

## Good Steward Newsletter – August 2011

August 1, 2011 by [O'Meara Ferguson](#)

### The Debt Crisis: A Nice Mess, Indeed



The comedian Oliver Hardy was known to wrinkle his nose, purse his lips and proclaim to his partner, Stan Laurel, “Well, here’s another nice mess you’ve gotten me into!”

If Laurel and Hardy were with us today, they might offer similar observations about the current debt crisis in Washington, D.C.

Unfortunately the current crisis is no laughing matter. Too much is at stake, and as this article went to press, the matter was still unresolved. Congress and the president may yet pull a rabbit out of the nation’s hat, but the process for getting there will not have been encouraging.

While our elected officials play politics, people are suffering; jobs are not being created; genuine health care reform eludes us. Real leadership—of a bipartisan nature—is nowhere to be found. A nice mess, indeed.

The Catholic Church has important insights to contribute to this discussion.

We begin with basic moral principles—the dignity of human persons, the common good, the value of work and the importance of family life as the foundation of human society. We add to the Church’s teaching on social and economic justice a profound insight into stewardship as a way of life.

What does stewardship have to say to the current debate in Washington?

Everything.

All that we have as individuals, families, communities and as a nation has been given to us by God to nurture, develop and share generously with others out of gratitude to God and out of a sense of responsibility for one another and for the world in which we live and work.

We are stewards—not owners—of the material and spiritual gifts that we have received. Our job as stewards is to take care of—and share—the bountiful gifts God has entrusted to our care. We must do our work responsibly because we will be held accountable for the result!

As stewards, we should not spend more than we earn. Responsible efforts to balance the federal budget are good stewardship. They promote the common good.

As stewards, we should have a particular concern for the poor and for families who are struggling to find work and to support themselves in an uncertain economy. Cuts in spending should not be callous or insensitive to the real needs of suffering people. Deficit reduction does not have to be mean-spirited or uncaring. Let’s help each other get back on our feet and become self-supporting, productive members of society.

As stewards, we recognize that good health is a gift from God to be treasured and protected. Access to affordable, life-affirming health care remains an urgent national priority.

We recognize that the rising costs of Medicare, Medicaid and other entitlement programs need to be addressed, but we urge that the needs of the poor, working families and vulnerable people be protected. Cost-cutting proposals should not simply shift health care costs from the federal government to the states or directly to beneficiaries. Such measures could leave more elderly, working families and poor people without the assurance of adequate and affordable health care.

As stewards, we should work together collaboratively. Ideological warfare does not serve the common good. We can—and do—have differences of opinion about solutions to our nation’s economic problems.

But unless we can work together for the common good, we run the risk of making a bad situation worse. Good stewardship requires unity and solidarity. This is never easy, but it is essential that our elected officials find common ground and refuse to give in to the increasingly discordant voices of chaos and disunity that are all around us today.

As stewards, we believe that all proposals effecting our economy should be reviewed in light of their impact on ordinary citizens—especially the poor and marginalized members of our community. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* teaches: “Just, efficient and effective public financing will ... encourage employment growth, ... sustain business and non-profit activities,” and help guarantee “systems of social insurance and protection that are designed above all to protect the weakest members of society.”

Representatives of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued the following statement last spring:

“The Catholic bishops of the United States stand ready to work with leaders of both parties for a budget that reduces future deficits, protects poor and vulnerable people, advances the common good, and promotes human life and dignity.

“The debate on the federal budget FY 2012 will raise important and substantive issues for discussion, and at the same time raise serious concerns about how budget proposals meet the criterion of adequately protecting poor and vulnerable people.

“The moral measure of this budget debate is not which party wins or which powerful interests prevail, but rather how those who are jobless, hungry, homeless or poor are treated. Their voices are too often missing in these debates, but they have the most compelling moral claim on our consciences and our common resources.”

Authentic economic, political and moral leadership are needed now more than ever—for the common good and for the sake of the individuals, families and communities in all regions of the United States.

Let’s pray that our elected officials in Washington can truly come together as responsible stewards of all our nation’s gifts.