Rev. Dr. Bob Edgar General Secretary, National Council of Churches USA April 22, 2005

The National Council of Churches USA is saddened by the events of the last week. Not only has the Family Research Council developed an ad campaign that attacks Christians who do not agree with them as being "against people of faith" and anti-Christian; but Senator Bill Frist, who supports this effort, has refused to meet with us and other religious leaders, including the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, on numerous occasions. Time and again we were denied access to <u>even</u> have our voices heard on this issue.

Surely none of us can miss the irony. Even as we fight for freedom and religious liberty for countries around the world in America, the self-proclaimed land of the free, an anti-democratic mentality is rising up before our very eyes. No longer do we have healthy dialogue in the public square where we can express our differences and work together for the common good. No longer are we allowed to freely express our views in opposition to the majority political party without being accused of being "anti-Christian," "against people of faith" and "un-American." Now the stage has been set for those who disagree with one political party to be demonized and ostracized, unable to fully participate in democracy and cut off from having access to our public officials. This is an outrage!

This ad campaign should be called "Just-Us" Sunday instead of Justice Sunday. It makes one political point of view a litmus test for Christian faith, and in so doing, attempts to disenfranchise, if not excommunicate, the millions of American Christians who hold a different view. This will only serve to further divide and polarize our nation. It will lead to destruction and isolation, rather than edification and reconciliation. We are profoundly grieved that our brothers and sisters in Christ would willingly choose this detrimental path.

Our conscience is clear. We have followed Christ's mandate outlined in Matthew 18. Jesus tells us that if we have a dispute with our brother or sister we are to go to them and if they do not listen we should take someone else with us. If that doesn't work Jesus tells us to wipe the dust off our feet. Today, after trying repeatedly for the past week to meet with Senator Frist and ask him to change this very destructive course of action, we are here to say that we are very close to wiping the dust off our feet.

Perhaps it was naïve but we had hoped that Senator Frist would change his mind and refuse to allow his name to be associated with this campaign. Unfortunately we are here today to say that politics has trampled impartiality and the "just-us" mentality has prevailed over *justice*.

We pray for God's mercy for America in the days ahead.