these” we are not talking about numbers on a page. We are talking about the elderly – grandmothers and grandfathers, deacons, trustees and ushers, children’s ministry workers, community leaders and those who have worked for decades to provide for themselves and their families. We are talking about children and youth who were born with purpose and possibilities, who have their whole lives ahead of them, future pastors and lay leaders, lawyers, teachers, journalists and members of Congress, those who will determine the future our nation. We’re talking about those who have disabilities and those who work hard every day – sometimes two and three jobs to make ends meet and provide for their families but get paid low wages that do not cover the high cost of living in most cities and towns in our nation. We are talking about people, those created in the image and likeness of God, just like we are. Those are the vulnerable people who will be hurt and I would even say devastated if this proposed budget were to pass. We always say that budgets are moral documents that reflect our values. What does this budget say about us, about who we are and what our values are? Many of us have called this budget immoral and unjust. I would have to go even further than that. I would call it mean, vicious, callous, cruel and yes, because of the devastating impacts it would have on individuals, families and entire communities, I would even call it evil – perhaps not in intent, but certainly in effect.

This proposed budget makes deep and severe cuts to safety net, anti-hunger and anti-poverty programs – programs that have been proven to help people get out of poverty and avoid financial devastation. It cuts programs that help the elderly avoid destitution. It cuts education, afterschool programs, TRIO student services and GEAR Up that helps people from low-income families go to college on the one hand, and job training programs on the other. It makes deep and vicious cuts to Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (food stamps). It eliminates Community Development Block Grants, which have helped to revitalize communities across this nation. It slashes housing vouchers that help provide affordable and adequate shelter for families. And, it cuts Meals on Wheels for crying out loud! It cuts disability insurance and attaches unreasonable work requirements that people who are looking for a job, have to have a job in order to be eligible for health benefits and food stamps. It undermines care for God’s creation and disproportionately will have negative impacts on African American and Latino communities.

This proposed budget will starve the hungry, jeopardize the lives of the sick and sanction the polluting of the water we drink and the air we breathe. All of this, to give tax breaks to the wealthiest in our nation. If I were to use a biblical example, I would say that this budget is one that requires the poor, elderly, low and moderate income families to make bricks without straw!

But, we stand today, unified in our call for members of Congress to reject this budget! We stand today to speak out against the devastation that this proposed budget will surely cause. We stand, today, to say this budget legislates evil and mistreats the poor. We stand today, unwilling to be silent, and asking our brothers and sisters in Christ to make their voices heard. We want them to join us in letting Congress know that we expect them to do what is just and moral and to vote against this budget.

Thank you.

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