

A Pastoral  
Letter  
to the  
Catholics  
of  
North Carolina

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Of  
One Heart  
and  
One Mind



# Of One Heart and One Mind

## A Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of North Carolina

***For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors for ever and ever.***

(Jeremiah 7:5-7)

As followers of Jesus Christ our Lord, and as pastoral leaders of the Roman Catholic community in North Carolina, we feel compelled to express our grave concern for the children, women and men in our state who lack sufficient economic means to live full and fruitful lives.

We write to ask you, our sisters and brothers, to embrace with us our Church's responsibility to help shape our world so that the God-given dignity of every human being will be acknowledged, respected and protected.

We speak because our American economy has expanded dramatically and many have prospered in the eleven years since the U.S. Bishops' 1986 pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*. Yet we are still haunted by how the least among us are faring. There is too much poverty and too little economic opportunity for all our citizens. Our faith tradition as Catholics calls us to put the needs of the poor and the vulnerable before all else. In our job-oriented economy, this tradition is expressed in the security of gainful employment.

We are concerned because in the midst of a strong economy there are those among us looking for work who cannot find it; those who need and desire full-time jobs but are limited to part-time or temporary employment; and even among full-time workers a substantial number who fall below subsistence wages and are unable to provide for their family's basic necessities. The economic recovery of the last six years has generated a wider income and benefit gulf between the upper and lower ends of our work force. To the working poor, the impact of the expansion has been selective and discriminatory. These economic disparities lead to injustices demanding our attention. We must raise our voices and act to improve and change these conditions.

## CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

*I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these.* (John 13:34-35, 14:12a)

Jeremiah and the prophets of old remind us repeatedly that justice is the sign of God's life-giving love. In the gospels, Jesus Christ proclaims that the hallmark of His followers is that we love one another according to the example He has set. We call all believers to embrace this discipleship, to act always in ways that bestow the same compassion and justice on others that Christ lived and taught.

We invite you to work with us in finding ways to achieve economic justice for all. The mandate of Scripture is clear, and our Catholic social teaching gives us the direction and the context for reaching out to the poor and the vulnerable among us. Discipleship is not an easy journey, but we are challenged to imitate the life of Jesus in our world of human as well as spiritual need.

The Catholic community in the United States and in North Carolina has made a significant financial and human investment in serving the poor and the powerless. Our parishes and our diocesan agencies, Raleigh's Catholic Social Ministries and Charlotte's Catholic Social Services, consistently provide for those who struggle to be economically secure. Despite this continuous outpouring of good works over the years, the signs of distress are all around us: people without jobs that pay a living wage, families without housing living in shelters, and children without access to health care.

As Catholics, though we are relatively small in number in North Carolina, we have a responsibility to continue to use whatever influence we have to ensure that public policy decisions are more accountable to the common good of all North Carolinians, from the native born to the newly arrived.

## ERA OF CHANGE IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN NORTH CAROLINA

The national safety net programs of 60 years are undergoing fundamental change and the very nature of our response to poverty is being shaped for the foreseeable future. Will the removal of the federal system of guaranteed minimal assistance for the most vulnerable among us enable men and women to move into good jobs? Our hope is that it will, but our fear is that many will be left behind. For many in society it appears that the person exists for the economy rather than the economy for the person.

There is a high expectation that churches, non-profit agencies and the private sector will be willing and able to move into the vacuum created by the approximately \$30 billion<sup>5</sup> in budget cuts over the next five years in programs for the poor and low-income workers. While private programs do play an extremely important role in fighting poverty, they cannot, and should not, take the place of government. Indeed government at every level, including our own state's, must continue to grapple with how best to address the problems of poverty.

## NORTH CAROLINA WORK FIRST

The goal of the North Carolina Work First (welfare reform state plan) is to move families from public assistance to self-sufficiency through employment.<sup>6</sup> This is a worthy objective but one that needs close attention and examination. Goals must always be measured against the reality of the times. People cannot succeed if the system lacks adequate opportunities for success. Are we simply moving people off welfare rolls, or are we prudently moving them toward gainful employment? Are good jobs available throughout all the counties of our state? Is there enough time to prepare people for gainful employment? Are there adequate job training opportunities? Does this employment truly provide for all the basic needs of a family?

## Meet Maureen and her four-year-old son, Richard

Maureen works at a fast food restaurant earning \$6.25 per hour. She works as many hours per week as her manager will schedule her. Since she works at least 30 hours a week, she is eligible for medical insurance. However, the employee share of the cost is very high in proportion to her earnings. Richard has frequent respiratory infections and has had to be hospitalized on several occasions. Recently it was discovered that he is allergic to a wide variety of substances, so Maureen has had to go to the expense of changing her heating system to include electronic filtering. Her rent has also recently been increased. In spite of working full-time, she earns only \$13,000 per year, which is not enough to meet her expenses.



Maureen, like 40,000 year-round, full-time workers in North Carolina, is one of the working poor: a worker who cannot afford basic necessities.<sup>1</sup> And there are 84,000 families and individuals without children who work, yet live in poverty in our state.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the 300,000 North Carolinians who earn under the minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour are female adults (not teenagers) and like Maureen are often the sole wage earner in the family.<sup>3</sup>

## DIFFICULT QUESTIONS ON ECONOMIC DIVISIONS

We ask you to consider this:

Why, in the midst of economic growth, does the imbalance between those who have and those who do not have continue to escalate? Why, in 1993, did the incomes of the highest earning 20% of households increase by about \$10,000, while the income of the 20% of households at the bottom income range decreased by \$1200.<sup>13</sup> Why, in the United States, which has the world's highest living standard, do 20% of our children live in poverty, while the child poverty rate in Canada is 9%, the United Kingdom, 7.4%, France, 4.6%, and Germany, 2.8%?<sup>14</sup> Would not the prophets call these the "orphans" of our day — those without the means to develop their potential according to their God-given dignity?

### Meet Rita and Carlos and their children, Carolina and Juana

This couple left their native land and legally immigrated to the U.S. because they could not find work in order to feed and clothe their children. Carlos works long hours in the fields earning up to \$7,000 during the harvesting season.

Although he always looks for work in the off season, jobs are hard to come by; thus he rarely earns more than \$15,000 per year. Rita cares for the children in the mobile home they share with another family of three. Though they have applied for citizenship, the wait is long (up to two years). Between harvesting seasons they have had to ask for food stamps to tide them over. But due to changes in the law, because they are not U.S. citizens, they have lost access to food stamps.



Rita and Carlos are the "aliens" in our land about which Jeremiah would exhort us — they, along with 3600 legal permanent resident immigrants in NC, are barred from receiving food stamps.<sup>4</sup> (Food stamps are vouchers low-income people use to purchase enough food to obtain a nutritionally adequate diet; the food stamp program suffered some of the deepest 1996 "welfare reform" cuts.) Though he harvests food for NC families, Carlos is unable to adequately feed his own family.

## OUR CATHOLIC TEACHING<sup>15</sup>

*The place where they gathered shook as they prayed. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak God's word with boldness. The community of believers were of one heart and one mind. None of them ever claimed anything as his own; rather everything was held in common. With power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great respect was paid to them all; nor was there any needy among them.* (Acts 31-34a)

Today, we must pray for, hope for, expect that God's Holy Spirit will embolden us to act as one body in building the reign of God where, because we share from our livelihood, each one among us will have access to that which is necessary to live a life of dignity. We must be open to the power of the risen Lord to lead us, as individuals and as community, in ways that we might not ordinarily have imagined.

Our Catholic social teaching holds that all economic life should be shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how well they protect the life and dignity of the human person, support the family, and serve the good of all people. As a community of faith, we must look to the common good of all our brothers and sisters.

Our Church teaches that:

- work enhances human dignity and therefore should be expected and rewarded.
- people have a right to productive work, to living wages and benefits, to decent working conditions as well as the right of association for mutual benefit.
- in an industry or sector in which there is a pattern of paying below a living wage, social justice requires employees and/or employers to come together to raise wage and benefit standards for the common good of the industry as a whole.
- to the extent they are able, people have a responsibility to provide for themselves and their families; they have a corresponding right to the means to be able to do so (work, health care, food, shelter, clothing, rest).
- when these conditions are not being met by the private sector, society, including governmental action, must guarantee this security.
- economic policies are to be evaluated according to their impact on the poor and the vulnerable.
- in our role as citizens, we must share in shaping and implementing such policies.

*As we U.S. Bishops assert in our 1997 Labor Day Statement, "In our [Catholic] tradition . . . a person cannot be regarded as a tool of production. Work, at its best, helps people to share in the creative activity of God. Work helps each of us to realize our God-given potential and is a vital part of the way in which we contribute to the community. Workplaces should be structured to advance these human and spiritual needs."*

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S ROLE?

We must continue to address the *effects of poverty* by serving the poor in homeless shelters, in food pantries, with clothing drives, and in literacy centers; but we must also include action aimed at resolving the root *causes of poverty*. In addition to addressing the immediate needs of individuals and families, we must work to change societal conditions and public policy to be more responsive to human needs.

To reduce poverty, there is no more effective strategy than providing access to jobs that pay a living wage. We must form partnerships with our state and county governments and with our local businesses to ensure that any process for reducing poverty includes substantial commitments to assist Work First participants and low-wage workers with education, job training, reliable transportation, and child care, so that they may move up to higher wage jobs. And we must ensure that workers are being trained for jobs that actually exist.

## WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

To some, this present time may seem to be a time of confusion and disunity. To these we respond with boldness: we trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to fill us with a sense of unity, to lead us in new ways to meet the needs of the poor, to act out of God's own life-giving love. We rely with certainty on God's promise in Jeremiah to dwell with us as we "act justly with one another."

And so, dear sisters and brothers, we conclude our reflections with a deep and abiding appreciation for all that you do and have done for the poor and the vulnerable among us, and we challenge you to look about and see what yet needs to be done.

+ *William G. Curlin*

*Most Reverend William G. Curlin  
Bishop of Charlotte*

*F. Joseph Gossman*

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Bishop of Raleigh*



***As we have prayed to discern what our commitment shall be as leaders of the dioceses, we pledge the following:***

- We will add the voice of the Church loudly and clearly to the conversation about poverty in our state. Children must be protected. Families must not be abandoned as they move off Work First. They must be given the support they need to achieve economic security.
- We commit to delivering social services to those in need to the best of our ability and resources.
- We commit to making advocacy for justice an integral part of our charitable efforts.
- We shall convene and/or enter into new partnerships with other faith communities, non-profit agencies, and government to find real solutions to poverty.
- We will monitor and document the human impact of laws being passed and assess who is being helped and who is "falling through the cracks," in order that we may be effective advocates for just public policies.

## Meet Janet and her two-year old daughter

Janet is proud that she has managed to get off Work First by taking two part-time jobs: one is year round and pays \$5.25 per hour, the other pays \$6.00 per hour during the school year, however neither provides benefits. She rents a one-bedroom apartment for \$395 per month. She pays \$60 per month for public transportation to get to work. Monthly day care costs are \$346. Janet is ineligible for food stamps (because of a complicated formula applied to earnings for the 10 month school year), but she and her daughter are enrolled in Medicaid. After paying payroll taxes and including an Earned Income Tax Credit, her monthly income is \$1080. Janet lives with the reality that "there is never enough money to go around," and lives in fear that her rent will increase, or there will be a medical emergency forcing her to quit work.



For the Janets, whom we could compare to Jeremiah's "widows," the question at the end of the month is whether they can afford the rent, the groceries, or the utilities. Like many of the 25% of the private sector work force that is made up of part-time, seasonal workers, and consultants/subcontractors,<sup>7</sup> Janet does not receive health insurance. In 1995, an average of 918,000 North Carolinians (13.3% of the total population) were uninsured.<sup>8</sup> An additional 1.1 million (16%) were considered underinsured.<sup>9</sup> Over 250,000 children lacked health insurance.<sup>10</sup>

In North Carolina a person employed at the hourly minimum wage of \$5.15 will likely pay between 35% to 45% of his/her income for an average one-bedroom apartment. Child care and food could consume another 50%, leaving little for other necessities.<sup>11</sup> Applying the broadly-used measure of economic stability of 185% of the federal poverty line, the hourly wage necessary for a family of three to stay out of poverty is around \$11 or an annual salary of around \$22,000.<sup>12</sup> We question whether enough of these jobs are available to the poor citizens of North Carolina.



*Of people in the business community, we ask that as you pray to discern your commitment to the well-being of the impoverished and the less powerful in your communities, you consider the following:*

- Work with local governments to guarantee that policies provide the support necessary to move individuals and families out of poverty.
- Offer practical help by giving time, expertise, job readiness and training resources. Seek out local job-training organizations and offer cooperative positions during training.
- Create jobs and offer on-the-job training and mentoring for new employees.
- Make work pay. Most people moving from Work First to jobs will be employed at a minimum wage before they can qualify for a living wage. Convene local business coalitions to create and support services that will enable people to take these entry-level jobs, i.e., subsidized child care, low-cost and reliable transportation, job benefits, and mentoring in skills building.
- Form an alliance of business persons who will take the initiative in working with community colleges to identify the education and training needs for viable jobs in your area. Then be certain that courses to meet these needs are available.
- Invest with non-profit community self-help organizations that help low-income families gain access to the housing market in healthy, safe neighborhoods.
- Work with local community development corporations and business incubators to provide mentoring in the development of business plans for micro-enterprise efforts in poor communities.
- Insist on strong schools for all North Carolinians. There is a strong correlation between the level of education and the amount of earnings.



*Of our parishes, we ask that you develop your social ministries by engaging your entire membership in education, justice, advocacy and charity on behalf of the poor through the following:*

*Prayer and meditation:*

- Read and meditate on God's word in Scripture as individuals and as community. Pray to discern God's will for us as disciples on how we are to influence societal structures and institutions for the good of the poor.
- Incorporate the moral and ethical dimensions of economic life into Eucharistic liturgies through homilies, general intercessions, and general announcements.
- Resist efforts at stereotyping the poor or blaming the poor for their plight. Begin parish meetings by praying for guidance on how to assist the poor in our communities.

*Study and Action:*

- Study and reflect on Catholic social teaching, especially the ten principles of Catholic teaching on the economy, *A Catholic Framework for Economic Life*. Host adult education sessions on the *Economic Justice for All*.<sup>18</sup>
- Organize listening sessions with individuals and/or groups to assess the most pressing human needs.
- Become involved in diocesan legislative networks. Organize letter-writing and telephone campaigns on economic issues such as fair taxes, welfare reform, minimum wage.
- Learn more about the Catholic Church's domestic anti-poverty program, the Campaign for Human Development, and the projects it funds in North Carolina. Support CHD through its annual parish collections every November.
- Analyze the underlying causes and results of poverty in your communities – childhood hunger, elderly isolation, unemployment, underemployment, lack of job training, lack of affordable child care, spouse/child abuse, lack of affordable housing.
- Decide on an issue for your parish to work on and then team up with others who are working on that issue (large social and economic justice issues are rarely solved by small numbers, there must be a large constituency who cares).

**Meet Kathy and Andy and their four children, ages 5-15**

Both Kathy and Andy work. Andy has worked as a maintenance man at a manufacturing facility for seven years and now makes \$7.00 per hour (\$14,500 per year). In order to get her certificate in child care, Kathy has been going to school after her full-time job as a housekeeper in a hotel where she earns \$5.40 per hour (approximately \$11,200 per year). With child care subsidies Kathy and Andy have been able to scrape by from month to month. Every two or three months they have to ask for help with food stamps in order to keep up with their growing children's nutritional needs. Occasionally, they must ask for groceries from their church's food bank.



Though they earn two full-time salaries, Andy and Kathy have a difficult time subsisting without help; even so they make more than the federal poverty guideline for a family of six which is \$20,573.<sup>15</sup> Their children, like 29% of children in the United States are at risk of hunger or are hungry.<sup>16</sup> Food pantries throughout our state and nation report that increasing numbers are showing up at their doors, and that many are neither the jobless nor the homeless, but the working poor.<sup>17</sup> Andy and Kathy are an example of the growing economic divide between the rich and the poor.

*Partnerships and relationships with other churches:*

- Participate with other parishes or in ecumenical groups to study the employment situation in your area. Research the answers to these questions: in your community, is there a discrepancy between the number of available jobs and the number of persons who must move into those jobs? is there adequate funding available for low-income families' child care subsidies? is there job training for real jobs that pay real living wages?
- Establish partnerships between parishes in areas of low and high poverty rates (some counties have up to 24% poverty, others as low as 9%).

*Partnerships with local agencies*

- Contact the Work First Coordinator at your county Department of Social Services and ask how you can help families move from welfare to work. Some suggestions: adopt a family during the first few months of work, provide transportation, donate child care spaces, mentor parents, tutor children, form a support group for adults seeking work, donate professional clothing, start a food pantry, rent apartments/housing to Work First participants, lend/sell/ give used cars to Work First participants, hold job fairs.
- Each county should have a Work First Task Force with representatives from the various segments of the community. Contact your Work First Coordinator and ask who represents the religious community and then form a relationship with that individual. If there is no representative, offer to serve.



*Special invitation to retirees:*

- Retirees (comprising up to 20% of our North Carolina Catholic population<sup>20</sup>) with your vast experience and talents, we encourage you to seek additional avenues to serve the poor, especially in ways that will help move families from poverty to economic independence.



## Of One Heart and One Mind

Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> NC Budget and Tax Center, The 1997 People's Budget for North Carolina, p. 3, February 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

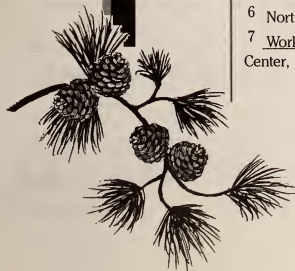
<sup>3</sup> From a presentation on Welfare Reform Issues, by Dan Gerlach, Senior Fiscal Policy Analyst, NC Budget and Tax Center. Sponsored by the United Way of North Carolina and the NC Budget and Tax Center, May 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Alison Brown of Immigrants Legal Assistance Project, telephone conversation on August 26, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Wendell Primus, Budget Analyst, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Washington, DC. Telephone conversation on September 8, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> North Carolina State Plan for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, April 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Working for a Living in North Carolina, An Analysis of Tax Policy & the Working Poor, NC Budget and Tax Center, 1994, p. 3.





8 Policy Statement on Health Care, Adopted by the House of Delegates, North Carolina Council of Churches, October 19, 1996.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Judith McKay, Executive Director, Caring Program for Children, PO Box 2291, Durham, NC 27702, telephone conversation on June 15, 1997.

11 Gerlach, Dan, Ed. Jobs Under Work First: Do They Exist?, BTC REPORTS, January, 1997.

12 Working for a Living in NC. An Analysis of Tax Policy & the Working Poor, NC Budget and Tax Center, 1994, p. 6.

13 U.S. Catholic Bishops, A Decade After "Economic Justice for All": Continuing Principles, Changing Context, New Challenges in Tenth Anniversary Edition of Economic Justice for All, 1997, p. 8

14 Transforming the Welfare System. A Position Paper of Catholic Charities USA, Alexandria, VA., 1994. Note: Catholic Charities USA is the nation's largest private network of voluntary social service agencies. More than 1400 local agencies with over 230,000 staff members and volunteers serve more than 14 million people in need — mostly families and children — each year.

15 U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty Thresholds, 1996, March 4, 1997.

16 Bread for the World, Silver Spring, MD. Tell Congress Hunger Has a Cure, 1997, p. 8.

17 Rivera, Elaine. "Hungry at the Feast," Time, July 21, 1997, p. 38.

18 For further reading on Church teaching as it applies to economic life, see U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral Economic Justice for All, 1986, and their statement, A Catholic Framework for Economic Life, 1996. These can be ordered by calling 1-800-235-8722.

See also these papal encyclicals and Vatican II documents:

*Rerum Novarum (RN)*, Pope Leo XIII, 1891

*Mater et Magistra (MM)*, Pope John XXIII, 1961

*Pacem in Terris (PT)*, Pope John XXIII, 1963

*Gaudium et Spes (GS)*, Second Vatican Council, 1965

*Populorum Progressio (PP)*, Pope Paul VI, 1967

*Laborem Exercens (LE)*, Pope John Paul II, 1981

*Centesimus Annus (CA)*, Pope John Paul II, 1991

On wages:

and needs of families, MM 33, LE 19.2

and profit sharing, MM 32

and State, PT 64

disparities in, MM 68

factors influencing, MM 71, PT 20

just wage, RN 17.1, 44, LE 8.5, 15.1, CA 7.2

key issues, LE 19.4

threats to, LE 17.2

On work:

and common good, LE 10.2

and society, LE 10.2

and the family, LE 10

as merchandise, LE 7.1

changing nature of, LE 8

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creation of, GS 66.1, LE 18

dignity of, CA 6, 19.2

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gospel of, LE 25.2

heart of social question, LE 7.3

obligation to, RN 45, CA 43.2

right to, CA 43.3

theology of, GS 67.1, LE 24

value of, PP 27, LE 9.2, II, 25

19 *Ibid.*

20 Task Force on Aging Diocesan Survey, Office of Special Ministries, Catholic Social Services, Diocese of Charlotte, 1997.

Note: Individuals in case studies are composites of situations described by agencies across the state.

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