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# HOPE IN A TIME OF POVERTY

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A Reflection from the USCCB Department of Justice, Peace & Human Development



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*“I wish to extend an invitation to **solidarity** to everyone . . . this means caring for the dignity of the person, but above all I would say do not lose **hope.**”<sup>i</sup>*

**Pope Francis**

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In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus steps onto the lake shore from a boat and sees a vast crowd. “His heart was moved with pity for them” (Mt. 14:14). The Lord calls us to see the growing numbers of poor and vulnerable persons. He asks that our hearts be moved with compassion for the more than 46 million persons and almost 10 million families living in poverty in our country today.

Christ’s tenderness and merciful gaze go out to them. As servants of Christ, we take the side of those suffering poverty. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has given us a poignant example of compassion. With him, we show our “loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about.”<sup>ii</sup>

As disciples, our challenge is to pattern society on God’s love, oppose injustice, and suffuse our common life with charity in truth. While many speak of a recovery, the economy still denies many a just and

living wage. Women and men still struggle to build a marriage and a home where families can grow.

**Now is a moment for discernment for all concerned about the common good. It is time to come together to shape a new vision for the future.**

We must not be naïve about the complexity of the forces and events reshaping our economy, nor blind to our own responsibility. As Pope Francis says, “In this globalized world, we have fallen into *globalized indifference*. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn’t affect me; it doesn’t concern me; it’s none of my business!”<sup>iii</sup> This crisis requires us to look at our world with fresh eyes, with a renewed respect for the dignity of the human person and the sacredness of life.

Our hope is grounded in the Providence of God, the presence of the Risen Christ in the Church, and the power of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit prompts us to radical solidarity with those who suffer, and to charity, “an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace.”<sup>iv</sup>

*Faith* purifies our struggle for a just society. *Hope* roots our pursuit of justice in the joyful expectation of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). And *love* makes us capable of building the bonds of solidarity that can foster the common good.

The persuasive strength of Catholic social teaching, “the truth of Christ’s love in society,”<sup>v</sup> gives us hope

that the Catholic community, together with others, can make a difference in overcoming poverty. **It is the Church's duty to shed light on the social questions of our time. The Church "cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice."**<sup>vi</sup>

In the coming weeks leading up to Labor Day, we will offer some reflections on different aspects of the present economic crisis. They will not be exhaustive. They are meant to be a sign of our union with those who are suffering, a strong message of hope and a challenge to us *all* to look for solutions.

We are called to stand with the poor in this difficult moment. Together, we must work to build a just society. The call *to do good, make justice your aim, redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea and defend the widow*<sup>vii</sup> is addressed to all. **We need everyone's wisdom, reflection and action to match the magnitude of today's poverty.** We also need leadership worthy of the challenge of the present crisis, "a new generation of committed lay Christians"<sup>viii</sup> to search for new solutions.

As Benedict XVI said, "Be prepared to put your life on the line in order to enlighten the world with the truth of Christ; to respond with love to hatred and disregard for life; to proclaim the hope of the risen Christ in every corner of the earth."<sup>ix</sup> In this joyful

confidence, may this invitation be taken up by all.

*"The life and words of Jesus and the teaching of his Church call us to serve those in need and to work actively for social and economic justice."*

*~ Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*

<sup>i</sup> Francis, [General Audience](#), St. Peter's Square, 01 May 2013

<sup>ii</sup> Francis, [Homily at Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate](#), 19 March 2013

<sup>iii</sup> Francis, [Homily during Visit to Lampedusa](#), 08 July 2013

<sup>iv</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter [Caritas in Veritate](#), 1

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

<sup>vi</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter [Deus Caritas Est](#), 28

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. [Isaiah 1:17](#)

<sup>viii</sup> Benedict XVI, [Homily at Mass](#), Shrine of Our Lady of Bonaria, Sardinia, 07 September 2008

<sup>ix</sup> Benedict XVI, [Message to the Young People of the World on the Occasion of the XXIII World Youth Day](#), 2008



Ideas to help the economy? Share your hope on Twitter with #EndPovertyNow and follow us @EndPovertyUSA!

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit [www.usccb.org/jphd](http://www.usccb.org/jphd) for the complete series of reflections.

### PovertyUSA.org (PobrezaUSA.org)

An initiative of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, PovertyUSA addresses poverty from the grassroots perspective with facts and solutions.

### *Economic Justice for All*

A Pastoral letter on Catholic social teaching and the U.S. economy. ([http://www.usccb.org/upload/economic\\_justice\\_for\\_all.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/upload/economic_justice_for_all.pdf))

### Economic Justice-Economy

This website contains many resources and details the USCCB position on the economy. (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/economic-justice-economy/>)

### *Caritas in Veritate*

In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI offered an ethical analysis of the global economic crisis and a framework for moving forward as one human family. (<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/who-we-teach/adults/caritas-in-veritate-resource-material.cfm>)

### *Sacraments and Social Mission: Living the Gospel, Being Disciples*

This booklet helps Catholics better understand the relation between the sacraments and our social mission as members of the Body of Christ. ([www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments/sacraments-and-social-mission.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments/sacraments-and-social-mission.cfm))

