

With Archbishop Borders***Let's use extra tax money for the poor***

The question I am asked most often lately is something like this: Are you in politics?

My answer is that I certainly am not but I am involved in political life. If I wasn't, and others weren't, then we would leave all political considerations only to those who are elected. That wouldn't be right. I am concerned about issues of the common good. And the right to participate is not just reserved for leaders it should be available to everyone.

The church has become involved in politics as lobbyist for the poor.

The primary objective of that lobbying is to encourage the body politic to face up to the reality that all of us have an obligation to reach out to those in need. We all are enjoying the fruits of God-given natural resources and those fruits should not be limited to people either by inheritance, education, health or natural ability. But they should include those who, for the most part through no fault of their own, are deprived of the basic necessities of life.

Let me get specific.

The bishops of the archdiocese and the Maryland Catholic Conference philosophically take a public stance appealing to the members of the House of Delegates, the Senate and the governor and all people of good will for three basic reasons:

One, every person is a child of God and entitled to be treated with respect and live in circumstances according to his or her dignity as a person. All of us should approach human life with a sense of awe and recognize that a person should be able to live in such a way that the native gift of freedom can be exercised.

Two, the economy, economic systems and government exists to serve people and not the other way around.

Three, every person has a right to participate in the economy and a right to work in circumstances in harmony with human dignity and with adequate remuneration for the basic necessities of life.

Recently, the bishops and the Maryland Catholic Conference recommended to the governor, the House of Delegates and the Senate that the windfall tax be used to meet some of these basic needs. To my way of thinking, the key question is not the windfall tax. The question is: Will the people of Maryland and their elected officials face up to our moral obligation?

The windfall tax seems to be an excellent vehicle to begin a more realistic approach to both a civic and a moral responsibility that is ours. Maryland is sixth among the states of the nation in per capita income and in the lower one half of the states in responding to welfare responsibilities.

I applaud Governor Schaefer and the members of the legislature who are working to use the windfall tax justly. I hope the citizens of this state have the broad view that is rooted in justice to encourage elected officials to take action to this end.

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to take action to this end.

Specifically, I'd like to mention three areas in need of state assistance:

The Aid to Families with Dependent Children program needs to be increased. The current level is 20 percent below the Maryland recognized standard of basic needs. Just an addition of 50 cents per day would make a tremendous difference for people who have no other source of income.

We would request that \$25 per month be added to the General Public Assistance program.

This obviously will not meet the need but it would be a definite step in the right direction.

The governor has suggested that \$5 million be allocated for a realistic program that would enable people currently on welfare to be assisted so they can participate in productive work. In the long run, this would place more people on the tax roll and reduce those in need of public assistance.

I recognize these recommendations are limited in scope and will not be the total answer to systemic difficulties but it certainly would be a good beginning.

Finally, I would like to address the scandal of our day — taking the life of an unborn child. Maryland is 5th among states in per capita abortions. If there is greater funding, the prospect of moving higher on that list would be a sad commentary on our appreciation of the gift of life.

Those who would fund abortions often say, 'if the affluent can afford an abortion, then the state should provide the means for a poor woman to have an abortion.' As much as I am interested in reaching out to the poor, the question is not of the poor and the affluent but the rights of a child carried in the womb of a poor woman or the womb of an affluent woman.

When people confuse basic rights and make decisions contrary to principle eventually everyone suffers and the basis for the breakdown of society is in place.

May I ask all of you who read this to join with me in concern for these needs in our state.

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