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Statement

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THE WORLD
FOOD CRISIS

MAY 1975

A Pastoral Plan
of Action

NATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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November 21, 1974

Food supply

Statement
on
THE WORLD FOOD CRISIS
A Pastoral Plan of Action
National Conference
of
Catholic Bishops

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The world food crisis is part of the larger pattern of global interdependence. The crisis is linked directly and systemically with questions of environment, population, economic relationships, political and military power.

World hunger and malnutrition are part of this complex pattern. They must be attacked on two levels: immediate assistance programs to prevent starvation in many regions in the world; and a long range program to increase food production, especially in the less industrialized nations.

The long range program must strike at the root problem of under-development which plagues the people of many nations. Plans for agricultural development require the cooperation of the U.S. government, the poorer nations, the FAO, and voluntary agencies including religious organizations such as our own Catholic Relief Services.

It is not enough, however, that such development merely foster economic growth. Development must significantly reach the "little farmer" and so-called marginal people, and reduce the gap between the wealthy and the poor. Christian missionaries have effective contacts with the poor sectors of these societies and have demonstrated the capacity to assist materially in their agricultural development. Efforts by

these missionaries merit increased support by the American religious community.

Moreover, the food crisis poses for the United States both domestic and international implications. An appropriate pastoral response for the Church must include a series of interrelated activities at the level of public policy/legislative program, community information and education, and pastoral practice.

A. PUBLIC POLICY/LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

The bishops, acting through the United States Catholic Conference and its General Secretary, propose a program of public discussion directed toward influencing appropriate executive and legislative action which, in a systematic and organized way, will seek to achieve national policies effectively dealing with the food issue, internationally and domestically.

The fundamental premise of the program is that food is a unique commodity and a sacred resource. The guidelines for legislative initiatives meriting USCC support are the following:

First, increase genuine agricultural development overseas; technical assistance and development programs must be expanded to promote greater food production in the less industrialized nations;

Second, increase funding for Food for Peace (PL 480); as an immediate step, increase substantially food allocations through Title II of Food for Peace (humanitarian aid), and resist efforts to use food as a political and strategic weapon;

Third, modify U.S. trade policies to lower trade barriers and to provide just prices for imports from poor countries. Special trade preferences for these nations' exports and substantially increased adjustment assistance for adversely affected U.S. workers and

industries must be part of this revised trade policy;

Fourth, assure American farmers of a fair return for their capital and labor. The productivity and viability of American agriculture must be maintained. Serious disruption of this sector of the economy could adversely affect the world food crisis;

Fifth, promote more equitable distribution of resources in the United States. Areas of legislation in this regard are the following: expanding programs of food stamps and school lunches, providing special assistance to the elderly, the unemployed and the poor, revising income tax burdens, and restructuring land use policies;

Sixth, protect both family farmers who are often subject to severe economic pressures in the agricultural chain of food production, processing and sales, and also consumers in middle and lower income categories;

Seventh, modify the operation of the free market system, especially the impact of the large corporation, when it stands in the way of justice.

B. COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Since the food crisis is a long term problem as well as one of immediate concern, it will be necessary to keep the structural dimensions of the issue, both in its factual and moral aspects, before the public. The Church has means of doing this through already funded programs which merit implementation at the national, diocesan and parish level. Among them are the following:

First, its educational system for adults, youth and children;

Second, its access to the public through the secular and religious media of press, radio and television;

Third, workshops, special days of reflection and study for priests, religious communities and laity.

C. PASTORAL CARE

The most direct, universal and concrete contact the Church has with its people is at the level of pastoral ministry. Unique opportunities are available to promote the Church's deep concern about human development.

1. Liturgy: The themes of life, bread, community, solidarity, and responsibility flow through the symbol and substance of the liturgical life of the Church. These can be woven into teaching, worshiping and prayer experiences which address the food crisis to the whole community. Liturgical seasons of the Church's year are especially appropriate, for example, Advent, Lent, rogation days, the Holy Year. Particularly to be encouraged are parish and diocesan programs of worship, fasting and abstinence on appointed days. The funds from such fasting would be directed toward efforts ministering to the needs of others.

2. Lifestyle: A major pressure on food supply is the pattern of consumption. Especially evident in our consumer-oriented way of life are the waste of food and the excessive consumption of energy. Appeals to Christian conscience of responsible stewardship highlighting the practice of days of fast and abstinence, flow from the deepest roots of our biblical and ecclesiastical traditions. We urge the whole Catholic community—priests, religious and laity—to join with us in observing at least two days a week as days of fast. We also urge resistance to advertising and other forms of social pressure which promote affluent and wasteful eating habits.

3. Locating and feeding the hungry: In this time of food scarcity, inflation, economic recession and rising unemployment, methods of pastoral care require renewal

and adaptation. First, awareness must be heightened about the condition of many members of our society, and efforts by priests, religious and laity must be intensified to locate and minister to those suffering severe hardships in our dioceses, parishes and local communities. Commanding attention, in particular, are the aged on limited fixed incomes, the working poor and the unemployed, and families and individuals on welfare and other public assistance programs.

Second, support for increased activities must be given to such agencies as Catholic Charities, Catholic Relief Services, the Campaign for Human Development and others. This will enable them to intensify their efforts to provide immediate short term relief and to work for long term structural changes for human development.

CONCLUSION:

In this pastoral response to the food crisis the American Catholic community is called to address a broad agenda of issues. World hunger and malnutrition present Church agencies, diocesan offices, parishes, educational systems, the bishops, priests, religious and laity, that is, the whole Church, with an opportunity to experience an essential dimension of its mission: acting on behalf of justice and participating in the transformation of the world. This should be done in the context of a broad ecumenical effort, working with other Christians, Jews, those of other faiths and all men and women of good will.

The goals outlined here for the Church are only a beginning. No document could possibly embrace the many activities and programs which will be required to respond to the cries of the hungry and to what Pope Paul has called this "crisis of civilization and solidarity."

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