

# Faith groups target `Super Committee' on poverty

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WASHINGTON (RNS) As the deadline for a federal deficit-reduction plan looms, religious communities are holding prayer vigils, phoning politicians and organizing letter campaigns in a bid to protect safety net programs for the poor.

The national "Faithful Budget Campaign," led by a coalition of about 25 mainline Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Muslim organizations, is targeting the 12 members of the congressional "Super Committee" tasked with finding \$1.2 trillion in budget cuts by Nov. 23.

"We urge you to ensure that people who are impoverished, hungry, homeless, disabled and elderly, both in the United States and abroad, are not asked to sacrifice what little they have," said the coalition's letter to members of the Super Committee.

The Super Committee's recommendations will face votes in the House and Senate before the end of the year. A deadlock or a defeat in either house will trigger \$1.2 trillion in immediate, across-the-board spending cuts.

The coalition has been holding weekly prayer vigils on Capitol Hill since midsummer. The vigils began in response to the debt-ceiling debate and led to the arrest of 11 religious leaders for praying in the Capitol Rotunda, but did not end there.

"They have really been, in a sense, a pep rally for the community and a way of consistently being mindful of ... our God-given responsibility to recall Congress to its people," said the Rev. J. Herbert Nelson, director of public witness for the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The Faithful Budget Campaign is also targeting the home districts of members of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, as the Super Committee is

officially known.

The Rev. Cassandra Howe, minister of a Unitarian Universalist church in Portage, Mich., led a group of her congregants on Oct. 19 to rally for the poor at the office of Republican Rep. Fred Upton.

An interfaith group will hold another prayer vigil on Nov. 2 outside the office of Rep. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., another Super Committee member.

Paul Whiting, a member of a Quaker community in Billings, Mont., was one of more than 1,000 people who participated in a campaign to call members of Congress on Oct. 4 and 5.

"We're spending money on the military when we should be spending money on human beings," said Whiting, repeating his message to Super Committee member Sen. Max Baucus, a Montana Democrat.

The Faithful Budget Campaign will culminate in a Nov. 13 "Super Vigil" outside the White House while other vigils take place simultaneously around the country.

"We have to make our faces visible, not just to represent our faith, but also to let elected officials know that people of conscience are paying attention to these issues," said Randy Block, director of the Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network.