

Inside: The church pays tribute to Cardinal Joseph Bernardin



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Bishops issue call to justice

WASHINGTON (CNS) — U.S. Catholics were urged to work for economic justice in a brief, 10-point framework approved by the nation's bishops Nov. 12 in a unanimous voice vote.

"A Catholic Framework for Economic Life" echoes the much larger 1986 pastoral letter by the bishops, "Economic Justice for All." The new statement will be available by Jan. 1 in English and Spanish on a card, a poster and as an introduction to an anniversary edition of "Economic Justice for All."

Here is the approved text of the 10 principles:

1. The economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy.
2. All economic life should be shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family and serve the common good.
3. A fundamental moral measure of any economy is how the poor and vulnerable are faring.
4. All people have a right to life and to secure the basic necessities of life (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, safe environment, economic security).
5. All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions as well as the right to organize and join unions or other associations.
6. All people, to the extent they are able, have a corresponding duty to work, a responsibility to provide for the needs of their families and an obligation to contribute to the broader society.
7. In economic life, free markets have both clear advantages and limits; government has essential responsibilities and limitations; voluntary groups have irreplaceable roles, but cannot substitute for the proper working of the market or the just policies of the state.
8. Society has a moral obligation, including governmental action where necessary, to assure opportunity, meet basic human needs and pursue justice in economic life.
9. Workers, owners, managers, stockholders and consumers are moral agents in economic life. By our choices, initiative, creativity and investment, we enhance or diminish economic opportunity, community life and social justice.
10. The global economy has moral dimensions and human consequences. Decisions on investment, trade, aid and development should protect human life and promote human rights, especially for those most in need wherever they might live on this globe.



Letter recalled one decade later

In their 1986 pastoral letter "Economic Justice for All," the U.S. bishops wrote about the real purpose of human life:

"The fulfillment of human needs, we know, is not the final purpose of the creation of the human person," they wrote. "We have been created to share in the divine life..."

Frank Stotz, former chief financial officer of Bausch & Lomb Inc., the Rochester-based optics giant, put the bishop's lofty words into plainer terms:

"God put us on this earth to make something other than a buck," he said in an interview. Stotz is a parishioner at Church of the Transfiguration in Pittsford.

But how we make that buck became the concern of the U.S. bishops in the early to mid-1980s. Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee chaired a five-member committee of his colleagues that traversed the country for expert testimony on the economy from economists, sociologists, theologians, labor leaders, business experts, government officials and corporation heads.

One of the people consulted was Daniel Finn, a professor of economics and theology at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn. In a telephone interview, he noted that Vatican officials had been uncomfortable with the consultative process the bishops undertook to write their letter.

"Rome was concerned that this might give the impression that the bishops don't have a teaching authority of their own," he said, adding that he'd learned that from one of the bishops on the committee. "But the teaching authority is increased when you have this kind of consultation."

The end result of all that consultation was "Economic Justice for All," which asked the nation in its opening paragraph: "What does the economy do for..."

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTHEW SCOTT

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