

# Prelate urges youths to provide hope for poor

By Ann Borgmann  
Catholic News Service

MILWAUKEE — Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland urged more than 600 students attending the fifth conference of the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness to become a "source of hope" for the voiceless poor.

"Think of all the helpless people out there," the Milwaukee prelate said in an address earlier this month. "Every time you reach a helping hand to them, every time you show concern for them, you become their extra lung. You become their source of hope."

The conference was held Oct. 10-13 at Jesuit-run Marquette University in Milwaukee. The national student campaign is a Boston-based network of college and high school students, educators and community leaders who help students and other groups unite to combat poverty and homelessness.

Describing his own boyhood in Pennsylvania during the Depression, the prelate advised the students to treat each person as a human being, not as a statistic.

"People do not want, when they're poor, to be treated as if they're poor, as if they have no dignity," he said. "Please make sure that you see every human being out there, especially the poor, as having their own worth and dignity ... We don't give them that worth and dignity. They get that from being created in the image and likeness of God."

The archbishop also urged the students to teach the poor how to live independently. "People have a right and want to participate fully in society," he said. "They



File photo

An unidentified man finds a resting place on a rundown street in downtown Detroit. Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland urged students at a conference on hunger and homelessness earlier this month to treat all people with dignity.

want to take care of themselves and their own families."

Action, not words, is the key to reaching out to people, he added. "You've got to touch poor, helpless people," he said. "You've got to get out there with them. To talk about it is useless, in a sense."

When historians write about the accomplishments of the 20th century, they will highlight the creation of nuclear weapons, great personal wealth and space travel, Archbishop Weakland said. But society has yet to find a solution to poverty.

Gerard Cajas grew up in New York City in a household where his mother sometimes struggled to support the family. A graduate of St. John's University in New York, he works with poor youths in the Norris Square Neighborhood Project in Philadelphia.

He said he heard about last year's conference from friends and took time off work to find out "how I could contribute to where I'm working now."

By attending, "maybe I can subconsciously awaken the consciousness of my peers," he added.

Jessica Powers and Chip Lambert, freshmen at Emerson College in Boston, established a student group called World Hunger Year in an attempt to educate the local community about the homeless. Attending the conference, they said, will give them tips on how to plan programs and fundraisers.

"This is a very strong issue; it hits home with me," said Powers, who often sees people sleeping on benches near campus. "I don't see the need for people in America to be without homes, not educated and not have jobs."



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