



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

PASTORAL STATEMENT ON LIVING JUSTICE IN THE DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY

For more than a year, there has been some debate, nationally and at the diocesan level, on the Catholic Church's stance on several social justice issues. This debate, emotional and contentious at times, has had repercussions here in Wisconsin and in the Diocese of Green Bay. The purpose of this pastoral statement, therefore, is twofold:

1. to announce the establishment of a new diocesan commission which is charged with taking a leading role in the catechesis, planning, and implementation of Catholic Social Teaching in the Diocese of Green Bay; and
2. to clarify and answer some open-ended questions related to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and the role of individuals and parishes in local organizations such as JOSHUA and ESTHER.

A New Approach by the Diocese of Green Bay

The Catholic Church has one of the largest bodies of teaching on charity and social justice of any organization in the world. Much of this teaching is largely unknown by many Catholics and the teaching is also often misunderstood or misconstrued and interpreted in a way that was not intended.

Realizing that there is a genuine need for a greater understanding of the social doctrine of the Church and that the Diocese needs to be more involved in implementing this teaching in our own way and coming from our own theological and ecclesial foundation, I am announcing today the establishment of a new commission to be called the *Commission on Living Justice*. The charge

given to this commission is to do its work based upon all of the social justice principles of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the Universal Church which is an integrated approach to living out the Gospel. (<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml>)

The title, *Commission on Living Justice*, is appropriate because the purpose of this commission will be to help the Diocese and our individual parishes live out the gospel message of justice and charity as outlined in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, and in the social doctrine of the Church.

The principles of the Catholic Church are comprehensive and include the teaching on the *Life and Dignity of the Human Person* at all of its stages. This body of knowledge and faith is one of the great contributions of the Catholic Church in the last forty years and should serve as the foundation of all that we do in this important work of the Church.

In his Encyclical letter *God is Love* (2006), Pope Benedict XVI addresses the relationship of charity to justice and justice to charity:

“The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.”

Charity and justice are actually two sides of the same coin or like the right and left hand of the body of Christ, the Church. When we do acts of charity, we ought to be thinking about how we can be part of the solution on a systemic level so that people are not devastated by unjust actions of others. At the same time, acts of justice which are not rooted in charity can easily become politicized and lose the connection to the Gospel mandate of charity.

I hope to have this commission established, membership named and a formal structure within our diocesan organization by early Fall 2011 along with other plans which will emerge from the current Diocesan visioning and planning process.

Catholic Campaign for Human Development

For some time in this country, there has been significant disagreement among people of good will about this national collection taken in parishes to support the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. This annual campaign, started by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 1969, takes place every year in the Diocese of Green Bay on the fourth Sunday of Lent.

The debate surrounding this collection centered around the use of some of the donations to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). The CCHD philosophy emphasizes empowerment and participation by the poor. By helping the poor to participate in the decisions and actions that affect their lives, CCHD empowers them to move beyond poverty.

Helping the poor is not about giving them “hand outs”, but is about providing the tools they need to lift themselves out of poverty. Historically, this campaign has done much good around the country and also here in the Diocese of Green Bay.

The controversy, however, revolved around several concerns. First, a few of the organizations that received CCHD funds had acted in conflict with Catholic teaching or had direct connections to *coalitions* that are not in harmony with Catholic principles of social justice ministry. A result of this connection was the perception that by receiving funds from the CCHD, the Catholic Church was funding organizations that side with other entities or coalitions that may espouse positions that contradict Catholic teaching. Actually, as noted on the USCCB site, of the 270 grants provided last year, there were 5 that were defunded once the USCCB became aware of the conflicts.

A second concern revolved around the appearance of partisan political positions taken by some of these organizations.

The appearance of having a partisan political agenda by some of these organizations calls into question the affiliation that the organizations have with Catholic parishes or the diocese. Also, parishes and dioceses must adhere to USCCB guidelines governing political activity. Political actions by some organizations affiliated with parishes or a diocese can raise red flags regarding the adherence of a parish or diocese to these USCCB guidelines for political involvement. Of course, this was and is a major concern to the Bishops overall and to me as the Bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay.

The Bishops' Conference studied the situation in great depth for several months and presented their conclusions to the bishops at the November USCCB meeting in Baltimore. Their report announced "ten commitments" that the Bishops are making especially in regard to the CCHD application and granting process. (The "ten commitments" can be viewed online at www.usccb.org/cchd/reviewandrenewal.shtml).

The new application process for grants announced by the USCCB will be much more thorough and will give increased consideration to Catholic social justice entities. According to the guidelines, this application/grant process is first done at the local diocesan level and then proceeds to the national level at the Bishops' Conference. The new requirements contain tools which will assist the diocese in the grant application process. Grant requests will continue to require the permission of the diocesan bishop before they are sent to the national level.

Last year (2010), I directed that there would be a moratorium on the CCHD collection in our diocese until such time as the USCCB had concluded their study. With the study concluded and with implementation of the new procedures, I am confident that we have the necessary checks in place that will help us to be better informed and assist us in discerning grant requests properly. Therefore, the CCHD collection will be reinstated and will take place as part of the collection for the World's Poor the weekend of April 2, 2011.

Parish Corporate Membership in Non-Catholic Organizations

A related topic centered on two local congregation-based community organizing units to which fifteen Catholic parishes and two Catholic organizations belong called JOSHUA and ESTHER. These organizations have done much great work since their beginnings.

In 2009, ESTHER helped broker an agreement between the Outagamie County Clerk's Office and Spanish-speaking clients to ensure a more equitable process for the issuance of marriage certificates. That same year, ESTHER collaborated with the City of Appleton and Harmony Café (Appleton) to help establish LUNA, a Latino youth group whose mission is to promote civil rights for young Latinos in the Fox Valley.

Among the local projects championed by JOSHUA was the COTS Homeless Shelter founded in 2005. This emergency temporary shelter led to the establishment of St. John the Evangelist Homeless Shelter in Green Bay in 2007. In 2008, JOSHUA championed the establishment of the Brown County Drug Court, a process for nonviolent drug offenders.

These organizations are connected to a hierarchy of organizations, WISDOM on the state level and Gamaliel on the national/international level. Many faith-based groups, including some of our Catholic parishes, currently have memberships in these local, state and national structures.

A controversy arose during the last electoral campaign cycle when an announcement from a pro-abortion coalition appeared on the ESTHER web page. When this was discovered, ESTHER, JOSHUA, WISDOM and the Gamaliel Foundation immediately withdrew their connection to that coalition.

However, due to my concern about the lack of oversight of non-Catholic groups whose positions may be inconsistent with the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching, I sent a letter to our member parishes of JOSHUA and ESTHER in which I detailed my concerns and communicated the fact that I thought we should withdraw our "corporate memberships" from these organizations.

I also mentioned in a meeting with some of the pastors and parish members of JOSHUA and ESTHER that I had institutional/structural concerns that, in fact, our corporate membership could make us subject to a parallel hierarchy with which the Catholic Church could have conflicts. We have our own hierarchical structure including both the local, diocesan authority as well as the Wisconsin Catholic Conference. An undesirable result of dual affiliations could be that a conflict could place our parishioners in a very difficult position of having to choose between their Catholic Church authority and another parallel organization.

Subsequent to my meeting with the pastors and parish members, I placed the implementation of my decision on hold until I had time to review and pray about what I had heard at the meeting. Shortly after this meeting, I appointed a task force to make recommendations to me about how to proceed. I have benefited greatly by the recommendations of the task force, and their work has facilitated my deliberations. While my conclusions reflect many of their recommendations, I do not embrace all of those recommendations.

I want to make it abundantly clear that I am very proud of many of the works that JOSHUA and ESTHER are doing here in Green Bay and in the Fox Valley. The living out of the Gospel values of Matthew 25 in mutual projects is truly commendable, an example of living out the call of charity and justice in our day.

However, my concern continues to center on the structural and institutional concerns which I have mentioned above that are brought about by the “corporate membership” of our parishes in local groups and, ultimately, through them to the state and national organizations. Therefore, I am directing our parishes to withdraw their “corporate membership” in these organizations, effective July 1, 2011.

In spite of this directive, let me also clarify that this does NOT mean that individual parishioners cannot have a personal membership in JOSHUA or ESTHER or that parish groups cannot work together with JOSHUA and ESTHER on specific projects consistent with Catholic Social Teaching. It means that we can continue to work ecumenically with brothers and sisters of other faiths, but

that our parishes will no longer be corporate members in a parallel organization of this type.

Actually, this issue has prompted the Diocese of Green Bay to look into all of our corporate relationships and to begin to review the status of all relationships through the same lens for the same or similar reasons. The same structural and institutional principles on which I am basing my decision regarding parish membership in JOSHUA and ESTHER will apply to all relationships that the Diocese and parishes have with other organizations. The Diocese and parishes should continue to pursue mutually beneficial project partnerships, not memberships in other organizations.

I want to thank all of those involved in works of charity and social justice, both those in special groups like JOSHUA and ESTHER and those who carry on the works of charity and justice in all of the parishes, schools and Church entities here in our Diocese. Thank you very much and may God bless all of our efforts to live charity and justice in our day.

**The Most Reverend David L. Ricken, D.D., J.C.L.
Bishop of Green Bay
February 16, 2011**