Diocesan Social Action Office

Reflections on the Current Economic Crisis: Opportunities and Challenges
By Tom Allio

The current economic crisis is a significant teaching moment for the Church. The following are some brief reflections about how the current crisis can be an opportunity to strengthen our faith, educate our fellow parishioners about Catholic teaching and the root causes of the crisis, respond pastorally to their concerns, and become more involved in timely public policies that impact the common good.

1. **An opportunity to deepen our faith:**
   One thing remains constant in this time of uncertainty and turmoil and that is Jesus Christ. He is our rock and foundation when all that is material seems to be shifting and eroding. Jesus walks with us when we are confronted with the day to day challenges of unemployment, foreclosure, tuition payments, high energy costs and food bills. Turning our hearts and minds in prayer to God and meditating on the redemptive suffering of Jesus puts us in touch with how God is with us in our human suffering. This can be a source of comfort, peace, wisdom and direction. God alone knows our needs and loves us unconditionally. God will not abandon us in our time of need.

2. **An opportunity to explore how the promotion of the values of Catholic Social Teaching can offer guidance to solving the economic crisis:**
   Some key questions for us are the following:
   - How do the poor and vulnerable fare in the implementation of the economic stimulus programs?
   - How is the common good advanced with regards to the bank bailouts, tax cuts, Medicaid spending, infrastructure investments, and other elements of the stimulus?
   - Are we holding our government and economic institutions accountable for their performance?
   - Are decisions and actions being done in a transparent manner?
   - What is the level of participation of people at the local and state levels in key decision making?
   - How can these decisions impact global climate change and advance green energy and care for God's creation?
   - How are the decisions in Washington impacting our brothers and sisters who are adversely affected by global markets?

   The pastoral letter of the U.S. Bishops entitled "Economic Justice for All" remains relevant in looking at these questions from a faith perspective.

St. Augustine Towers ♦ 7800 Detroit Avenue ♦ Cleveland, OH 44102 ♦ (216) 939-3851 ♦ Akron (330) 535-2787 ♦ Fax (330) 535-9040
Thomas J. Allio, Senior Director
Diocese of Cleveland

3. **An opportunity to educate parishioners about the economic crisis:**
   This is a moment to offer educational opportunities and discussion about the root causes of the crisis. It can be an occasion to reflect about what it will take to create a "just economy;" one in which everyone has a place at the table. At the same time, it is an opportunity to offer compassionate outreach through programs that give people the tools to survive this economic crisis.

4. **An opportunity to engage more people in advocacy and social change:**
   The collapse of the market has uncovered some myths, such as, markets can correct themselves and there is no need for regulation; the value of housing will always increase; loyalty to ones company will result in loyalty to you; elected officials will, more often than not, act in the best interest of the citizenry; the Federal Reserve can handle any downturn merely by lowering the prime; the U.S. can spend its way out of the recession. ***My point is simply: Washington alone cannot solve our problems. Faithful Citizenship calls us to be actively engaged in all these questions if we are to be "salt and light" and a leaven to society. Our Church has much to offer in these debates and policy decisions.***

5. **An opportunity to provide an inspired, pastoral leadership:**
   In a time in which there is fear and hopelessness, religious leaders are called to be attentive to the pain, anxieties and struggles of their parishioners. They are called to walk with them in their troubles. Homiletics can inspire hope and a sense that as a faith community we are "all in this together." In addition, a parish may find creative ways to offer counseling, support and networking opportunities for parishioners.

6. **An opportunity to empower new parish leaders:**
   The economic crisis offers the occasion to invite leaders to step forward and utilize their skills in many ways. These include ensuring safety net programs are operating as efficiently as possible; conducting workshops and forums on employment services, debt reduction, and foreclosure modification; revitalizing social concerns committees.

For more information and assistance, contact the Diocesan Social Action Office
@ 888-620-5280 or tjallio@clevelandcatholiccharities.org;
Diocesan Education & Training Center, 330-535-2787 or kpleith@clevelandcatholiccharities.org;
Commission on Catholic Community Action, 216-939-3843 or skryan@clevelandcatholiccharities.org;
Catholic Commission of Lorain County, 440-244-6037 or smkleppel@clevelandcatholiccharities.org
Catholic Commission of Wayne, Ashland & Medina, 330-263-6176 or
pjobryan@clevelandcatholiccharities.org;
CCHD/CRS, 440-245-5043 or jrortiz@clevelandcatholiccharities.org;
Catholic Commission of Lake & Geauga, 440-943-7608 or jwalcott@clevelandcatholiccharities.org

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