



President-elect Donald Trump listens to Elon Musk as he arrives to watch SpaceX's mega rocket Starship lift off for a test flight from Starbase in Boca Chica, Texas, Nov. 19, 2024. (AP, File/Brandon Bell)



Thomas Reese

[View Author Profile](#)

Follow on Twitter at [@thomasreeseSJ](#)

Religion News Service

[View Author Profile](#)

## [\*\*Join the Conversation\*\*](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

March 7, 2025

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

President Donald Trump and his DOGE hitman, Elon Musk, are defunding and destroying programs that support and provide what Christians have traditionally called the seven "[corporal works of mercy](#)" (as opposed to "spiritual works of mercy"), which tend to the body: Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the prisoners, bury the dead and give alms to the poor.

At the end of February, the U.S. State Department announced the cancellation of some 10,000 programs that fed, sheltered and cared for people around the world, including the sick and children. The impact will be worldwide but especially harsh on refugees fleeing conflicts in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

"The countries affected by these cuts — including Sudan, Yemen, Syria — are home to millions of innocent civilians who are victims of war and disaster," explained David Miliband, president and CEO of the International Rescue Committee. Many refugees from these countries have fled to neighbors, such as Chad, that are ill-equipped to take care of them.

[\*\*Read this next:\*\* Exclusive: Catholic Relief Services lays off staff, cuts programs after USAID shakeup](#)

Many of the programs on the chopping block are administered through USAID, which provides food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, shelter to the homeless and medicine for the sick.

The administration has also targeted refugee assistance programs run by [faith-based organizations](#) such as Catholic Relief Services and the U.S. Catholic bishops' Migration and Refugee Services; evangelical Christian groups such as World Relief and Church World Service; as well as Lutheran, Jewish and Episcopal ministries.

The government has also [refused to pay faith-based agencies](#) for the work already done, a tactic Trump has been [accused of using](#) against companies contracted to work on his real-estate properties. His response to such complaints has been "sue me."

Faith-based and other NGOs have had to [lay off or furlough](#) scores of experienced personnel who dedicated their lives to helping refugees, the sick and the desperate. Even if their funds are eventually restored, the damage will be done, as new, inexperienced staff will have to be hired and trained to replace those who have been lost to other employment.

The cumulative result of these cuts will be the deaths of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, from starvation and disease. Those who survive will suffer from the long-term effects of malnutrition and disease.

"Women and children will go hungry, food will rot in warehouses while families starve, children will be born with HIV — among other tragedies," said [InterAction](#), an alliance of international non-governmental organizations and their partners in the United States. "This needless suffering will not make America safer, stronger, or more prosperous. Rather, it will breed instability, migration, and desperation."

If you believe the Scripture is the Word of God, the message is clear: Musk and Trump will go to hell for defunding the corporal works of mercy. Will we?

[Tweet this](#)

The seven corporal works of mercy have been a hallmark from the earliest times of the Christian community of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Sadly, Trump and Musk are not the only political players exhibiting disregard for those in need. Many Americans, including some Christian leaders, are arguing that [compassion is bad](#) because it fosters weakness. According to a 2024 survey done by the [Chicago Council on Global Affairs](#), 51% of Americans favor cutting economic aid to other countries, only 7% want to expand it and 33% would keep it about the same.

Hard-headed Democratic strategists like [James Carville](#) say these numbers demonstrate that Democrats should not defend foreign aid because it will not win votes.

All this contradicts Christ's command to care for the vulnerable and the marginalized, which Pope Francis constantly reminds us to obey. Christians cannot remain silent.

Advertisement

Jesus condemned [the rich man to hell for ignoring the poor man Lazarus](#) at his door. When Americans and their leaders stand before the throne of God, how will they be received?

At the Last Judgment, according to the Gospel of [Matthew](#), those without compassion will be told, "Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me."

They will ask, when did we not minister to your needs? And he will answer, "Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me."

If you believe the Scripture is the Word of God, the message is clear: Musk and Trump will go to hell for defunding the corporal works of mercy. Will we?

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. [View the full series.](#)