

**Message from Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr for All Masses
on November 19 and 20, 2011**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

A few weeks ago, the President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Timothy Dolan, urged bishops and clergy throughout our nation to preach on a scourge that is gaining ground in our great land. That scourge is poverty. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, at least 46 million Americans are now living below the federal poverty line. That figure appallingly includes one out of almost every four children, and members of our African-American and Hispanic communities live with unemployment and poverty at higher rates than most. These national trends are reflected in Ohio, where nearly one out of every seven people has no health insurance. And here in our own Archdiocese, some of our rural counties are experiencing unemployment rates near or above 12 percent, well above the state and national averages. So many of us, in our parishes and schools, are either dealing with the brunt of this recession ourselves, or we know someone close to us who is.

As Catholics we are called to put the life and dignity of every human person, especially of the poor and vulnerable, at the heart of everything we do. None of us can stand idly by.

The readings of the Mass on the weekend just prior to Thanksgiving could not have been a more poignant reminder of what is expected of us in the midst of these difficult times. The vivid passage taken from the Gospel of Matthew is one of the few scenes in the Gospels where we hear Jesus give us a description of our actual Judgment Day. Jesus tells us that our salvation is inseparably bound to how we respond to “the least ones” among us who are in need of material relief and spiritual companionship. As His Holiness Benedict XVI explained it, “Love of God and love of neighbor have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God” (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 15).

But for baptized Catholics, we do not reach out to those in distress just out of a sense of fear of being cordoned off with those who fail to love and are destined for “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Rather, with the joyous holiday of Thanksgiving approaching, we take the opportunity to remind ourselves that we have indeed been “blessed by the Father” and we respond to the needs of our less fortunate brothers and sisters out of sincere gratitude for God’s love in our lives and an awareness that God wants to extend that same love through us to the poor, the sick, the hungry, and the thirsty.

As each one of us considers again this year what blessings prompt our appreciation, I urge you not to forget the simple truth that you and I, and everyone in this world, belongs to a God who infinitely loves each one of us. He celebrates your life everyday. And He has given you a dignity that no outside circumstances or personal failings can erase. The more we take this undeserved gift to heart, the more we come to understand that it is only natural for us to want to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick,

and visit the imprisoned. When we are thankful for what God has done for us and what He promises to us, there is no disconnect between our love and our actions for others.

With this in mind, I want to give thanks to all the faithful of the Archdiocese who, through their professional lives or volunteer time, already make stronger the social safety net without which the poor and unemployed would fall into even greater despair. I am grateful also to all those who through economic initiatives provide employment to others with a decent wage and working conditions.

We should all avoid the temptation to judge others, such as our immigrant brothers and sisters, who too often are the subject of exploitation in these trying times. Nor is this a time to judge the poor and unemployed. In fact, every one of our readings today illustrates that is uniquely God's job. For us, this is simply a time to respond with love to the suffering around us.

There are several ways that I invite you to respond to the pressing needs of our less fortunate brothers and sisters, today and well into Advent:

1. We recently took up the annual collection for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which funds programs in this Archdiocese and elsewhere to help the poor help themselves. Thank you to everyone who has contributed. If you have not made a contribution but would like to do so, please send it to your parish or the Archdiocese, noting they are intended for "CCHD."
2. Our Catholic Charities of Southwest Ohio, Catholic Social Services of the Miami Valley, our St. Vincent de Paul conferences, and many other relief ministries for the poor need us now more than ever. It is never too late to share with them your contributions, your financial support, or your personal time as a volunteer.
3. In many of our communities across the Archdiocese, there are food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, transitional housing facilities, job readiness programs, and other support efforts which are in serious need of donated items. In these economically challenging times, the assistance being sought by those who must make recourse to these programs is far outpacing resources. To help alleviate this situation, individuals and families might consider taking time to gather and donate such needed goods. Perhaps a special collection of these items could be organized through the parish.
4. Finally, we must be mindful that, as Congress proceeds with finding a responsible balance to our nation's budgetary woes, it must not do so with disproportional cuts to life-saving programs for the poor and vulnerable in the U.S. and abroad. I am grateful for any advocacy that can be done to relay this message to our elected officials.

These are just a few suggestions of how we can all seek the face of Christ in the poor and to respond with love. In whatever manner you choose to answer this call, may you do

it in thanksgiving for the Kingdom to which each of us is called, where no one will want for anything and "God will be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

Wishing you and your loved ones a prayerful and hope-filled Advent, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol inside a circle, followed by the name "Dennis M. Schnurr" in a cursive script.

Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr
Archbishop of Cincinnati