



# Issues

Office of Peace and Social Justice  
Diocese of Gary

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## Eucharist and Social Justice

**O**n October 7, 2004, the late Pope John Paul II sent out the Apostolic Letter, “Mane Nobiscum Domine” (“Stay with Us, Lord”) inviting the Church to celebrate the Year of the Eucharist from then until October 2005. In the final chapter of that letter he wrote:

“...the authenticity of our communal sharing in the Eucharist...is the impulse which the Eucharist gives to the community for a practical commitment to building a more just and fraternal society. In the Eucharist our God has shown love in the extreme, overturning all those criteria of power which too often govern human relations and radically affirming the criterion of service: ‘If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all’ (*Mk 9:35*). It is not by chance that the Gospel of John contains no account of the institution of the Eucharist, but instead relates the ‘washing of feet’ (cf. *Jn 13:1-20*) by bending down to wash the feet of his disciples, Jesus explains the meaning of the Eucharist unequivocally. Saint Paul vigorously reaffirms the impropriety of a Eucharistic celebration lacking charity expressed by practical sharing with the poor (1 *Cor 11:17-22, 27-34*). **Can we not make this Year of the Eucharist an occasion for diocesan and parish communities to commit themselves in a particular way to responding with fraternal solicitude to one of the many forms of poverty present in our world?**”

The Pope enumerated some forms of poverty: the tragedy of hunger for millions; disease, especially in developing countries; the loneliness of the elderly; hardships of the unemployed; struggles of immigrants. He noted that these evils are present even in areas of great wealth. He concluded that it is by our mutual love and our concern for those in need that we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. *Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46*) and “this will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.”

The Pope linked Eucharist and social justice and made that link normative for celebrations of the Eucharist which are rooted in biblical justice, “fidelity to the demands of a relationship,” the relationship between God and God’s people, between one another, between human beings and the earth. Its qualities are mercy, steadfast love, and fidelity. It is making things right with a

partiality to those affected by evil and oppression—those on the margins. It is the foundation of ethical justice—commutative, distributive, and social. Catholic social tradition flows from biblical justice. It focuses on the life and dignity of every person, their rights and responsibilities, and their solidarity as a human family. It is the basis of the Common Good. When

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### Australian priests speak out on the Eucharist

**W**e would like to see more emphasis on the real need for the people of God to understand that participation in the Eucharist propels us into being Christ for the poor, wounded and marginalized people of our world.

The real presence of Christ in the poorest of the poor cannot be separated from the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

*NCP Reflection on the Lineamenta*  
[www.onlinecatholics.com.au](http://www.onlinecatholics.com.au)

we celebrate Eucharist, we celebrate our relationship with God, our love of God beyond all human idols. We celebrate our love of every being, friend and enemy, especially the downtrodden, as an image of God. We celebrate our relationship with the earth as stewards loving all material creation as a gift from God.

This link between Eucharist and Social justice while rooted in the Old and New Testaments and the Fathers of the Church like St. John Chrysostom, was weakened in the Middle Ages. Then the focus turned to the adoration of the Eucharist as a presence to be looked at, not a sacrament/sacrifice that is transformative and challenging. The time of the Reformation and beyond further diminished the link between Eucharist and Social justice by often separating the Word of Scripture from sacrament and spirituality.

In 1891, Leo XIII wrote “*Rerum Novarum*” on the rights of working people. Pope St. Pius X began liturgical reforms in 1903. There was again a link between Eucharist and Social justice. The link was celebrated and developed in the Benedictine monasteries of France, Germany, and Holland. They influenced Virgil Michael, a Benedictine priest, who

in 1935, at St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota began the liturgy journal, *Orates Fratres* (now *Worship*). This journal fed the beginnings of a liturgical movement in the United States that saw the sacrament of baptism as foundational to Christian life and recognized the priesthood of all believers. That priesthood called everyone to active participation in the liturgy.

The liturgy, and in particular the Eucharist, is the fountain of the true Christian spirit. That spirit has the power to transform not only those who participate in the Eucharist, but to reconstruct the social order. We break the Eucharistic bread, are broken open by it, and are called to establish peace and justice. Central to this perspective is the truth that we are the Mystical Body of Christ, one body but many members, called as St Paul says, “to have the same care for one another” (1 *Corinthians* 12: 25).

These truths formed the basis of the Liturgical Movement and of Catholic Action. In 1931, 40 years after Leo’s ground-breaking letter, Pius XI wrote “*Quadragesimo Anno*” and called for the exercise of charity and social justice to reconstruct the social order. In 1943, his successor, Pius XII, wrote “*Mystici Corporis*”, on the Mystical Body of Christ

### Blessed are the peacemakers

Peacebuilding, human rights, education, policy analysis, advocacy and natural resource management programs change the conditions under which long-term hunger and poverty develop and persist. Since 2000, the Diocese of Gary has been in a Global Solidarity Partnership with the people of Haiti through the work of Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

The generous people of the diocese have provided funding to three orphanages (including one solely dedicated to children with AIDS) and a soil conservation project. CRS offers a way you can get directly involved in this partnership—

CRS works with the Foods Resource Bank (FRS) to establish growing projects that raise financial resources for food security programs overseas. In this program rural parishes/communities work together with urban parishes/communities to directly help a food program in one of the world’s poorest areas.

- Rural parishes/communities/farmers
  - Donate the use of land, labor or farm equipment
  - Share farm management know-how and time
  - Give supplies, seeds, fertilizers, etc.
- Urban parishes/communities
  - Involve church groups and schools to rent an acre(s) of land
  - Provide resources to a rural parish to purchase seeds
  - Arrange a “harvest celebration trip”

—For more information call Heartland Center, 219.844.7515—

and our union in with Christ. Both encyclicals reflected the truths of the Liturgical Movement and Catholic Action and reenforced and further formed those movements.

The 1930's–50's saw the marriage of the Eucharist and Social justice and outstanding figures who actively promoted and lived that marriage—

- Dorothy Day , Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker Movement
- Catherine de Hueck and the network of Friendship Houses
- Fr. John Lafarge, S.J. and the Catholic Interracial Councils
- Leaders in Liturgy Frs. Godfrey Diekmann, OSB, William Leonard, S.J., Reynold Hillenbrand
- Leaders in Catholic Action Fr. George Higgins and Msgr. John Egan

Much of the energy that came out of the Benedictine monasteries of Europe and of the Liturgical Movement/Catholic Action in the United States joined with a flowering of Scriptural Scholarship and powerfully influenced the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965. Yet, despite that influence which was given expression in various Council documents, there is only a bare mention of the relationship between the Eucharist and Social justice in Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (1963).

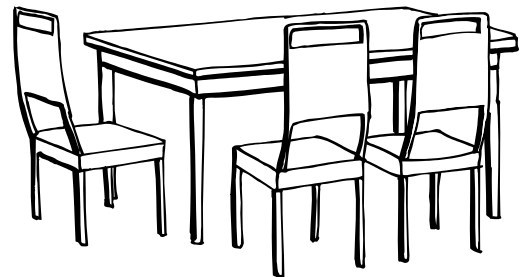
A real disconnect occurred in the 1960's between the Eucharist (the liturgical life and spirituality of the church) and social justice (the reconstruction of the social order). That carries on into our own day.

Thankfully, our Bishops have given us two fine pastorals which reconnect the Eucharist and social justice. In November 2002, the Bishops issued “A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God’s Children”. A year later, in November 2003, they wrote “For I Was Hungry And You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farm Workers”. Both pastorals address many issues of social justice including: the needs of the poor, especially to have a voice and power in our society; how food is grown, distributed and shared here and around the world; rights of farmers and farm workers,

and related justice issues. In both pastorals the image of a table is used. The table of the Eucharist is linked to the table where people gather to eat, meet, plan, and work—

“When we gather as Catholics to worship, we gather around a table to celebrate the Eucharist. It is at this altar of sacrifice that we hear the saving word of Christ and receive his Body and Blood. It is Christ’s sacrificial meal that nourishes us so that we can go forth to live the Gospel as His disciples. Too often, the call of the Gospel and the social implications of the Eucharist are ignored or neglected in our daily lives.”

*A Place at the Table, 1*



“The moral measure of our efforts is how our community of faith works together to secure a place at the table of life for all God’s children”  
*For I Was Hungry And You Gave Me Food, P. 15*

Pope John Paul II began the Year of the Eucharist by inviting Catholics to celebrate the gift of the Eucharist—to reflect and recommit to its theology and worship and be transformed by the Eucharist in our own lives, parishes, and communities. We are to transform our social order and world, reaching out in solidarity to those who are hungry, oppressed and marginalized. It is an invitation, biblically based, rooted in our history, liturgy, and tradition of social teaching. It is an invitation to reconnect the disconnect, to find the marriage of Eucharist and social justice, to be transformed and to be transforming of our world.

How can we do the Year of the Eucharist? A parish in the Diocese of Gary realized they had to do more than simply have adoration. They began a soup kitchen. It links the Eucharist they worship, eat, drink, and share, to the sharing of food and drink with those who do not have as much. Being fed by the Eucharist, they realized they needed to feed others.

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*Eucharist and Social Justice*, continued

The remainder of this liturgical year belongs to Matthew and his community, a Gospel that looks hard at church and community and how they work and what is needed and how sometimes they don't work. Do we unpack *Matthew*? Do we preach the Just Word? Does how we celebrate Eucharist lead us not simply to go home, but become changed in some small way and committed to the communities we live in and their transformation?

There are many questions this year raises for us. Each community/parish needs to look at how it reflects on, celebrates, and acts with the Eucharist/social justice. Perhaps the measure of how we close the Year of the Eucharist in October, is how we have experienced some level of conversion, how we have developed a new spirituality of the Eucharist in solidarity with all God's children, working to make a place at the table—social, economic, political, Eucharist—for everyone, especially those who have no place.

✱ James M. Dixon, S.J.

### A time to share

Are you retired and eager to “give something back”? The Ignatian Lay Volunteer Corps is accepting volunteers (age 50+) to work with the poor in the Chicago area two days a week.

- A ministry opportunity for retired persons
- Share your talents and life experiences with organizations that directly assist the poor
- Reflect and pray on your experience in the Ignatian tradition

*For more information contact—*

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—Visit the website [www.ilvc.org](http://www.ilvc.org)—

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