

Food for All Op-Ed
Most Rev. Dennis M. Schnurr
Archbishop of Cincinnati

When the issue of poverty comes up in conversation, often someone will quote a passage from the Christian scriptures: “The poor you will always have with you” (Mk 14:7). Tragically, this seems all too true when we witness how many people in our region two thousand years later are still trapped by the scourge of poverty and related issues, such as the breakdown of families, racism, violence, the lack of quality education, and unemployment.

The numbers are grim and compelling. In Cincinnati, 30 percent of the residents live below the federal poverty level, and nearly half of all children in the city are poor. In Hamilton, Middletown, Wilmington, Dayton and Springfield, as well as some of our rural communities, about one in every three or four residents are trapped in poverty. Studies on social mobility show that Cincinnati and other nearby communities rank below the national average in the ability for low-income families to improve their financial circumstances.

That is simply not acceptable. To assume that poverty is just a fact of life that we must get used to is to misread the words of Jesus. On the contrary, the message of the Gospel is that the poor will always be with us because we will always choose to be with them. When poverty, crime, and tension mar our neighborhoods, we cannot disengage and run away. Instead, we must even more determinedly enter into the lives of those in the midst of the struggle.

This notion of accompanying the poor and vulnerable on their journey has been one of the greatest hallmarks and inspirations of Pope Francis’ pontificate. The Holy Father consistently reminds us that one of the very purposes of life is to non-judgmentally help others carry their load. And this message is ringing even more loudly as we anticipate the pope’s visit to the United States in late September, which will include discussions on the state of families, visits to charities and a correctional facility, and addresses to Congress and the United Nations.

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati has decided to welcome the Pope to our country with a gesture that we know he would appreciate – a response to his call for greater love, service, and social justice for those in need.

As a Catholic community, we tend the wounds of the poor and vulnerable every day through our numerous charities, churches, schools, and healthcare facilities. And we joyfully do this alongside so many other faith communities and people of good will. But this summer, we are moved to offer Pope Francis a special “spiritual bouquet in action” – that is, a collection of devotional acts from anyone who wishes to welcome him to our land.

Given that Pope Francis has launched a campaign called “One Human Family, Food for All” with the ambitious goal to eradicate systemic hunger by 2025, the Archdiocese, Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio and Catholic Social Services of the Miami Valley are responding with a local “Food for All: Be Multiplied” initiative. Our goals include 1,000,000 food items donated to local food pantries, 5,000 letters to Congress to advocate for life-giving nutritional

programs in our federal budget, and a “Pope Francis House” for a local family through Habitat for Humanity. It is a campaign in which everyone, regardless of faith, is invited to join.

In the Gospel passage of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, **which will be proclaimed this weekend in Catholic and many other Christian churches**, we marvel how through the gift of one person five thousand were fed. Each one of us is that one with a gift. Please visit www.stirintoflame.com/events/foodforall to learn how you can bring yours into this campaign.

No short-term gift of charity and no one federal policy can stop all empty stomachs from growling or bring lasting hope to those in despair. Our prayer, however, is that this spiritual bouquet will be a call to action for everyone to engage for the long-run in issues of poverty and distress facing our communities.

We hope that Pope Francis will appreciate this compilation of good works to figuratively place it on his table in Rome. But, more importantly, we look forward to it resting on the one table in our corner of Ohio around which we all sit. May it give us encouragement that, by always allowing our gifts to be multiplied, we can one day end hunger and poverty.