

Will civil disobedience get attention?

By [John Dart](#)

July 29, 2011

As

political leaders fight about the federal budget and the debt ceiling, some religious leaders are certain that the poor are in peril from funding cuts. They've signed petitions, held vigils and sought audiences with legislators. One group took the next step yesterday to get attention--a sit-down protest in the Capitol rotunda.

Eleven

advocates, including several mainline Protestant clergy, refused to disperse or to stop singing and praying despite repeated warnings from the U.S. Capitol Police. The midday demonstration no doubt grew out of the group's frustration at being just one of many voices rallying for specific interests amid the showdown in Washington.

The

U.S. Catholic bishops, representing the largest church body, have [urged lawmakers](#) to protect those likeliest to suffer under major cuts. Various religious leaders have tried petitions and joint statements. Will these efforts encourage like-minded Democrats or Republicans to stand their ground for moral integrity?

A

broad delegation of Christian leaders [met with President Obama](#) last week, asking him to form a "circle of protection" around programs for those in need. Those attending abided by the request not to quote the president, but they said Obama did cite Jesus' directive to serve "the least of these."

The

Thursday protest [drew some media attention](#). As the arrests were made, Rep. Chellie

Pingree (D., Maine) announced on the floor of the House of Representatives that religious leaders were being arrested for standing up for persons in poverty, [according to the NCC](#).

Declaring

that many lawmakers are compromised by political self-interest and the seduction of power, J. Herbert Nelson, director of PCUSA's public witness, said this before he was arrested: "Faith leaders cannot stand idly by and watch while the mandate of the gospel to love our neighbors is violated in the halls of Congress."