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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Joint Statement from Five Mainline Protestant Leaders
“Congress Should Reject This Budget”

In response to the FY 2006 Budget Conference Report to be considered by Congress and as a follow-up to a March 8, 2005 press conference calling the President’s FY ’06 Budget “unjust,” five mainline protestant leaders issued the following statement:

On March 8 we, as leaders of the Episcopal Church USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society, issued a joint statement questioning the priorities of President Bush’s 2006 Federal Budget. We remembered the Gospel story of Lazarus and the rich man* and noted that the 2006 budget had much for the rich man but little for Lazarus. It was our hope that Congress would take action on behalf of “Lazarus.” Sadly, all indications are that that has not been the case. Therefore, today we call upon Congress to reject this budget and go back to the drawing boards.

We believe our federal budget is a moral document and should reflect our historic national commitment for those in our own country who suffer from hunger, lack of education, jobs, housing, and medical care as well as concern for our global community. There are good programs that can help solve all of these problems. We know, we have seen them at work and we our doing our part with our own programs. But we cannot do it alone. Government must be a partner in providing opportunities for our fellow women and men to pursue their God given gifts. We commend those who attempted to improve the FY ’06 budget by adding funds for Medicaid, education, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, and international family planning. We regret that the speed with which this document is being brought to the floor does not allow time for the careful examination such a document requires.

As we view the FY ’06 Federal Budget through our lens of faith this budget, on balance, continues to ask our nation’s working poor to pay the cost of a prosperity in which they may never share. We believe this budget remains unjust. It does not adequately address the more than 36 million Americans living below the poverty line, 45 million without health insurance, or the 13 million hungry children. Worldwide it neither provides sufficient development assistance nor adequately addresses the Global AIDS pandemic. Therefore, we ask Congress to reject this budget and begin anew.

We conclude today, as we did March 8, by asking that together we “pledge ourselves to creating a nation in which economic policies are infused with the spirit of the man who began his public ministry almost 2,000 years ago by proclaiming that God had anointed him “to bring good news to the poor.”

Signed by:

The Most Reverend Frank T. Griswold

Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, USA

The Right Reverend Mark Hanson

Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American

The Reverend Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick

Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.)

The Reverend John H. Thomas

General Minister and President, United Church of Christ

Mr. James Winkler

General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church

**There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames"*