



The letter on the following page is one of 10 identical letters sent to the candidates for president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), on the first day of the Bishops' semi-annual meeting (November 11, 2013).

The 10 candidates are:

- Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond of New Orleans
- Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, OFM Cap., of Philadelphia
- Bishop Blase J. Cupich of Spokane, Washington
- Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston
- Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles
- Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky
- Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore
- Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr of Cincinnati
- Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron of Detroit
- Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami



November 11, 2013

Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz  
Archbishop of Louisville  
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Louisville, KY 40201-1073

c/o Baltimore Marriott Waterfront  
700 Aliceanna Street  
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Archbishop Kurtz:

We congratulate you on your nomination for the presidency of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

This past March, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit present in the Sistine Chapel, the conclave of the College of Cardinals voted for Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio to become the 266<sup>th</sup> pope and most recent successor to St. Peter. Before we came to know the Bishop of Rome as we do today, the world was consoled by a foreshadowing anecdote he shared on the evening of his election. “Remember the poor!” his brother bishop and ‘great friend,’ Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, OFM Cap, whispered in his ear as the white smoke rose from the Vatican. And the name Francis ‘came into [his] heart.’ Who would have guessed on that night the degree to which Pope Francis would so passionately define his leadership for the Church with such a simple, clear and unambiguous message and in such a short period of time?

As leaders of two Catholic organizations rooted in the Catholic Social Justice Tradition and supported by more than 60,000 Catholics, we prayerfully urge you – as Cardinal Hummes did – to also “remember the poor!” We urge you to remember them regardless of the outcome of the USCCB election, but especially if the responsibility of leadership is bestowed upon you this week.

It is understandable to our Catholic sensibilities that the most important aspects of our Catholic identity are the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and the importance of helping the poor. Just as the poor are inseparable from Jesus and have a special place in the Kingdom of God, so too do they in the hearts of Catholics and all people of goodwill. Helping the poor is in our Catholic DNA and remains an integral part of our Catholic experience, even for those who have left the Church.

We are gratified that our Church is among the largest providers of non-governmental social services and health care in our nation, through the good work of Catholic Charities and the Catholic health care system. We are gratified for the Catholic educational system’s legacy and how it continues to educate children in low-income neighborhoods today. We are gratified for the good work of Catholic Relief Services and the Migration and Refugee Services, demonstrating our care and concern for the strangers across national boundaries and among us. And we are gratified

for the good work of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the Church's anti-poverty campaign that arose from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s under the inspired leadership of Monsignor Geno Baroni. We also feel a strong sense of responsibility to this extraordinary legacy.

All of this has helped to form our Catholic identity and is a reflection of the rich Catholic Social Justice Tradition that prudentially unites faith and reason to help build a more just world. It has inspired the imperative for social action, helped guide our national conscience, and strengthened our nation's secular appreciation of social justice as part of the American Experiment. The Catholic Social Justice Tradition has guided Americans' understanding of and service to "the general welfare" – indeed the common good.

Pope Francis has awakened a new sense of possibility and responsibility within us. His messages of building a 'Church for the poor' animate hearts and minds here at home, as they do across the world, uniting the global community in solidarity with those most in need.

It is in the spirit of Pope Francis, and as faith-filled Catholics who represent different parts of the Mystical Body of Christ, we feel moved to urge you and your brother bishops to do more for the poor so that our Church here in the United States may truly be a 'Church for the poor.'

Why would we ask this of you, given everything the Church already does to help those most in need?

Since the global economy was brought to the edge of collapse by the sub-prime mortgage scandal, the USCCB has failed to collectively and effectively address poverty – even once. The USCCB vote of 134 to 85 on the failed Special Message on *Work, Poverty and a Broken Economy* last November indicates that there is not consensus among the US bishops on what you can collectively support. This alone has made many ask: what is to become of the Catholic Social Justice Tradition, particularly in light of the ground-breaking 1986 pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*, and its unanimous reaffirmation in 1995 and 1996, a time when the US bishops vigorously opposed national welfare reform.

Additionally, there has been a growing school of thought that percolates among some bishops and beyond their circles – and sometimes into the public square – that the US bishops should not involve themselves in economic affairs because you are not economists. Such a perspective surrenders moral imperatives that can shape economic policy and creates an *advocacy gap* that has diminished the effectiveness of the US bishops' prophetic voice as paracletes for the poor.

We could cite volumes of data documenting the needs of the poor and the 'scandal of glaring inequalities' in wealth and economic opportunity between rich and poor in our country and throughout the world. Suffice it to say, this September, as the government shutdown approached, the US Census Bureau released data on the number of people living in poverty in the US in 2012 that reported the following: the numbers of the poor remained essentially unchanged from 2011 and 2010, remaining 25 percent higher than in 2007. While the nation focused its attention on our asymmetric political divide, forty-six million – 1 out of 6 – of our sisters and brothers, in anonymity, felt the lingering impact of the Great Recession on their lives. At the same time, underscoring the inequality we witness, the stock market hit record highs last week and corporate

coffers have never been more flush with cash. These numbers help define two Americas, one of which more poignantly, disproportionately, and negatively entraps children and people of color.

As economists ponder whether we are facing a ‘new normal’ for our economy, inspired moral leadership is needed that can give substance to the rightful assertion that government budgets – including tax codes – are ‘moral documents’ and that, as Pope John XXIII said, “We must remember that, of its very nature, civil authority exists...to protect, above all else the common good.” Our nation has plenty of economists. However none of them have access to a captive audience of as many as 26 million voting age Catholics each Sunday as they open their hearts for the presence of Christ at Communion or who can make headlines with a national campaign of poverty awareness.

In order for our economy to serve the needs of people and not the other way around, unambiguous moral leadership – like that of Pope Francis – is needed to shape economic policy and budgets as moral documents at this critical juncture in the life of our nation and Church.

And so, today, we stand in solidarity with you and with the poor and urge you, if you are elected as president of the USCCB, to prayerfully consider:

- To follow the hope, focus, and leadership of Pope Francis in your presidency of the USCCB.
- To make it clear – in your first public statement – that advocating for the poor will be a pastoral priority for you as president of the USCCB and that you will seek to make the USCCB a *bishops’ conference for the poor* in accordance with Pope Francis’s call to make our Church a ‘Church for the poor.’
- To advocate within the USCCB for the US bishops to collectively issue a pastoral letter or ‘message’ or statement that advocates for the poor not only on the basis of personal charity but also on the basis of the right role of government – as enshrined in the Catholic Social Justice Tradition – at your June 2014 semi-annual meeting.
- To advocate within the USCCB for the US bishops to launch a nationwide poverty awareness program in all Catholic parishes in 2014, similar to the religious liberty campaign that was conducted in 2012.

We are grateful for all of the good work that our Church does and for the leadership and good work you have provided to that end. We thank you and your brother bishops for your service to the Church and for taking the time to consider our urgings made in prayerful solidarity with you and our sisters and brothers in need. You and your brother bishops remain in our prayers.

In the Peace of Christ,

Steven A. Krueger  
President, Catholic Democrats

Fred Rotondaro  
Chair, Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good

attachment

# CROSS OF ECONOMIC JUSTICE

*“The poor have the single most urgent economic claim on the conscience of the nation.”*

*–Economic Justice for All, U.S. Bishops, 1986*

*“We must remember that, of its very nature, civil authority exists...to protect, above all else the common good.”*

*– Peace on Earth, John XXIII, 1963*



*“But above all we must remember the priority of labor over capital: labor is the cause of production; capital...is its mere instrument or tool.”*

*On Human Work, John Paul II, 1981*

*“The world’s wealth is growing in absolute terms, but...The scandal of glaring inequalities continues.”*

*– Charity in Truth, Pope Benedict XVI, 2009*

THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE TRADITION  
*Informing our nation’s conscience and public policies for over a century*