



# Matthew 25

*...whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine,  
you did for me.*

The Social Ministry Commission Newsletter  
of St. Mary's Catholic Center, College Station, Texas

May 2010

## **Global Solidarity: Fighting Poverty to Build Peace**

*By Clotilde Pichon, Director of Social Ministries at St. Mary's*

In his message for World Peace Day 2009, Pope Benedict XVI made the call to fight poverty as the way to build peace and stressed the role of global solidarity in this endeavor. The Pope is not the only one to make a connection between poverty and lack of peace: for several years now 2006 Nobel peace prize winner Muhammad Yunus, economist Jeffrey Sachs, researcher Claude Berrebi and international non-profit organizations like Oxfam and Caritas Internationalis have all denounced poverty as one of the main contributors to instability in the world.

Poverty claims the lives of millions of people each year by increasing their vulnerability to hunger, disease, and natural disasters. This is demonstrated time and time again when watching the world news. Just take the first four months of 2010: the earthquake in Haiti in January killed an estimated 250,000 persons and left 1.5 million people homeless; 8 million people in Niger are facing food shortage because of the lack of rain in 2009; over a million people have been forced to flee their homes and over 3 million are in need of humanitarian assistance due to renewed fighting in Somalia .... Poverty also contributes to political instability as attested by many of the poorest countries in the world being among the weakest states ([www.cgdev.org](http://www.cgdev.org)).

*"In today's globalized world, it is increasingly evident that peace can be built only if everyone is assured the possibility of reasonable growth: sooner or later, the distortions produced by unjust systems have to be paid for by everyone. It is utterly foolish to build a luxury home in the midst of desert or decay. Globalization on its own is incapable of building peace, and in many cases, it actually creates divisions and conflicts. If anything it points to a need: to be oriented towards a goal of profound solidarity that seeks the good of each and all. In this sense, globalization should be seen as a good opportunity to achieve something important in the fight against poverty, and to place at the disposal of justice and peace resources which were scarcely conceivable previously" (Message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict XVI, January 1, 2009, # 14).*

### **The Teachings of the Church**

The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers and the Church has long promoted peace. Not only are we called to oppose unjust war, nuclear conflict and the arms race, but also to oppose economic injustice and corruption, which are often at the origin of unrest and riot. *"Peace is built up day after day in the pursuit of an order willed by God and can flourish only when all recognize that everyone is responsible for promoting it..... In a climate permeated with harmony and respect for justice, an authentic culture of peace can grow and can even pervade the entire international community."* (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #495)

The principle of solidarity has been described by John Paul II as one of the fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching. We are one human family, whatever our differences. This is increasingly true in a world where globalization has become common place. As such, loving our neighbor means we cannot remain indifferent to the fate of our brothers and sisters all over the world. Solidarity calls us to the pursuit of justice and peace, as Pope Paul VI taught us in His encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963) *"if you want peace, work for justice"*.

### **Poverty and International Development**

Some progress toward poverty reduction has been achieved over the years through international assistance. More notably,

infant mortality rates worldwide have been reduced by 33 percent in 20 years, smallpox has been eradicated, more people are having access to safe drinking water sources and sanitation, improvements in agriculture techniques have helped to feed an extra billion people in the world with some countries like Bangladesh, once a symbol of famine, approaching self-sufficiency. ([www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org))

In 2000 world leaders agreed to a new global partnership under the umbrella of the United Nations and set up the Millennium Development Goals as a plan of action with measurable targets to reduce by half extreme poverty in the world by 2015. With the economic crisis initial data pointed to areas where progress towards the eight goals has slowed or reversed, and much is still to be done to alleviate world poverty, especially in sub-Saharan Africa who experiences the highest rate of poverty in the world. Some of the most important issues plaguing the region concern treatable and preventable diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, low productivity and under-investment in agriculture, and insufficient number of teachers to achieve universal primary education. Debt, trade and investment, health, development assistance and effectiveness, climate change, water and sanitation, and good governance are other issues that need to be addressed in order to significantly reduce world poverty. ([www.one.org/](http://www.one.org/))



## Catholic Confront Global Poverty

Inspired by Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 World Day of Peace Message "Fight Poverty to Build Peace" and shaped by the long tradition and experience of the Catholic Church of standing in solidarity with poor persons and communities, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) call on Catholics in the United States to confront global poverty. Catholics can pray, support the work of CRS, and advocate for policies and programs that help poor persons in the world. The campaign is focusing on seven key issues: improve and increase U.S. international assistance (in particular fulfilling our nation's commitment to a total foreign aid of 0.7% of our national income), strengthen international peacekeeping and peacebuilding initiatives, complete debt relief, reform global trade and agricultural

policies, promote comprehensive immigration reform and address the root causes of migration, ensure sustainable development of natural resources and address climate change. ([www.usccb.org/globalpoverty](http://www.usccb.org/globalpoverty) or [www.crs.org/globalpoverty](http://www.crs.org/globalpoverty))

### **Global Facts** ([www.globalissues.org](http://www.globalissues.org))

*Almost half the world live on less than \$2.50 a day.  
24,000 children die each day due to poverty.  
1.02 billion people in the world go hungry.*

Solidarity calls us to care for our neighbors in need both nearby and those far away. To join the fight against global poverty, see some ideas in the "What You Can Do" section below.

## What are Catholics doing

### Catholic Relief Services (CRS) ([crs.org](http://crs.org))

Since 1943 CRS, the official international humanitarian agency of the U.S. Catholic community, assists impoverished and disadvantaged people overseas, regardless of their race, religion or ethnicity and in the spirit of Catholic Social Teaching to promote the sacredness of human life and the dignity of the human person. In addition to emergency assistance, CRS works in long-term development to ensure that people are able to participate in the fullness of life in areas like hunger, health, education and peace building, and has reached more than 100 million people in more than 100 countries on five continents.

### Work of Human Hands Sale

The Work of Human Hands project of CRS provides Catholics in the United States an opportunity to put their consumer dollars to work for a better world by buying extraordinary, one-of-a-kind Fair Traded handcrafts. The beautiful products are created by democratically run groups of disadvantaged artisans and farmers, mostly women, from around the world who struggle to compete in the conventional trading system. By purchasing their products, you help generate needed income for the artisans and contribute to the sustainable development of their communities. The Social Ministry Commission has organized a Work of Human Hands Sale at St. Mary's since 1998. The event includes an educational display to raise awareness about global solidarity. It has grown from selling \$2,000 worth of merchandise to a full 2-day event selling some \$10,000 worth of merchandise in the last 2 years. The sale is always taking place on the first weekend of December. Mark your calendar and do your Christmas shopping for a cause!

### **Meet Françoise and see how CRS programs can make a difference** (from a story by Lane Hartill, CRS)

Françoise never had many friends. She dropped out of school as a child and married as a teenager, against her wishes. After the marriage she worked like a slave, hoeing potato fields to hauling boulders. She had a child almost every year for the next six years. When you ask about her parents, Françoise starts to weep: she is from Rwanda and many of her family members died during the genocide in 1994. Then she joined the CRS-led group Savings and Internal Lending Community (SILC). CRS helped set up groups for Rwandans who do not have access to banks, bringing them together to learn how to save money. Money is contributed to a fund and members can access modest loans. Because most of the members are from the same village or community, there is social pressure to repay the loan on time. The group members also contribute to a social fund, which helps members when unexpected needs for cash arise, usually for medical emergencies or funerals.

With the help of her first \$30 loan through SILC, Françoise set up a little shop. Now, she still has a hard time making ends meet, but the loans definitively help. There are some other benefits for the group members like the friendship they develop, helping to strengthen their community. Women chat with one another releasing all the stress that is simmering inside them. Thus Françoise became good friend with her neighbor, Yvonne, also a member of SILC; they talk about life, comfort and encourage each other. Françoise can smile again and is more positive about the future.

## What can you do

**Pray** for people throughout the world seeking to rise from the indignities of poverty, for U.S. policies that can help make it happen, and for all who stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters overseas.

**Learn** about Catholic social teaching, what the Church is doing to confront global poverty, U.S. international and economic policies, and the impact on poor people around the world. ([www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/))

**Act** and **advocate** by contacting your elected officials to promote policies that promote justice, peace and prosperity for impoverished people. ([www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty/](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty/)) Join Catholics Confront Global Poverty today at [www.crs.org/ccgp](http://www.crs.org/ccgp).

**Give** to collections for the Church's mission overseas that helps people lift themselves out of poverty or to CRS. Help with the organization of the Work of Human Hands sale at St. Mary's or shop there for your Christmas gifts. For more information about the sale, contact Clotilde Pichon at [cpichon@aggiecatholic.org](mailto:cpichon@aggiecatholic.org).

**Interested in learning more about Social Justice and the Catholic Social Teaching? Join the Conversations about Contemporary Concerns this summer, where each week a social justice topic will be presented and discussed. Come to any to the sessions every Tuesday at 7 PM in the Student Center from June 1 to August 3. Check St. Mary's website for more information on the topics to be discussed.**