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Fund offers matching grants to projects helping West Virginia's poor

Colleen Rowan Catholic News Service | Dec. 3, 2012
Wheeling, W.Va.

A new matching grant fund established by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston aims to help address "the grief and anguish of the poor among us," especially the children living in poverty, said Bishop Michael J. Bransfield.

Announcing the fund at a Nov. 29 news conference, he said it will provide matching grants for parishes, schools and agencies in the diocese that wish to implement local programs and outreach to address issues he identified in a pastoral letter he issued in early November.

The fund was established, the bishop said, to help new and existing ministries meet the needs of the poor in communities across the state.

Pastoral guidelines for the fund will be distributed in December by a grant committee.

"It is my hope to speak to the grief and anguish of the poor among us, especially the experience of our children and families in poverty, and offer to them a compassionate message of joy and hope," Bransfield said.

"At the same time, I want to invite you, dear brothers and sisters, to join me in compassionate care for the poor and continual solicitude on their behalf," he added.

He spoke about his pastoral letter, "Setting Children Free: Loosening the Bonds of Poverty in West Virginia," and the issues he covered in the document, his fourth pastoral since he became bishop of the statewide diocese.

He noted that West Virginia experiences higher incidents of low birth weight and infant mortality than the national average. The child death rate is higher in West Virginia, he said, as is the percentage of children approved for free and reduced-price school meals. The state also ranks higher than the national average in child abuse, children with poor oral health and in the teen birth rate.

"All of these statistics, taken together, give a clear understanding of the experience of poverty among young people and its consequences for their health," the bishop said. "To help the children of our state rise from poverty will take a wide variety of approaches.

"Extending compassionate care to children means that we should work for policies regarding health including the effects on children of behavioral health problems of addiction and mental illness and education which will give these young ones 'long lives, full of well-being.'"

Bransfield said he sought to address the most pressing aspects of poverty in the Mountain State in his pastoral and noted that concern for the poor is part of the church's mission in the new evangelization.

"Through our Catholic Charities agencies and the work of our parishes and social ministries, we are committed to feeding the hungry and clothing the naked," he said. "We are committed to educating our young people and tending to the physical and spiritual needs of all. We do so, motivated by Christ and following the example of

Our Lady, Mother of the Poor."

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