

‘We are our brothers’ keepers,’ remind bishops in economic statement

BALTIMORE - At a time of economic crisis, the U.S. Catholic bishops issued a statement Nov. 11 reminding people that “we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. We are all in this together.”

The brief statement issued by Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago, the bishops’ president, noted that “hard times can isolate us or they can bring us together.”

It was drafted during the annual fall meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore and approved by the body of bishops in a voice vote Nov. 11 as a statement from Cardinal George on their behalf.

“As pastors and bishops, we see the many human and moral consequences of this crisis,” the statement said. Though the impact of the crisis is greater in some regions of the country, families all across the nation are losing their homes, workers are losing their jobs and health care coverage, retirement savings are threatened and people are losing the sense of hope and security, it continued.

But the church will continue to “reach out to those in need, stand with those who are hurt, and work for policies that bring greater compassion, accountability and justice to economic life,” the statement said.

Bishop Leonard P. Blair of Toledo, Ohio, who suggested the statement, said at a press conference following its approval that the impetus for it came out of “the very basic concern we have as pastors” that the economic situation be met with

understanding, compassion and a sense of solidarity with one's neighbors.

A day earlier in his home state, he noted, another major employer announced dramatic job cuts. DHL, the international shipping company, announced it was eliminating 9,500 jobs, about 7,000 of them located in Wilmington, Ohio.

"Our people are hurting and the bishops want to be with people as they're hurting," Bishop Blair said.

Archbishop George H. Niederauer of San Francisco, who chairs the bishops' communications committee, said the bishops felt it was important to raise people's consciousness about the needs of their neighbors.

Even before the recent economic downturn, many dioceses were hit hard financially by payouts of settlements for sexual abuse claims, Archbishop Niederauer noted. But in times like these, helping people in need is far less about the diminished assets of a diocese than it is about "calling people to come forward" to help their neighbors, he said.

Bishop Blair said Toledo has a long tradition of people helping people, particularly at the parish level, and he doesn't see that being particularly affected by diocesan financial situations.

"If all politics is local, a lot of charity is also local," said Archbishop Niederauer.

Parish collections, the annual diocesan charity appeals, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and local food pantries are the kind of help that people have generously supported to help their neighbors in the past and that the bishops hope to encourage with the statement, he said.

The statement noted that Pope Benedict XVI in his message for the 2008 World Day

of Peace said families need to have “a home, employment and a just recognition of the domestic activity of parents, the possibility of schooling for children and basic health care for all.” The pope, it said, “also insists that society and public policy should be ‘committed to assisting the family in these areas.’”

The bishops concluded by offering prayers for families and individuals, “our sisters and brothers, who are hurting, anxious or discouraged in these difficult times. We also pledge our prayers for our wounded nation and suffering world. We pray that, working together, we can find the courage, wisdom and ways to build an economy of prosperity and greater justice for all.”