

Archdiocese of Newark

Office of Communications & Public Relations
171 Clifton Ave.
Newark, NJ 07104
www.rcan.org

contact:

Jim Goodness

973-497-4186

973-202-2317

goodneja@rcan.org

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Remarks by The Most Reverend John J. Myers, President, New Jersey Catholic Conference, and Archbishop of Newark, On the Statement on Poverty in New Jersey By the Bishops of New Jersey

Today, the Bishops of New Jersey are calling attention to the need for all in this state to work together to address the shocking, growing problem of poverty here in New Jersey.

You may ask why now? It's very simple: 49 million people across this country live in poverty. And almost eight hundred thousand of them live here in New Jersey. In addition, the face of poverty has changed. It is the face of men, women and children in our cities, our suburbs, our rural areas. They need jobs, food, housing, education, and they need it now. They are victims of an economic crisis that needs to be changed immediately.

The Catholic Church follows Christ's command to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and shelter the homeless. Christ also told us that whatever we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, we are doing for Him.

We are all God's children and, consequently, we have a responsibility to help anyone in need. The Church has a tradition of helping the poor – whether it be on the other side of the world, or in our neighborhoods.

Equally important, we have helped the poor whether or not they are Catholic.

But we know we cannot do it alone.

The current economic crisis and its effect on the poor require collective collaboration. Individual efforts alone will not stem the tide of increasing poverty. Today, we encourage everyone – individuals, families, churches, synagogues, mosques,

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businesses and government -- to address the issue of poverty. It is no coincidence that, even as we meet here, students from Seton Hall Prep are across the street at the offices of La Casa de Don Pedro, helping them prepare much needed food baskets for families to not only enjoy Thanksgiving dinner, but daily meals to sustain their lives. That's cooperation, and the start of the solution.

We must come together to work to reduce poverty – past failures and the current difficult economic times are not an acceptable reason to fail to act on behalf of the poor.

Today, it is even more critical that we work together to end poverty. Our State and federal lawmakers are facing huge deficits, which has prompted some to suggest drastic cuts including reducing or eliminating programs that have provided the poor with a safety net.

This can not, must not, happen.

Our statement on poverty is not just words. Rather, it is a call to action. We need to think “outside the box.” For this reason, we will be establishing four task forces, designed to study issues adversely impacting poverty: the weakening of family life, the lack of affordable housing, unemployment, and failing educational systems.

Our goal will be to identify pragmatic recommendations to help strengthen families, improve schools, reduce unemployment, assure living wages, and increase affordable housing.

We stand here today to call on everyone to pray for wisdom and strength to end poverty. We call on everyone in New Jersey today to be part of this effort.

There is much to be done. Every day, the media brings to us the voices of those who need help. These voices cry out to us from the depths to fix the problems we can fix, and to end joblessness, homelessness, lack of food, poor education – to end poverty.

We do not have all of the answers.

We do know this: Jesus told us to have faith in Him, and to follow His commandments. “Love one another as yourselves” is one of those commandments.

Thank you.

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