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Churches taking stock in social ministry views

At its best, Catholic charity could be likened to a well-stocked cupboard, open to anyone needing containers filled with justice, security and mercy.

In recent years, however, more and more U.S. Catholics have become concerned with the ingredients inside those containers — ingredients carrying such names as "consistent life ethic," "full employment," "living wages," "child care," "racial harmony," and a host of other components.

But many observers contend that Catholic social ministry advocates must also analyze the ingredients in the harsh stew society serves to its unfortunates.

Millions of citizens here and abroad are forced daily to consume the paltry fare of underemployment, unemployment, child neglect and abortion, racism, sexism, and other rotten crumbs thrown out by an uncaring world.

For more than a decade, continuing cutbacks in governmental spending — combined with negative economic factors — have buffeted poor and low-income families in the United States. War, famine and disease, meanwhile, have exacted gruesome human tolls in many of America's world neighbors.

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