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

Message to new pope: Don't separate the social, economic

Kate Childs Graham | Feb. 25, 2013 NCR Today

As news of Pope Benedict XVI's resignation unfolds, Catholics are reflecting on his papacy and his legacy. In these reflections, a common theme emerges again and again: Pope Benedict has been a real champion for economic justice.

And he has.

Many lauded the pope as an ally of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Some said he was even farther to the left than President Barack Obama when it came to economic justice. During his tenure, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace suggested reforms for the international financial and monetary systems, reforms that were dismissed by many conservative Catholics in the United States. In his 2009 encyclical, "Caritas in Veritate," the pope advocated for an economy guided by "an ethic which is people-centered" and decried the gross economic equalities that pervade today's society.

Pope Benedict heard the cries of the poor, and he was responding to those cries.

However, as progressive as many may characterize this pope on economic justice, he has been equally conservative -- and perhaps a bit regressive -- on many so-called social issues, including gender equality; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality; and reproductive justice, to name just a few.

Here's the thing: We can't separate the social from the economic. When a woman is barred from leadership, she feels that in her bank account. When same-sex marriage is banned at the state and federal levels, same-sex couples are forced to pay thousands more in taxes. When a person has to choose between paying for reproductive health care and putting food on the table, local economies suffer.

An unfinanced call

Christine Haider-Winnett feels called to the priesthood. Above all, she sees herself ministering to her community as a parish pastor. To prepare to fulfill her call, she is pursuing a Master of Divinity at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, Calif. However, unlike many men who feel an equal call to the priesthood, Christine has to foot the bill for her schooling.

This has put a serious financial strain on her and her husband. He works full time. She goes to school part time and works 20 hours per week. Still, they find that there's "never enough money."

"Even though I'm taking only half of the recommended course load," Christine said, "my tuition is more than the cost of my rent."

Additionally, because Christine is attending a Protestant seminary while maintaining a strong Catholic identity, she doesn't have access to grants and scholarships her peers receive through their denominations.

A date night. A new outfit. Christine and her husband have to struggle to find money for even the little things.

An unplanned expense could force her to drop out of school.

Even so, she is determined to make it work. Her call is undeniable.

Months of unemployment

Like many -- too many -- people living in the United States, Delfin Bautista has been out of work for months on end. With a penchant for pastoral care, Delfin said he has been a front-runner for several positions in Catholic institutions only to be turned down once he shared that he identifies as LGBT.

Delfin applied for a campus ministry position at the University of Great Falls, a Catholic university in Montana. After talking with him and reading his resume, Delfin said the university flew him there for on-campus interviews. When he opened up about being LGBT, he said, he was no longer in the running.

He said he was also being considered for a retreat leader position with RENEW International, a Catholic organization based in New Jersey that focuses on the formation of small faith communities. Delfin said they were excited about his application and told him he was a frontrunner. Again, when he opened up about being LGBT, he said he was told he could no longer be considered for the position.

If they didn't turn him down outright, many Catholic organizations still lack equal benefits to support Delfin and his partner.

To make ends meet, Delfin and his partner have depleted their savings. They moved in with his mother. And recently, his partner -- a Catholic music ministry professional -- took a job as a security guard to make ends meet.

"It's been stressful," Delfin said. "But we are managing as a couple."

Out-of-pocket health care costs

Becky Schwantes-An was a graduate student in a service learning program at the University of Notre Dame a few years before the Affordable Care Act was passed. She and her peers in the programs received a modest "simple-living" stipend, but their health insurance didn't cover reproductive health care.

"It was definitely a challenge and quite frustrating to pay for birth control when my previous insurance covered it," Becky said.

She said she had to make sacrifices to pay the $15 a month.

Now that the Affordable Care Act has passed, birth control is provided without a co-pay. Becky, a social worker, applauds the legislation.

"I see firsthand the difficult decisions women have to make daily between paying for medication, utilities and food," she said.

Becky said she wants a church hierarchy that will allow women to "care for their bodies in the way that they feel is best for them" and not "based on the decisions of men who will never know what it is like to have a menstrual cycle and cramps, carry a pregnancy or give birth."

The social and the economic

The economic reality for women and LGBT people is grim. In the United States, women make only 74 cents for

every dollar paid to a male counterpart. The numbers for Latina and African-American women are even bleaker. Families headed by same-sex couples make about $15,000 less per year than families headed by opposite-sex couples. Fifteen percent of transgender people report making less than $10,000 per year.

These numbers reveal a staggering reality: The injustice that women and LGBT people continue to feel -- injustice that has often been promulgated by the church hierarchy -- is not just a social injustice. It's an economic injustice.

Indeed, Pope Benedict heard the cries of the poor. We need the next pope to hear the cries of women and of LGBT people as well. Only then will true economic justice reign.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/21/2014 - 19:00*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/message-new-pope-dont-separate-social-economic