NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Doing best together in these hard economic times

John McCarthy | Jan. 7, 2013 NCR Today

Catholics everywhere should take a moment and scream, "Finally!" Pope Benedict's New Year address brought the issue of wealth disparity to the global stage, giving an appropriate focus to the issues that we will be facing in 2013 and beyond.

The Holy Father aptly describes the ever-widening wealth gaps in the U.S. and abroad as "hotbeds of tension and conflict caused by growing instances of inequality between the rich and the poor." He cites the source of the great inequality as "the prevalence of selfish and individualistic mindset," which often leads to crime and terrorism. These statements should raise a series of moral questions for Catholics who view the market as a player in morality.

I was recently asked, "What makes up a Catholic budget?" In short, I believe the answer is: We all do best when we're doing best together. Budgetary battles are about priorities, but so often we let them fall into the drudgery of "us-against-them" politicking. Faith leaders have an important responsibility to remind the 100 percent that the 47 percent and 1 percent are harmed equally by the growing gap in our society.

With the top 10 wealthiest percent of Americans controlling 75 percent of our wealth, our society cannot function as a true community. Extreme wealth leads to political power and access to influencers, disrupting our equal democratic process. Extreme poverty -- as stated in the USCCB's *Economic Justice for All* -- is "a denial of full participation in the economic, social, and political life of society and an inability to influence decisions that affect one's life."

As we continue to become a nation divided by socio-economic status we cease to become a true community, insteading build up social barriers and creating our own elevated view of the self. The rich no longer hear the cry of the poor, and the poor see the rich only as self-serving. In short: We no longer understand each other's lives.

Capitalism itself isn't the problem; so often we like to find a scapegoat. If we want to look for the real problem at hand, we need to look in the mirror. We've allowed our society to become about numbers and profits and not about reality and people. As Catholics, we need to not only advocate for distributive justice but instead for meeting immediate needs of people, as they are present.

Now more than ever we need to see the Lord's Prayer as a call to social justice: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread." We can only build the kingdom here on earth to reflect the will in heaven if we see that our daily bread is not a full serving for ourselves alone, but instead a breaking of bread shared for all.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/21/2014 - 10:59*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/doing-best-together-these-hard-economic-times