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Letter

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people? What does it do to people? And how do people participate in it?"

Stotz is one of a handful of diocesan Catholics acquainted firsthand with the creation of that letter. A former chairman of the finance committee of the diocesan Stewardship Council, Stotz was a partner in the Price Waterhouse LLP accounting firm when he was asked to join a group to help the bishops draft "Economic Justice for All."

Made up of academics, social justice activists, labor experts, clergy, religious and lay business people, that study group was chaired by Marvin Mich, then an assistant professor of Christian ethics at St. Bernard's Institute. Formed at the request of Bishop Matthew H. Clark, the group was one of hundreds across the country that provided written suggestions for revisions in drafts of "Economic Justice for All." The drafts were issued between November 1984 and November 1986, when the bishops approved the third and final writing. In recent interviews with the *Catholic Courier*, members of the diocesan study group recalled how the bishops' let-

ter affected them and spoke about its current relevance to today's church and society.

Stotz recalled that he considered "Economic Justice for All" a good document, but that it could have done a better job of acknowledging the difficulties of operating a successful business in a fiercely competitive economy. The document could have recognized more fully that despite such pressures, many business executives sincerely strive to uplift the poor, integrate minorities into the workplace and to treat their employees decently, he stressed.

"You can always find some horror story in how some person was treated by some company," he said. "The fact of the matter is, it's bad business to deal with people inappropriately. Good businesses don't do that."

Stotz commended the bishops' concern for the poor, and noted that he shared it himself. But he also said the bishops could have stressed more the need for people to take personal responsibility for



their own economic destiny through habits of self-discipline and education.

But another member of the diocesan study group, Lawrence J. Oberlies, vice president and senior trust officer of Marine Midland Bank in Rochester, said that since "Economic Justice for All" was issued, the bishops have not been hard enough on shareholders, investors and corporate executives who have profited handsomely while thousands of employees have lost their jobs through downsizing.

"Over the last 10 years, I've been disappointed with the lack of commentary by church leaders, particularly bishops and priests, on the downsizing, re-engineering and out-sourcing going on under the guise of coping with competition in a global economy," said Oberlies, a parishioner at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield. "In fairness, I presume that most clerics have been intimidated by the complexities of world economics and hesitant to publicly pontificate in unfamiliar waters. But they certainly were and are qualified

to point out greed when they see it."

That point was echoed by Jim Lund, who co-directs the Chicago Archdiocesan Office for Ministry of Peace and Justice with his wife, Mary Heidkamp. The couple were social ministry employees of the Rochester diocese in the early 1980s and participated in the pastoral letter study group.

Lund stressed that the bishops' letter, and Catholic social teaching in general, points away from seeing people and nations as mere objects in the economy. For example, Third World debt seen from the eyes of the church is a far different issue than when it's seen by Western lending institutions, he said.

"(Third World nations) are repaying that debt at the cost of the health of children who had nothing to do with the debt," he said. "Our faith says that the lives of these children is more important than some bank in New York getting its interest payment on time."

The bishops' pastoral letter has had a positive effect among Chicago business executives, according to Heidkamp, who noted that a group of Catholic business people inspired by the letter formed "Business Executives for Economic Justice." The group helps low-income residents to integrate into the economy through job training and enterprise, she said. Such activity by lay people highlights what Heidkamp saw as one of the greatest strengths of the bishops' letter.

"(It) helped people to understand that we're all economic actors, no matter what we are, and that the church gives us principles by which to act in the economy."

The drafting and consultative process that preceded the issuance of "Economic Justice for All" gave a parallel insight to Mich. It was a great moment in U.S. church history when its leaders asked its lay members to help them form a teaching, he said.

"You actually had the bishops not just as teachers, but as learners," he said. "In a sense, we were part of the magisterial office of the church."

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This is the seventh and final article in an occasional series on the U.S. bishops' 1986 pastoral letter "Economic Justice for All."

St. Mary's, Rochester, group helps unemployed

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Robert H. Gusciora was a highly successful employee with a Fortune 500 company when, he said, he was unceremoniously dismissed. The ax came three months before he would have qualified for a full pension.

"It was a very, very tough thing because I had given my heart and soul to that place," he said.

After losing his job, he turned to the "People in Transition Group" at St. Mary's Church in downtown Rochester for support. Formed in October 1993, according to the parish's permanent deacon, William F. Coffey, the group meets at 7:30 p.m. the second Tuesday of every

month. Members of the group are unemployed parishioners along with mentors who provide emotional support and regular contact with unemployed members, he said.

Gusciora noted the group was a light of hope shining during some of the darkest days of his life.

"If it weren't for that kind of organization, it would've been a tougher, tougher thing," he said of his emotional downturn after losing his job.

Now Gusciora is one of several volunteers in the group, which contains experts in such areas as resume writing, unemployment insurance and job placement. Deacon Coffey estimated that 80 percent of the 150 people who have used the group landed jobs. Networking among

group members and the wider parish helped that process, he said.

"We've had people in the parish hiring people from the parish," Deacon Coffey said.

Coffey pointed out that St. Mary's decided to sponsor the group after parishioners who had lost their jobs expressed concern about their personal futures. The parish responded, he said.

"If we can't see Christ in the unemployed, where do we see him?" the deacon asked rhetorically.

Loretta Lowans, a volunteer with the group, put it in another way.

"All of those unemployed parishioners have supported the parish," she said. "Now it's their time of need, and by God, the church should be there for them."

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