

Domestic Poverty and the 2012 Elections

In campaign rhetoric and convention speeches, a great deal of attention has been focused on how the middle class are faring in the current economic climate. At the same time, however, people living in poverty seem all but forgotten.

The option for the poor and vulnerable is a cornerstone of Catholic Social Teaching -- a commitment to resisting injustice and marginalization, and to transforming society so that the basic human dignity and rights of all people are respected.

Reflections from Catholic Social Teaching

The quality of the national discussion about our economic future will affect the poor most of all, in this country and throughout the world. The life and dignity of millions of men, women, and children hang in the balance. Decisions must be judged in light of what they do for the poor, what they do to the poor and what they enable the poor to do for themselves. The fundamental moral criterion for all economic decisions, policies, and institutions is this: They must be at the service of all people, especially the poor.

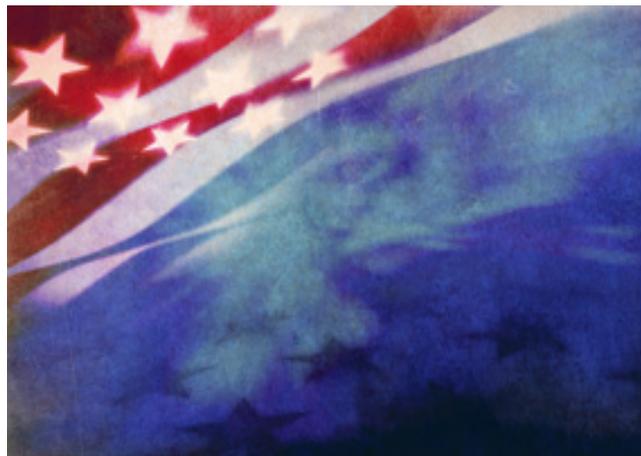
-- USCCB, *Economic Justice for All*, #24

Our faith calls us to look at economic life in terms of its moral and human dimensions. Concern for the poor echoes through the Scriptures -- in the passion of the prophets, the words and witness of Jesus, and the example of the early Church. The Church has lived out this concern in every age and every land. Our commitment to those who are in greatest need is rooted in the biblical vision of the sacredness of all human life.

-- USCCB, *A Place at the Table*

As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental 'option for the poor' -- to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. This 'option for the poor' does not mean pitting one group against another, but rather, strengthening the whole community by assisting those who are most vulnerable. As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of all our brothers and sisters, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response.

-- USCCB, *Economic Justice for All*, #16



Statistics on Domestic Poverty

- 46.2 million Americans (15%) live below the poverty line, including over 16 million children (about 22% of U.S. children).
- 1.46 million households experience extreme poverty -- living on less than \$2 per person per day -- including 2.8 million children.
- In 2011, income inequality increased, while median household income fell.
- Approximately 15% of households experienced food insecurity in 2011, meaning that they did not have access to enough food to support an active, healthy life for all members of the household.
- Nearly 80,000 families (comprised of more than 240,000 individuals) experienced homelessness on a single night in 2010. Over the year, approximately 1.6 million people spent at least one night in an emergency shelter or transitional housing.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; U.S. Department of Agriculture; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; National Poverty Center.



We are a country pledged to pursue 'liberty and justice for all,' but we are too often divided across lines of race, ethnicity, and economic inequality. ... We are an affluent society where too many live in poverty and lack health care and other necessities of life. ... These challenges [among others] are at the heart of public life and at the center of the pursuit of the common good.

-- USCCB, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, #2

Questions for Candidates to Public Office on Domestic Poverty

1. What do you understand to be the primary causes of poverty in U.S. society today? How will you address these root causes?
2. What do you believe is government's role to create conditions that effectively help to move people out of poverty? How do you envision partnering with non-profit, faith-based, community, and/or charity groups to achieve this goal?
3. How will your administration prioritize the needs of those living in extreme poverty? What will you do specifically to address the situation of children and families, and ensure that they have access to the things necessary to support basic human dignity and fundamental human rights, including adequate housing, education, health care, sufficient food?
4. What is your response to growing income inequality in the U.S.? What policies do you propose to move towards a more just and equitable distribution of income and resources? How will you deal with gender and minority wage discrimination?

Education for Justice Resources

- Backgrounder: The Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
<https://educationforjustice.org/resources/backgrounder-option-poor-and-vulnerable>
- U.S. Poverty Quiz 2012
<https://educationforjustice.org/resources/us-poverty-quiz-2012>
- Prayer Service for the Eradication of Poverty
<https://educationforjustice.org/resources/prayer-service-eradication-poverty>
- Quote Sheet: On Being Citizens and Disciples
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/resources/quote-sheet-being-citizens-and-disciples>

Other Resources

- Catholic Campaign for Human Development - Poverty USA
<http://www.povertyusa.org/>
- NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
<http://www.networklobby.org/>
- USCCB, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf>

