

Banquet

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Entitled *A Theology of Economic Engagement*, the document states:

"The heart of the relationship between economics and theology is found in Psalm 24:1: 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.' The material earth and the spiritual God exist in relationship ... God owns the earth."

"In America in 1990 the richest 1 percent of the population, after taxes, made as much as the poorest 40 percent of the population," the document says. "While there is a mythology that justifies such inequality by implying that the poor are less worthy, less able and less ambitious than the rich, we reject this mythology."

Economic Engagement notes that the word "economics" originated in a Greek word describing the "good or right management of the household, the family's shared life." The statement maintains that: "Our household is being badly managed."

"The politics and economics of division need now to be replaced with the politics and economics of inclusion ...," *Economic Engagement* continues. "We applaud members of the banking and business communities who recognize the integrity of God's household by investing in people and neighborhoods that once were overlooked."

Economic Engagement quotes Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity, an organization that promotes the building and ownership of homes for low-income people: "God's people 'don't need charity, they need capital. They don't need case workers, they need co-workers.'"

The document was the culmination of months of effort by GRCC to address economic issues affecting Rochester's development, according to Sister Beth LeValley, SSJ, who heads the organization's task force on community economic development.

The task force meets every first Thursday of the month at Rochester's Mount Olivet Church and has sponsored numerous educational programs and meetings on economics, including a March 23 forum at St. Mary's Church in downtown Rochester on "Investing in Community Development."

The task force has also looked into such issues as the establishment of a



credit union for low-income people, a prospect that has interested her order and several other organizations, said Sister LeValley, a former superior general of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

"I think the religious community is looking at vehicles that they can support," she added.

Sister LeValley and the Greater Rochester Community of Churches are not alone in their concern over economics and justice. Delving into marketplace specifics is part of a growing trend as Western Europe's bishops become increasingly concerned with the nitty-gritty of economics.

They see *lira*, *deutsche mark*, *franc*, *pound* and *peso* decisions and the systems in which they are made as important motors in determining social and political well-being.

When Italy's largest automaker, Fiat, began 1994 with plans to eliminate 15,000 jobs, the Italian bishops showered the company with harsh criticism.

In individual and joint statements, they unleashed their wrath over the devastating effect this action could have on Italy's recession economy, already plagued by high unemployment. Some bishops chided Fiat executives for failing to create new jobs and even told them where the company should build

new plants.

The U.S. bishops' extensive commentary on the economy, published in 1986, is credited with stimulating the Europeans to take a similar look at their situations.

Previously, bishops explored the consequences of economic decisions in national life, but were not involved in economics as a cause of social and political ills, said Roberto Papini, secretary general of the Rome-

based Jacques Maritain Institute.

Western Europe is not unique. The tendency to take a critical look at the economy extends to the hierarchies of other developed countries and of the underdeveloped world.

Papini's institute, a Catholic-oriented think tank, and the Catholic University of Fribourg, Switzerland, expect to conclude a study on the trend later this year after examining the statements of 1,500 bishops from around the world.

Preliminary results show that economic analysis is filling up more and more pages of official church documents.

Here are some upcoming examples of the trend in Western Europe:

- The Spanish bishops have prepared a 100-page document on the nation's growing level of poverty.

- The French bishops are working on a document about France's unemployment problems.

- The German bishops have begun consultations with labor leaders, businessmen and politicians on a major document to be issued in early 1995 on social and economic issues, especially problems related to German unification. The document will be jointly published with Germany's main Protestant churches.

Western European church officials say that the trend has been spurred recently by changing conditions in post-Cold-War Europe and public pressure on bishops to be more specific in their application of church social teachings.

"The borders within Europe are breaking down. People from the East are standing before us," said Father An-

thony Rauscher, a professor of economics and theology at the University of Augsburg, Germany.

Eastern Europeans are well-trained and "they don't want charity," he said. "They want a share of the market."

Father Rauscher is on the 10-member committee drafting the German joint document.

In preparation for the final writing of their document, German Christian leaders are taking a crash course in these economic complexities through a series of consultations with representatives from Germany's labor, business and political worlds.

In France, the bishops are preparing a new document after a statement they issued last September on unemployment was generally criticized as "not concrete enough," said Jesuit Father Henri Busseri, secretary of the bishops' social commission.

The statement was well-received for its emphasis on human dignity but it did not go far enough, he said.

"It needs precision" and the new statement "will present reflections on more specific questions," added Father Busseri.

In Spain, "the crisis marking our country" is the rapid spread of poverty, said Father Fernando Fuente, secretary of the Spanish bishops social affairs commission.

This requires "an ethical review of how the economy is evolving," he said.

The February document written by the social affairs commission does not stop at economic analysis, but also proposes concrete ways by which Catholic groups can fight poverty, said Father Fuente.

According to Papini of the Maritain institute, "the mother of all these documents" in the developed world is the 1986 U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on the economy.

The U.S. document was written after several years of extensive hearings with experts representing a cross-section of U.S. economic, religious and political life.

But the phenomenon of exploring the economy already was rooted in Latin America since the 1960s and the U.S. bishops learned from their Latin American counterparts, said Papini.

Although Catholics are a tiny minority in Asia, Papini's research shows that the region's bishops also are on the economics bandwagon and their documents have an influence on societies.

Asian Catholics "form part of an elite" and "how they act in society is important," he said.

EDITORS' NOTE - This article contains reporting by Catholic News Service.

Diocesan Catholics who know of church-related efforts on behalf of community development in their region are urged to contact Rob Cullivan at 716/328-4340.



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