Jesus never avoided uncomfortable subjects. Where polite society might frown on talking openly about money, Jesus confronted people’s beliefs, both spoken and unspoken, regarding finances. He understood how much of human life is affected by our attitudes toward wealth, by the way workers are compensated, and especially by economic realities—including taxes—that affect everyone.

More than once, Jesus was questioned about the morality of paying taxes. In each case, he acknowledged the responsibility to pay taxes while drawing attention to the deeper questions about the place of economics in our lives. When asked to pay the temple tax, he directed his disciples to catch a fish, whose mouth held a coin worth enough to pay for both of their taxes (Matt. 17:24-27).

When asked about the lawfulness of paying taxes to the emperor, he reminded the Pharisees that their first loyalty is owed to God. Everything belongs to God, the first and greatest giver. Since we are made in God’s image, we can follow that example and order our economic life, including our tax policies, accordingly (Matt 22:15-22).

These stories affirm the central place of an economics of sharing in a life governed by love for neighbor.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, who provided for the needs of a complete stranger after he had been beaten, robbed, and left for dead (Lk. 10:25-37). Jesus told that story to expand our understanding of who is our neighbor, not to tell us to wait until someone is bleeding by the roadside before we help. In telling his disciples to “go and do likewise,” isn’t he also calling us to make provisions for our neighbors who are victimized by their situation in life?

This call to seek justice for hungry and poor people requires us to take such compassionate actions to another level, moving beyond simple acts of sharing with those in need to the more encompassing action of advocacy. Through our advocacy for better government policies, we can help more families receive sufficient resources so they can keep from going hungry.

“Jesus said: ‘You give them something to eat.’ Writing a letter to Congress is a part of my service to God and the church. It is a way to multiply loaves and fish here and now. We cannot allow hunger in the world while celebrating the Supper of the Lord. A hungry child is a wound in the Body of Christ. My letter to Congress will be medicine to heal the wound.” – Rev. Juan Luis Calderon
Proverbs 13:23 states, “The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.” Today the labor of poor people is essential to the success of our economy, yet many workers do not see a fair share of the harvest. It is unjust that many who may work full-time at low wages will not take home an amount adequate for their families’ basic needs. The biblical call to do justice compels us to make sure that more of the harvest reaches those who produce it.

This year, we can help prevent the erosion of income by supporting tax credits for low-income workers. These tax credits can help millions of American workers support themselves and their families. Our efforts can put food into the mouths of hungry children, and restore hope and dignity to millions of households. It’s compassionate justice in action.

How Will Changes in Tax Laws Help End Hunger?
The poverty that causes hunger is largely due to a lack of monetary resources. Tax changes would put more money in the pockets of low-income families, making it easier for them to make ends meet.

While ending childhood hunger requires stronger nutrition programs, meeting that goal also depends on increasing income for families who struggle to cover their household expenses. The tax system can help do just that. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is an efficient, proven, well-targeted way to add resources – averaging close to $200 a month for families with children. With this credit, low-income families are better able to meet essential needs, including food and quality child care.

Handwritten letters are always read and logged.
Congress makes choices each year as it develops the federal budget. Our voices remind elected leaders that the budget is a moral document that should reflect our nation’s best values.

It helps to remember that some tax programs have a strong economic effect that also can ultimately boost our nation’s revenues. Testifying before Congress in 2008, Mark Zandi, chief economist and co-founder of Moody’s Economy said that for every $1 spent on refundable tax credits, $1.26 in economic activity is generated within local communities.

The tax code has many incentives that encourage taxpayers to make certain fiscal choices, like saving for retirement, getting a college education, or owning a home. But many of those tax credits are out of reach for low-income earners.

By expanding the benefits low-income workers receive, including making benefits refundable, tax credits encourage work and open up more financial choices. Programs like the EITC that benefit low-income working people only accounted for $89 billion out of $760 billion (12%) of the total amount spent through the tax code for all taxpayers in 2007.

While it’s true that we cannot control how people spend their tax benefits, the reality is that low-income families run out of money before they are able to address all of their needs. Research shows that about half of EITC benefits are used for long-term investments like improving housing, transportation, or paying tuition. The other half is spent on purchases to meet immediate needs like food, clothing, or catching up on rent and utilities. For all of us, our spending choices are limited by our available options.

Did You Know
13% of people in the U.S. live in poverty
14% of households are hungry or at risk of hunger
1 in 4 children live in household at risk of hunger
51% of all Americans will live in poverty at some point before age 65.
2008 poverty threshold for a family of 4 = $21,834
83% of low-income families have at least 1 working family member
76% of single mothers who head households work
30% of children live in low-income working families
A full-time worker at minimum wage ($7.25/hr.) earns $14,500 per year
2005 EITC lifted 5 million people including 2.6 million children above poverty threshold