

May 12, 2011

John Garvey
President
The Catholic University of America
620 Michigan Ave., NE
Washington, DC 20064

Dear President Garvey:

As students of the National Catholic School of Social Service Master of Social Work (MSW) program, we hereby express our disappointment in The Catholic University of America's choice of Representative John Boehner as the featured commencement speaker. To choose a political figure as polarizing as House Speaker Boehner serves only to divide our university community when we should be uniting to celebrate our accomplishments. We are proud of our university, our dedicated faculty, and our hard-working fellow graduates. However, Speaker Boehner's central role in the commencement program is not a fitting reflection of these accomplishments. The university community deserves better.

All that we have learned and experienced as MSW students and members of the university community compels us to speak out against the university administration's selection of a commencement speaker who, through his actions and words, contradicts many values fundamental to the Catholic faith, including compassion, social justice, and unity. The President Emeritus of our University, The Reverend William Byron, named preferential protection for the poor and vulnerable as one of the principles of Catholic social teaching. Dividing our society into rich and poor leaves the least of our society powerless. We are called to give a preferential option for the poor for the common good of society. Psalm 72 calls the righteous leader to protect the poor: "He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy. [. . .] He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight." Speaker Boehner has not been that righteous leader for our country.

The recent damage done to our nation's social and economic safety net by Speaker Boehner and his colleagues in the House of Representatives has the potential to devastate poor families and individuals across the country and beyond our borders. In their letter to the House of Representatives, the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops offered several moral criteria to help guide difficult budgetary decisions, including:

- “A central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects ‘the least of these’ (Matthew 25). The needs of those who are hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty should come first.”
- “Government and other institutions have a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.”

Ignoring these guidelines and, we believe, the teachings of his faith, Speaker Boehner’s budget priorities have hurt rather than helped “the least of these.” The Fiscal Year 2012 budget resolution, championed by the Speaker, severely cut funding for food assistance programs; low-income child care and early education programs such as Head Start; low-income health care programs including Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP); tax credits and income support; low-income education and training, shelters and services for people who are homeless, child maltreatment prevention; and refugee assistance. Additional cuts were made to numerous international programs that support sustainable development, peacekeeping and the provision of basic necessities like food and health care. The House of Representatives clearly did not give moral priority to these life-saving programs.

As social work students, we work with individuals and families who are vulnerable and poor, many of whom depend on Medicaid, Medicare and other social services to live their lives with dignity. House Speaker Boehner’s budget priorities have increased the burdens on the backs of the poorest among us. These individuals and families will continue to hold their heads up in the face of an even bigger struggle ahead to maintain adequate housing and to feed and clothe their children, but the negative impact will be far-reaching for future generations.

According to Catholic social teachings, “the way society responds to the needs of the poor through its public policies is the litmus test of its justice or injustice.” But again, Speaker Boehner’s legislative record has often contradicted Catholic teachings. This includes his opposition of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act (H.R. 5281), the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the Education Jobs and Medicaid Assistance Act, the Unemployment Compensation Extension Act of 2010, and the Health Care and Education Affordability Reconciliation Act of 2010—all of which would have provided badly needed assistance to poor families. Additionally, House Speaker Boehner voted in favor of the Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act, attempting to eliminate programs that provide more affordable and equitable health care to all Americans.

The Catholic University of America has a strong tradition of faculty and alumni who have infused their work with Catholic values. For example, Monsignor John Ryan, a moral theologian and influential social justice advocate who spent nearly 25 years as a professor at Catholic University after receiving his doctoral degree here, was dedicated to the rights of the working

poor, advocating for distributive justice and the minimum wage. He was dedicated to his principles—those of the social work profession and the Catholic social teachings—despite political, church, and popular backlash at times. Figures such as Monsignor Ryan prove that it is possible to hold a leadership position while staying true to Catholic social teachings and serving to create a more just and egalitarian society. We do not believe that Speaker Boehner has followed this example.

In closing, we ask: does the Catholic University administration really believe that Speaker Boehner is the example of Catholic leadership we should aspire to follow as we make our way into the world? As social service professionals committed to advocacy and justice with people who are socio-economically marginalized, we ask the administration to consider inviting commencement speakers who more accurately reflect the values of Catholic social teachings and social justice.

cc: Speaker John Boehner, U. S. House of Representatives
The Washington Post

Sincerely,

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|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Jean L. Audain | 14. Mark Davis |
| 2. Adrian Ballard | 15. Tyler DeLeon |
| 3. Jennifer Barry | 16. Allie Dryden |
| 4. Melanie M. Becker | 17. Laurieann Duarte |
| 5. Alejandro Berthe-Suarez | 18. Petra Duncan |
| 6. Jennifer Bonsall | 19. Melissa Eckels |
| 7. Angela Brown | 20. Thomas Elwood |
| 8. Rachel Brown | 21. Nicole Fauble |
| 9. Natalie Burns | 22. Shelley L. Fine |
| 10. Carla Calhoun | 23. Frances Ford |
| 11. Kerry Campbell | 24. Megan Gannon |
| 12. Jessie Conradi | 25. William E. Gonzalez |
| 13. Casey Crouch | 26. Grace E. Gray |

27. Katrin Ana T. Haller
28. Amber Hanson
29. Cassandra Hetherington
30. Tammi Hogan
31. Chaz J. Holmon
32. Whitney Joy Howard
33. Maria I. Iglesias-Gaspar
34. Katy Jamison
35. Jehari Jones
36. Lisa Kays
37. Kaitlin C. Kernan
38. Kara King
39. Juliet Kline
40. Jason Kling
41. John D. Kotler
42. Lindsay J. MacMurray
43. Tara Mainero
44. David Mauldin
45. Lynne M. McIntyre
46. Molly Milgrom
47. Ashley Wilson Moore
48. Jacqueline Moriarty
49. Pat Paddack
50. Helen Park
51. Walter Allen Pittinger
52. Laura Place
53. Noah Plotkin
54. Carolyn Polinsky
55. Nikita Purdy
56. Minh Riley
57. Michelle Roman
58. Rachel Rosenberg
59. Sonia A. Ross
60. Stephanie Roth
61. Julie Samuelson
62. Sarah E. Scheitler
63. Katherine Schwartz
64. Laura Sellers
65. Nancy C. Sharpe
66. Liz Shelton
67. Bridget Sherry
68. Hannah Small-Oie
69. La Kia M. Smith
70. Elise Smithmyer
71. Emily Steakley
72. David Stephenson

73. Diana Sterbick
74. Julia Strange
75. Michelle Thomas
76. Donna Tish
77. Regina Tosca
78. Megan Treacy
79. Sallie Twentyman

80. Katelyn Uyehara
81. Elizabeth L. Vincent
82. Cam Tu Vu
83. Jennifer Watson
84. Tyrone White
85. Rebecca F. Wrotny
86. Kelli R. Young