



Matthew 25

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

The Social Justice Committee Newsletter
of St. Mary's Catholic Center, College Station, Texas

January 2012

A Place For All At The Table

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

It is sometimes hard to believe that in the USA, one of the richest countries in the world, millions of persons live in poverty and up to 2.5 million are homeless. Many of us may relegate poverty and hunger as problems of developing countries. Not so. And even worse, with the current economic crisis poverty in the USA is steadily growing. Being poor does not mean necessarily being jobless, more and more working families are living at or below the poverty line.

As disciples of Jesus, we cannot ignore our social responsibilities towards our neighbors in need. All people have basic human needs that have to be met in order for us to reach our potential. Ending poverty means ensuring that all have the opportunity and ability to meet those needs for themselves and their families. When we respond to our neighbors in need, we are feeding, clothing, and sheltering Jesus, "Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25: 40)

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God, to comfort all who mourn."

-Isaiah 61:1-2

FAITH'S STORY

"Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless." (Mother Teresa)



One day a young lady called, Faith (not her real name) stopped at the church looking for assistance. Faith had lost her job and was receiving unemployment compensations, when she heard about a local non-profit paying for tuitions and books for people to go back to school and so she decided to get another degree in nursing. However when it was time for renewing her unemployment benefits, her status was changed and her compensations ceased, leaving her without any income.

Faith began looking for a job, but to no avail. She fell behind with all her bills, most critically rent and utilities. She had no family or friends in the area to turn to for help. Not knowing where to get assistance, Faith came to St. Mary's. She was facing eviction. Even pooling all the resources available locally would not have been enough to allow her to remain long in the same apartment without income. Faith needed to find an affordable place to stay, an impossible task that finally led her to the Twin City Mission homeless shelter. The church helped her with gasoline so she could still get to her classes and apply for jobs.

About a year later, Faith stopped by the church again. This time she did not come for assistance, but to give a small donation of her own in thanksgiving for the manner with which she was treated during her prior visits. After a few months living in the shelter or her car and taking any jobs she could to make money, she finally was hired for a job in her field allowing Faith to get back on her feet. She survived this tough situation thanks to her faith, and the kindness and concern shown by a few people she met along the way. Although she was thankful for the material help she received through the church, she is particularly grateful that someone took the time to listen to her, return her calls, and give her some advice and hope for the future. *"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."* (Leo Buscaglia)

"We need to connect with the poor on a personal level. It is one thing to send a donation to a charitable organization. While this is good and I think this is a worthy effort for us as Catholics, we also need to look directly into the eyes of the poor."

-Bishop Joe Vasquez, Catholic Spirit, January 2012

ON THE ECONOMIC SITUATION

Excerpts from a letter of Most Reverend Timothy M. Dolan, Archbishop of New York and President of the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, September 2011

[Recently] it was reported that 46 million people (15%) now live in poverty in the United States. This report follows dismal unemployment figures in recent months.... [T]hese numbers are not statistics, but people suffering and wounded in their human dignity. They are parents who cannot feed their children, families that have lost their homes and jobless workers who have lost not only income, but also a sense of their place in society. For us, each of these persons is a child of God with innate human dignity and rights that deserve respect. These numbers bring home to us the human costs and moral consequences of a broken economy that cannot fully utilize the talents, energy and work of all our people. We know the terrible toll the current economic turmoil is taking on families and communities. In our own Catholic dioceses we are struggling to match scarce resources with growing needs Widespread unemployment, underemployment and pervasive poverty are diminishing human lives, undermining human dignity, and hurting children and families.....

The best way out of poverty is to work at a living wage. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, 'Being out of work or dependent on public or private assistance for a prolonged period undermines the freedom and creativity of the person and his family and social relationships, causing great psychological and spiritual suffering' (*Caritas in Veritate*, # 25). The common good will not advance; economic security will not be achieved; and individual initiative will be weakened when so many live without the dignity of work and bear the crushing burden of poverty. These economic failures have fundamental institutional and systemic elements that have either been ignored or made worse by political and economic behaviors, which have undermined trust and confidence.

However, this is not time to make excuses or place blame. It is a time for everyone to accept their own personal and institutional responsibility to help create jobs and to overcome poverty, each in accord with their own abilities and opportunities. Individuals and families, faith-based and community groups, businesses and labor, government at every level, all must work together and find effective ways to promote the common good in national and economic life.

Sixteen million of our children (almost one out of four) are growing up poor. It is especially disheartening that African-Americans and Hispanics live with unemployment and poverty at far higher rates than others. Immigrant workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation and unfair treatment. These realities contradict our national pledge of "liberty and justice for all." They also contradict the consistent teaching of our Church. Our Catholic tradition begins with respect for the life and dignity of all, requires a priority concern for poor and vulnerable people, reflects the ties and bonds of solidarity, respects the mutual relationships of subsidiary, and promotes the dignity of work and protection for workers.

..... In our Catholic parishes, schools, charities, hospitals and other ministries, the poor, the underemployed and the unemployed are not issues, but people with names and faces. It is an essential part of our work as Catholics to build a more just society and economy. We feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, educate the young, welcome refugees and care for the sick and vulnerable.

What can You do?

Pray for those struggling to have their basic needs met or those facing health issues, and **reflect** on how you can serve others.

Get involved with St. Vincent de Paul Society (svdpvolunteers@verizon.net), Good Samaritan Gabriel Project Life Center (979-822-9340), Catholic Charities (979-204-7169) or with Aggies Serving Another Person (ASAPvolunteer@gmail.com).

Donate money in the St. Vincent de Paul Society Poor Box at the entrance of the Church. Donate gently used clothing, household items or furniture to the SVdP Thrift Store (300 N. Main in Bryan, 979-823-4369).

Learn about the Catholic Social Teaching (www.usccb.org, www.osjspm.org) and domestic poverty issues (www.usccb.org, www.catholiccharitiesusa.org)

Advocate by calling or emailing your federal, state or local representatives to express concerns about poverty in the US.

Poverty facts (from www.census.gov)

- The official poverty rate in 2010 was 15.1% — up from 14.3% in 2009; this represented 46.2 million people, up from 43.6 million in 2009.
- The number of people in poverty in 2010 is the largest number in the 52 years for which poverty estimates have been published.
- In the U.S., one out of every five children under 18 live in poverty. For children under six, that number is one in four.
- Texas ranks 6th in terms of people living in poverty: 18.4% of Texans were impoverished in 2010, up from 17.3%
- The number of the working poor, people with jobs but still in poverty is rising. In 2010, 22% of all jobs provided income below the poverty line.

Our Church serves and stands in solidarity with those who are poor and jobless, helping them break the cycle of poverty and act on behalf of their own families and communities. Our Conference will continue to urge our leaders to assist and protect the poor and jobless as they seek to promote economic growth and fiscal responsibility. The Catholic community will strengthen our work with others to address the economic, family, social and other factors which contribute to widespread poverty.

In these tough economic times, we turn to the God who loves us. We pray for those who need work. We lift up the poor and suffering. We ask God's guidance for our nation. This is not a time to give into discouragement. It is a time for faith, hope and love. Faith offers us moral principles to guide us in the days ahead. Christian hope gives us strength. Christ's love calls us to care for those left behind in this broken economy.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING AFTER YOU GRADUATE?

How about SERVICE? Matt Aujero from Catholic Volunteer Network donated his time and talent after he graduated. He invites all students who are trying to answer this question to come to his info session. Join him **in Room 204 after the 5:30 p.m. daily Mass Monday, Jan. 23rd** as he shares his story as one of more than 19,000 volunteers serving with CVN. Pizza and drinks will be served.