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Bishops urge parishes to be more Catholic by acting globally

Tony Magliano | Oct. 29, 2012 Making a Difference

Although you probably have never heard of it, one document, "Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for U.S. Parishes [1]," has the potential of making a tremendous difference in the lives of the poorest people on earth. But first, 15 years of accumulated dust needs to be wiped away from it.

As we approach Nov. 12, the 15th anniversary of this little-known but very important document of the U.S. bishops, it would be an excellent use of time for American Catholics as well as Catholics in all other economically developed nations to read and ponder the moral challenges of "Called to Global Solidarity."

The bishops write that though international institutions, programs and collections exist, they have not yet "awakened a true sense of solidarity among many U.S. Catholics. The international commitment of the Church in the U.S. is not all it can and should be. ...

"While many parishes do build global bridges, the Church's teaching on global solidarity is too often unknown, unheard, or unheeded."

The fact that the United States and almost every other industrialized nation gives less than 1 percent of its annual budget for poverty-focused international assistance and that relatively few Catholics lobby legislators for more life-saving foreign aid is sad evidence that building solidarity with the poor of the world is not a priority for most Catholics in the economically developed world.

This is not good. It does not reflect Gospel thinking or Catholic social teaching.

The bishops write, "The United States ranks first in the world in the weapons we sell to poor nations" -- $56 billion worth in 2011 -- "and near the bottom in the proportion of our resources we devote to development for the poor."

"For Catholics in the U.S. the call to international solidarity takes on special urgency. We live in the largest of the world's wealthy nations ... Yet all around us are signs of suffering and need: Foreign debt crushes hopes and paralyzes progress in too many poor nations ... 35,000 persons die of hunger and its consequences every day around the world."

And "26,000 people, mostly civilians, are maimed or killed every year by anti-personal landmines." And yet the U.S. refuses to sign the Ottawa Treaty banning such weapons.

The bishops lament, "The sense of responsibility toward the world's poor and oppressed has grown weaker."

In the face of grave injustice and tremendous poverty-based world problems, rich nations are often tempted to choose paths of indifference and even hostility to global engagement, write the bishops.

But as Americas prepare to elect a president and other national leaders, it is imperative to remember that "our faith calls us to a different road -- a path of global responsibility and solidarity."

In "Called to Global Solidarity," the bishops teach: "A parish reaching beyond its own members and beyond national boundaries is a truly 'catholic' parish. An important role for the parish is to challenge and encourage every believer to greater global solidarity." And the Mass -- especially the homily -- is ideally suited for this task.

The bishops write, "There is no greater opportunity to help Catholics understand the social dimensions of our faith than in the homily. ...

"Christ is calling us to do more. In a sense, our parishes need to be more Catholic and less parochial. A suffering world must find a place in the pastoral priorities of every Catholic parish."

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