

A PLACE AT THE TABLE

A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children

A Pastoral Reflection of the U.S. Catholic Bishops

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How can it be that even today there are still people dying of hunger? Condemned to illiteracy? Lacking the most basic medical care? Without a roof over their heads? . . . Christians must learn to make their act of faith in Christ by discerning His voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty. -- Pope John Paul II, Novo Millennio Ineunte, no. 50

I. A Table

A table is where people come together for food. For many, there is not enough food and, in some cases, no table at all.

A table is where people meet to make decisions—in neighborhoods, nations, and the global community. Many people have no place at the table. Their voices and needs are ignored or dismissed.

When we gather as Catholics to worship, we gather around a table to celebrate the Eucharist. It is at this altar of sacrifice that we hear the saving word of Christ and receive his Body and Blood. It is Christ's sacrificial meal that nourishes us so that we can go forth to live the Gospel as his disciples. Too often, the call of the Gospel and the social implications of the Eucharist are ignored or neglected in our daily lives. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* insists, "The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest" (no. 1397).

In our world and nation, many of our sisters and brothers live in poverty. The causes are complex, but the results are clear. They cannot find decent work, feed their families, educate their children, secure health care, or find adequate housing. Millions of children live in nations with too much debt and not enough development, in societies with deadly diseases and inadequate health care, in lands where conflict and corruption leave people without a place at the table. Millions of families cannot live in dignity because they lack the conditions worthy of human life.

As Catholics, we must come together with a common conviction that we can no longer tolerate the moral scandal of poverty in our land and so much hunger and deprivation in our world. As believers, we can debate how best to overcome these realities, but we must be united in our determination to do so. Our faith teaches us that poor people are not issues or problems but sisters and brothers in God's one human family.

In many ways, these are difficult times. We bishops and our Church are confronted with the terrible scandal of clerical sexual abuse and all the hurt and pain and loss of trust and credibility that have come with it. We bear special responsibility to address this crisis and our roles in it. In our dioceses and as a bishops' conference, we are working diligently to protect children and to restore trust. At the same time, we must recognize that our world faces other urgent challenges. Our nation is dealing with terror on its own shores. Our economy is hurting, shaken by corporate misconduct—and its impact on workers and investors—as well as broader forces of globalization and economic

change. Our world is broken by deadly violence and widespread hunger and deprivation.

II. A Mission

With our Church under challenge, our nation confronted by terror, and our world haunted by conflict, why focus on issues of poverty and human dignity at this time?

- *Our faith calls us to it.*

The Gospel and Catholic social teaching place our service of the poor and vulnerable and our work for justice at the center of Christian witness.

- *Our nation needs it.*

A sixth of our children are growing up poor in the richest nation on earth. ¹ The blessings and burdens of American life are not being shared fairly.

- *Our world requires it.*

More than 30,000 children die every day from hunger, deprivation, and their consequences. ² Disease and debt, corruption and conflict are threatening the lives and dignity of millions in our increasingly globalized world.

- *Our salvation demands it.*

In Jesus' description of the Last Judgment, the critical question is "What did you do for the least of these?" Jesus identified himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned, and the stranger, insisting that when we serve them we serve him. ³

- *Our actions can make a difference.*

In the face of these challenges, our community of faith must continue to preach the Gospel and pursue the Church's evangelizing and social mission. We can help shape a world where the lives and dignity of all people are respected and protected.

In his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus outlined his mission and ours: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free." ⁴ In these challenging times, this mission of Jesus is our way forward and our urgent task.

This pastoral reflection is offered for pastors and parishioners, for Catholic educators and citizens. It will be complemented by other resources for reflection and action in families, parishes, and schools. This reflection draws on existing teaching and policies to recommit our community of faith to be ever more faithful witnesses of God's love and justice, protecting the dignity of all God's children, especially the poor and vulnerable.

III. Context

The Need

Poverty is not just about numbers. It is about parents who cannot feed their children in Latin America or who are unable to bring sick or disabled children to a doctor in the United States. It is about the devastating consequences of addiction and family violence, about AIDS orphans in Africa, and about "no-parent families" in the United States. This is not about having a new car or about how fast you can get on the Internet; rather, this is about having a decent

place to live, enough to eat, clean water in your village, and clean air in your community. This is about the virtues we practice in our own lives and the values we promote in public life. And this is about whether there is a place at the table for all in our communities, nation, and world.

These people are not just statistics; they are sisters and brothers, members of our one human family. But statistics can indicate the magnitude of the problem and the urgency of the task. As we enter the twenty-first century,

- More than half of the world's population lives on less than two dollars a day. More than 1.2 billion people live on less than one dollar a day.⁵
- Almost 800 million people across the globe, most of them children, live with hunger or malnutrition as a regular fact of life.⁶ They live in desperate poverty, which means they die younger than they should, struggle with hunger and disease, and live with little hope and less opportunity for a life of dignity.

But poverty is not limited to the poorest countries. In our own nation, poverty is also persistent and pervasive. Clearly, it is experienced in different ways in different places. To be poor in our country is far different from being poor in sub-Saharan Africa, but poverty still diminishes the lives and undermines the dignity of many families who live in our midst.

- In the United States, thirty-four million people live below the official poverty line⁷ (i.e., \$17,960 for a family of four).⁸ If all these people lived in one state, its population would be larger than the combined current populations of Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Idaho, Iowa, and Arizona.
- The younger you are in our country, the more likely you are to be poor. More than 15 percent of our preschoolers are growing up poor.⁹ Discrimination, lack of opportunity, and economic injustice make poverty worse, especially for those in racial and ethnic communities and for persons with disabilities.

Signs of Hope

These stories and numbers should not immobilize us. They should call us to prayer, reflection, and action. This is not "one more thing to feel bad about," but rather an opportunity to put our faith into action, to be the "leaven" in society, to lift up the virtues and ethical principles that enhance human dignity. We can make a difference if we mobilize to combat poverty, because we have done so in the past. Consider the following examples:

- Decades ago, older Americans were among the nation's poorest people. Our nation made a commitment to offer economic security and health care to ensure that our senior citizens could live in dignity. Over recent decades, poverty rates among the elderly have dropped dramatically.¹⁰ More needs to be done, since there are still elderly people who face economic difficulties, including the cost of prescription drugs. But national commitment and shared investment have made a huge difference in the lives of millions of older persons.
- After World War II, the Marshall Plan helped rebuild Europe and turn adversaries into allies.
- Over the years, progress has been made against hunger, infant mortality, and poverty in some regions of the world, and life expectancy has increased in many countries.¹¹
- Most significantly, poor people themselves, in the United States and abroad, are working to break the cycle of poverty—seeking decent work; organizing for a "living wage"; making wise choices; building community organizations and unions; and working for clean water, health care, housing, and education. They are seeking their place at the table.

There is reason for hope and no excuse for inaction.

IV. Analysis

The realities of poverty today are shaped by powerful economic, moral, and cultural forces. Among these is the rapid pace of globalization—the increasing global connections among our economic, cultural, social, and political lives.

While we are becoming more connected as one human community, we often live and work in very different economies.¹²

- Some people are *pulling ahead*, harnessing their education and positions to seize the opportunities of economic life and the global marketplace.
- Many people are *left behind*. They lack the education, skills, access, and opportunity to compete. They include the hungry and homeless, subsistence farmers, victims of discrimination, those suffering with AIDS, those caught in violent conflict, and immigrants and refugees without the right papers or language skills. Discrimination, low wages, sweatshop conditions, and unjust trade and other policies leave many on the fringes of economic life.
- Many people are *struggling*. They have jobs or farms but may lack the income, health care, and other benefits to raise a family in dignity. They are working hard but not getting ahead. Their financial security is subject to investment decisions, market trends, world commodity prices, and other economic forces that are beyond their control. They worry about keeping their jobs or their farms, feeding and educating their children, paying for health care, and saving for their old age.

Our economic life is shaped increasingly by economic globalization, which offers both new potential and new problems. Some see this process as the source of many of the world's ills. For others, it is the solution. The question is not whether these forces will continue, but whether they lift people up or push them down, whether they drive people apart or bring them together. Will globalization increase gaps between rich and poor, or will it build new economic bridges and promote more participation in economic life among all people? As a community of faith, we can seek to shape what our Holy Father calls a "global culture of solidarity." We should assess economic globalization from every angle, but especially from the "bottom up," focusing first on how it touches people who have no place at the table.

V. A Tradition

The Biblical Vision

Our faith calls us to look at economic life in terms of its moral and human dimensions. Concern for the poor echoes through the Scriptures—in the passion of the prophets, the words and witness of Jesus, and the example of the early Church. The Church has lived out this concern in every age and every land. Our commitment to those who are in greatest need is rooted in the biblical vision of the sacredness of all human life. In the Old Testament, the Book of Genesis teaches us that every person is made in God's image and likeness¹³ and endowed with inalienable dignity, regardless of who we are, where we are born, or what we accomplish. As believers, we are called to treat all people—especially those who are suffering—with respect, compassion, and justice.

Genesis also teaches us that all of creation was made by God and ultimately belongs to God.¹⁴ The goods of creation must be used to advance the reign of God and the well-being of all. Private ownership is important to ensure freedom and dignity and to help people to meet basic needs, but the goods of creation are not to be controlled by some at the cost of injustice to others.¹⁵

Throughout the Old Testament, God calls his people to care for those on the margins of society.¹⁶ The God of Israel is a God of justice who protects and defends the poor.¹⁷ The prophets clearly reminded the people of Israel that a test of their faithfulness was the way they treated their poor and vulnerable—the widows, the orphans, and the aliens.¹⁸

In the New Testament, we learn how Jesus shared his love in a special way with those who were poor or vulnerable. In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and in the Parable of the Rich Young Man, Jesus urged us not to ignore those who are suffering in our midst and warned that attachment to riches can be a barrier to discipleship.¹⁹

Although Jesus reminded us that in a world marred by sin, the poor would always be with us,²⁰ he also challenged us to see him in those who are hungry or thirsty, in strangers, in the naked and imprisoned. In Christ's description of the

Last Judgment, we learn that when we ignore the poor, we ignore Christ himself. ²¹ As John Paul II has declared, "This Gospel text is not a simple invitation to charity. . . . By these words, no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity." ²²

Catholic Social Teaching

Applying the Scriptures to human history has been the task of saints, church leaders, and ordinary believers through the centuries. The social doctrine of the Church provides principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and guidelines for the choices we make every day. ²³

In the early years of the Church, Christian communities cared for their weakest members by sharing what they had. ²⁴ According to St. Ambrose, "You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich." ²⁵

Catholic teaching about human dignity and economic justice has been a special focus of many papal encyclicals and statements of our bishops' conference, offering key themes and principles and applying them to the issues of the day. (See "[A Catholic Framework for Economic Life.](#)")

Pope John Paul II insists that the unequivocal words of the Gospel remind us that there is a special presence of Christ in the poor. This presence requires the Church to make a preferential option for those who are poor and vulnerable. ²⁶ The principle of solidarity reminds us that as members of one human family, we see every "other" as our neighbor, who must share in the "banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God." ²⁷ Solidarity calls us to care for our neighbors in need who are nearby and for those who are far away and to see all those who suffer as sisters and brothers. ²⁸

Catholic teaching affirms that all persons, even those on the margins of society, have basic human rights: the right to life and to those things that are necessary to the proper development of life, including faith and family, work and education, housing and health care. Work is the key to the social question (cf. Pope John Paul II, *On Human Work*). Work should not leave people poor but should provide wages sufficient to achieve a standard of living that is in keeping with human dignity. ²⁹ Workers have both an obligation and a right to work, ³⁰ as well as a right to participation, association, and economic initiative. This includes the right to choose to join a union and to bargain collectively.

In the Catholic tradition, concern for the poor is advanced by individual and common action, works of charity, efforts to achieve a more just social order, the practice of virtue, and the pursuit of justice in our own lives. It requires action to confront structures of injustice that leave people poor. Individual believers are called to be generous in sharing what we have with those in need and to promote justice through the choices we make in our families, schools, and workplaces, and through our participation in social and economic life. ³¹

Our social doctrine is expressed and enriched by the Church's broad experience. Across the globe, our Church puts faith into action by feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, educating the young, caring for the sick, welcoming the stranger, providing access for persons with disabilities, and working for greater justice and peace. The Catholic Church is the largest non-governmental provider of education, health care, and human services in our nation. We are helping families and communities to combat hunger and homelessness, overcome poverty and dependency, build housing, resist crime, and seek greater justice. Catholic schools are among the best anti-poverty programs, offering

first-rate education, moral truth, and discipline in communities across our nation. We welcome and resettle many refugees fleeing conflict and repression. We offer relief and development in more than eighty countries. (See "[National Catholic Efforts to Overcome Poverty](#).")

Our Church's commitment to find a place at the table for all God's children is expressed in every part of our country and in the poorest places on earth. All across the globe, the Church carries this forward because of who we are and what we believe about God and the human person. Our faith gives us the strength, identity, and principles we need to sustain this work.

VI. A Direction

Our efforts to serve and stand with the poor recognize and build on the essential roles and responsibilities of four institutions. In a sense, the table we seek for all rests on these four institutions, or legs: (1) what families and individuals can do, (2) what community and religious institutions can do, (3) what the private sector can do, and (4) what the government can do to work together to overcome poverty.

A first leg of the table is what *families and individuals* are called to do. Every person has a responsibility to respect the dignity of others and to work to secure not only their own rights but also the rights of others. Every day, parents throughout the world make sacrifices for the well-being of their children. Parents are the guardians of the life and dignity of their children. Support for marriage and family life is at the center of our campaign to restore dignity and to overcome poverty for children. Public policy and all our institutions must reward, encourage, and support parents, including single parents, who make wise decisions for their children. Their hard work, their love and discipline, and their time and presence within their families are a gift not only to their children, but to our society and to the common good. They are also significant investments in avoiding or escaping poverty.

A second leg of the table is the role and responsibility of community organizations and faith-based institutions. These institutions can help families make good choices and overcome discrimination and other obstacles. They can confront structures of injustice and build community, and they can demand accountability from public officials. Faith is a religious commitment; it is also a community resource. On the toughest problems, in the toughest, most desperate neighborhoods and villages, religious and community institutions are present and making a difference. In the United States, the growing attention to faith-based and other community institutions is overdue recognition of the work of Catholic schools, Catholic health care institutions, Catholic Charities, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, and other groups. Here and abroad, our parishes and schools must continue to be clear about their identity and mission and must continue to be beacons of hope and centers of help for poor families and communities.

A third leg of the table is *the marketplace and institutions of business, commerce, and labor*. The private sector must be not only an engine of growth and productivity, but also a reflection of our values and priorities, a contributor to the common good. Examples of greed and misconduct must be replaced with models of corporate responsibility. Both employers and the labor movement must help the poorest workers to have a voice and a place at the table where wages and working conditions are set. A key measure of the marketplace is whether it provides decent work and wages for people, especially those on the margins of economic life. Parents need to be able to provide a life of dignity for their children by their work. Workers and farmers in this country and around the world need living wages; access to health care; vacation time and family and medical leave; a voice and real participation in the workplace; and the prospect of a decent retirement. Work must be an escape from poverty, not another version of it. The process of

globalization must provide opportunities for the participation of the poorest people and the economic development of the poorest nations.

A fourth essential leg of the table is the role and responsibilities of *government*—a means to do together what we cannot accomplish on our own. In the Catholic tradition, government has a positive role because of its responsibility to serve the common good, provide a safety net for the vulnerable, and help overcome discrimination and ensure equal opportunity for all. Government has inescapable responsibilities toward those who are poor and vulnerable, to ensure their rights and defend their dignity. Government action is necessary to help overcome structures of injustice and misuse of power and to address problems beyond the reach of individual and community efforts. Government must act when these other institutions fall short in defending the weak and protecting human life and human rights.

The debate about how to address poverty in the United States and abroad too often focuses on just one of these four foundations and neglects others. While these four elements work together in different ways in different communities, a table may fall without each leg. Some emphasize family responsibility or the role of religious and community groups. Some insist the market can solve all our problems. Others see a government solution for every challenge, while still others see government corruption as an insurmountable obstacle to development. These narrow positions are not our tradition. The Catholic way is to recognize the essential role and the complementary responsibilities of families, communities, the market, and government to work together to overcome poverty and advance human dignity.

Efforts to overcome poverty should not be distorted by ideological agendas. We hear debates about more personal responsibility versus broader social responsibility—personal virtue versus better public policies. All these are necessary. Parents need to make good choices for themselves and sacrifices for their children. They also need help through wise public policies that help them live in dignity and overcome injustice.

We also hear debates between those who advocate greater investment in and greater accountability on the part of poor countries. We need both. We need more debt relief and development assistance *and* we need more transparency and accountability to ensure that these investments are improving the lives, health, education, and housing of the poorest people on earth.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops supports (1) decent work, living wages, and workers' rights, (2) accessible and affordable health care for all, (3) genuine welfare reform that helps families escape poverty as they leave dependency, and (4) fair treatment of immigrants, farmers, and farm workers. Our Conference supports efforts to reduce debt and to increase development assistance, to oppose corruption and to end exploitation, and to restrain conflict and violence—all of which diminish or destroy the lives of poor people. (See "[USCCB Statements on Economic Issues](#).")

We will continue this advocacy, and we urge others to join our efforts. We will do all we can to make our voices heard, especially as welfare is reshaped, as policies toward immigrants and refugees are reviewed, and as new investments and approaches in foreign assistance are enacted. Every Catholic and all our communities of faith are called to join in the search for the moral values and virtues and for the just policies and social investments that will help people escape the trap of poverty and overcome the barriers of injustice. We recognize that the choices we make to build the common good will require sacrifice from all of us. Those who have more can make choices to use less, to share more, and to advocate for greater justice so that all people have the resources to provide for themselves and their families. For all to have a place at the table, some of us may have to take a smaller place at the

table.

At a time when our nation is seeking to respond to terror, there is an urgent and necessary focus on security. It is imperative to identify and to root out the injustices that feed terrorism. Part of this effort must be an investment in hope, a focus on the roots of violence, and a commitment to share fairly the burdens and opportunities in our nation and our world. Pope Paul VI's insistence that "if you want peace, work for justice" still is wise counsel. National unity, global solidarity, security at home, and a more peaceful world are all advanced by the pursuit of a decent and dignified life for all God's children. We seek not only a safer world, but also a better world.

VII. A Call

For believers, this mission is not simply a matter of economics or politics but of discipleship. We may sometimes differ about the specifics of how best to serve those in need, overcome poverty, and advance human dignity, but it is impossible for a Christian to say, "This is not my task." This mission is an essential part of what makes us disciples of Christ. As the Letter of James insists,

If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.³²

This is a time for faith demonstrated by good works. Such discipleship begins with *prayer and worship*. Prayer is essential if we hope truly to practice charity and to promote justice for those in need. We cannot worship a God of love or follow Christ's example of concern for those who are "least" if this love and concern are not consistently reflected in our liturgical celebrations. The poor and vulnerable should never be forgotten in our public worship or our private prayer. Just as we worship together worldwide on the Sabbath, we must work together in solidarity the rest of the week to live out the Gospel.

Preaching, education, and formation in our communities of faith must reflect the Church's option for the poor and vulnerable. Through preaching, education, and religious formation, we reflect and pass on to others the beliefs we share as followers of Jesus. If they are to be true to the demands of discipleship, then homilies, faith formation programs, schools, universities, and seminaries must reflect Christ's concern for those in need. They should also affirm our Church's teaching about the obligation to serve others, to overcome structures of sin, and to work for greater justice in the world. We urge those who preach and those who teach to do more to consistently share—in our parishes, schools, universities, and seminaries—the call to serve and to promote justice for those who are poor.

Each of us has many opportunities in our *everyday lives* to make choices that help or harm those who are most vulnerable. In our families, we can make time to serve those in need and to become involved in efforts that promote justice. We can raise our children with an ethic of service and a passion for justice. As workers, owners, and managers, Catholics should contribute to a workplace that is safe and respectful, where workers have a voice and can earn enough to support themselves and their families. As consumers and as investors, we can support businesses that contribute to the common good, treat workers fairly, and do not exploit the poor and vulnerable. As consumers, we can also live more simply so that there might be enough at the table for all. As faithful citizens, we should take seriously our responsibilities to vote and to voice our convictions in support of public policies that defend human life and promote the human dignity of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

The Catholic Church has a rich tradition of helping people at risk. Every believer is called to *serve those in need*. Through parishes and dioceses and through committees and organizations, we house the homeless, feed the hungry, visit those in prison, welcome immigrants, and provide countless other services. While we can be proud of what the Church already does, let every believer commit today to greater personal involvement in meeting the demands of the Gospel and the needs of our sisters and brothers. Each of us must become involved in efforts to share what we have and to overcome structures of injustice. We must also make the time in our busy lives to assist those with urgent needs.

The Gospel and Catholic teaching require us to serve those in need and *to work for a more just society and world*.

Both charity and justice are required by our faith. As citizens in the most powerful democracy on earth, we have unique opportunities to use our voices and votes to shape a more caring community, a more just nation, and a more peaceful world. We can join with others in our parishes, local community organizations, and legislative networks. We also can join with parishes and dioceses in other parts of the world and in ecumenical and other forms of action and advocacy. When people join with others to demand respect for their dignity and rights, not only do they help themselves, but they also build up the entire community and advance the common good. Our faith calls us to engagement, not retreat—to renew the earth, not flee the world.

The most challenging virtue of our time may be *solidarity*. This has been a defining element of Pope John Paul II's leadership and witness.³³ He insists that whatever our national, ethnic, religious, or economic differences, we are all God's children, members of one human family. "Loving our neighbor" has global dimensions in a shrinking world. In our prayer, formation, service, and citizenship, and in our programs of twinning and outreach, we must break through the boundaries of neighborhood and nation to recognize the web of life that connects all of us in this age of globalization.

Each of us must find concrete ways to act on this mission in our lives. Resources for carrying forward this form of Christian discipleship as individuals and as parishes, dioceses, schools, and educational programs can be found in the materials that build on and complement this reflection.

VIII. A Challenge

The call to overcome poverty and to uphold human dignity is not new. It is as old as the prophets and as current as today's headlines. Today this challenge is especially compelling because we have the capacity to make a difference and because the impact of rapid globalization makes it more urgent. Building on past progress and new opportunities, we can make this a time for hope. Hope offers the promise that, with God's help, shared sacrifice, wise investment, and renewed commitment, we can actually reduce substantially the levels of poverty, hunger, and human deprivation in our own land and around the world.

The First Letter of John calls us to the task:

If anyone is well-off in worldly possessions and sees his brother in need but closes his heart to him, how can the love of God be remaining in him? Children, our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine.³⁴

This is a time not for "just words or mere talk" but for "active and genuine" commitment by Catholics in the United States to work with others to make a place at the table for all God's children.

Notes

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Poverty in the United States 2000*.

² United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 2002*.

³ Mt 25:44-45.

⁴ Lk 4:8.

⁵ World Bank Group, *World Development Indicators 2000*.

⁶ United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World, 1999*.

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, *Census 2000 Supplemental Survey*.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2001*.

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Poverty in the United States 2000*.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ World Bank Group, *World Development Indicators 2000*.

¹² See U.S. Catholic bishops, *Tenth Anniversary Edition of "Economic Justice for All,"* (Washington, D.C.: United

States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997), nos. 4-5.

¹³ See Gn 1:26-27.

¹⁴ See Gn 1:26-30, 5:18.

¹⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000), nos. 2402-2407.

¹⁶ See Lv 19:9-15.

¹⁷ See Ps 113:7, 140:13.

¹⁸ See Is 10:1-5; Jer 22:3; Ez 22:29-31.

¹⁹ See Lk 16:19-31.

²⁰ See Mt 26:11.

²¹ See Mt 25:44-45.

²² Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 49.

²³ See CCC, no. 2423.

²⁴ See Acts 4:32-34.

²⁵ De Nabuthe, c. 12, n. 53; (PL 14, 747). Cf. J. R. Palanque, *Saint Ambrose et l'empire romain* (Paris: de Boccard, 1933), 336ff.

²⁶ See *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 49.

²⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (*On Social Concern*) (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1988), no. 39.

²⁸ See Bl. Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (*On Christianity and Social Progress*), no. 157.

²⁹ See Bl. Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (*Peace on Earth*) (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1963), no. 20.

³⁰ See Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (*On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum*) (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1991), no. 43.

³¹ See Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (*On the Condition of Workers*), nos. 35-36.

³² Jas 2:15-17.

³³ See *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38.

³⁴ 1 Jn 3:17-18.

The document *A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children* was developed by the Committees on Domestic and International Policy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It was approved by the full body of U.S. Catholic bishops at its November 2002 General Meeting and has been authorized for publication by the undersigned.

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Second quote in Section III is from Catholic Relief Services, 209 West Fayette Street Baltimore, Md. 21201-3443; phone 410-625-2220; fax 410-685-1635; www.catholicrelief.org.

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A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children is available in print editions in English and Spanish and may be ordered by calling toll-free 800-235 8722. Ask for publication number 5 519 (English), 5-880 (Spanish).

Para ordenar este recurso en español, llame al 800-235-8722 y presione 4 para hablar con un representante del servicio al cliente, en español.

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USCCB Statements on Economic Issues

In these brief reflections, we do not seek to apply Catholic social teaching or to advocate policy directions on specific issues. For years, our conference has addressed the moral dimensions of poverty at home and abroad. Other USCCB documents already outline policy criteria on a range of key issues related to poverty. Among the most recent statements are

- † *A Catholic Framework for Economic Life*
- † *A Commitment to All Generations: Social Security and The Common Good*
- † *A Decade After "Economic Justice for All": Continuing Principles, Changing Context, New Challenges*
- † *A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform*
- † *A Jubilee Call for Debt Forgiveness*
- † *Called to Global Solidarity*
- † *Economic Justice for All*
- † *Food Policy in a Hungry World*
- † *Homelessness and Housing: A Human Tragedy, a Moral Challenge*
- † *In All Things Charity*
- † *Moral Principles and Policy Priorities for Welfare Reform*
- † *Putting Children and Families First*
- † *Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities*

These documents can be ordered from USCCB Publishing by calling toll-free 800-235-8722 or obtained by visiting the U.S. bishops' website. Also available on the USCCB website (www.usccb.org) are recent testimony and action alerts on these and related issues.

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National Catholic Efforts to Overcome Poverty: Opportunities and Resources

In addition to the Scriptures and Catholic social teaching, the Catholic community brings to our work on poverty a wide range of experience in serving the poor and standing up for their dignity and rights. Everyone can join in these efforts and use valuable resources produced by Catholic organizations and programs. The following key national Catholic social ministry organizations are associated with the USCCB:

Catholic Campaign for Human Development: For information and educational materials on poverty in the United States, go to www.povertyusa.org . For information on the Church's program to support self-help groups in low-income neighborhoods, go to the website www.usccb.org/cchd .

Catholic Charities USA: For parish social ministry resources, advocacy materials, and information on how the Catholic community serves people in need throughout the United States, go to www.catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Catholic Health Association: For resources and information on Catholic health care and efforts to provide accessible and affordable health care for all, go to www.chausa.org.

Catholic Relief Services: For advocacy and educational materials on international issues as well as information on the relief and development efforts of the Church in the United States at sites around the world, go to www.catholicrelief.org.

USCCB Department of Social Development and World Peace: For parish resources and educational materials as well as advocacy resources and general information on the U.S. bishops' efforts to address issues of justice and peace, go to www.usccb.org/sdwp .

USCCB Migration and Refugee Services: For parish resources, advocacy materials, and general information on programs of the Church in the United States to support and resettle immigrants and refugees, go to www.usccb.org/mrs .

There are many additional organizations within the Catholic community and beyond that offer programs and resources for understanding and responding to poverty. Throughout the country, there are many *diocesan and parish programs* that offer essential help to poor people who are struggling to live in dignity. In addition, *state Catholic conferences* and *diocesan social ministry offices* work on justice issues and provide helpful information to schools and parishes. Catholics join with many ecumenical, interfaith, and other groups to defend human dignity. For more information, go to www.usccb.org/sdwp.

A Catholic Framework for Economic Life

The U.S. bishops' conference has identified ten themes drawn from Catholic social teaching that represent a "Catholic Framework for Economic Life." These themes and the teaching they reflect offer direction for our efforts to shape an economy that makes a place at the table for all God's children.

1. The economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy.
2. All economic life should be shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family, and serve the common good.
3. A fundamental moral measure of any economy is how the poor and vulnerable are faring.
4. All people have a right to life and a right to secure the basic necessities of life (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, a safe environment, and economic security).
5. All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions, and to organize and join unions or other associations.
6. All people, to the extent they are able, have a corresponding duty to work, a responsibility to provide for the needs of their families, and an obligation to contribute to the broader society.
7. In economic life, free markets have both clear advantages and limits; government has essential responsibilities and limitations; voluntary groups have irreplaceable roles but cannot substitute for the proper working of the market and the just policies of the state.
8. Society has a moral obligation, including governmental action where necessary, to ensure opportunity, to meet basic human needs, and to pursue justice in economic life.
9. Workers, owners, managers, stockholders, and consumers are moral agents in economic life. By our choices, initiative, creativity, and investment, we enhance or diminish economic opportunity, community life, and social justice.
10. The global economy has moral dimensions and human consequences. Decisions on investment, trade, aid, and development should protect human life and promote human rights, especially for those most in need, wherever they might live on this globe.

The full text of *A Catholic Framework for Economic Life* and other documents on economic issues can be obtained from USCCB Publishing by calling toll-free 800-235-8722 or visiting the U.S. bishops' website at www.usccb.org.

Seventeen-year-old Annett may never get a chance to learn to read, let alone fulfill her dream of becoming a doctor. She and her younger brother and sister live in an overcrowded urban district of Uganda's capital, Kampala, where neighborhoods consist of endless rows of wooden shacks with tin roofs on dirt roads, with no proper sanitation and poor drainage. When the children's mother died due to complications related to AIDS, they had no way to pay rent on their one-room home and became homeless. Annett now sells vegetables to put a roof over their heads and to send her younger sister to school. But as the head of a household, Annett's dreams of going to school herself may never come true.

—Catholic Relief Services

I am a father of two young children. My wife and I have been receiving "Ohio Works First" now for a little over two years. I have been working this entire time at a furniture store in exchange for my benefits. I do not get paid a real

wage—I only get \$536 a month for 35 hours of work each week. That means I'm earning less than the minimum wage—less than \$4 an hour. It's nowhere near enough to make ends meet for a family of four.

—Bread for the World