

# MIDEAST VOICES



Mideast Voice of the Poor, Columbus, OH

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## Becoming “a Church that is Poor and for the Poor”

Dear Friends:

Hope everyone is enduring the winter freeze! I recently returned from the 2014 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington, DC. Over 400 Catholics from all over the US gathered for spiritual celebration, education, and advocacy on behalf of those that we serve. The Saint Vincent de Paul Society was well represented. Visits were made to over 75% of US representatives and Senators. For issues important to those we serve, the following messages were delivered to our elected officials: support the Second Chance Reauthorization Act (S 1690, HR 3465) to give ex-prisoners a better chance at successfully integrating back into society; finish the job on comprehensive immigration reform; and support poverty-focused international assistance.

The headline above, taken from Pope Francis' new apostolic exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)”, was the theme for the gathering. How is the Church to be poor? How are we to be for the poor? This edition of Mideast Voices presents some sections of the “The Joy of the Gospel” that help answer these questions. Excerpts from Pope Francis' address to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland and his Lenten message are also presented.

A conference committee of US representatives and senators just completed the Farm Bill of 2014. The bill has been passed by the House and Senate and signed by President Obama. This final bill is a mixed bag and represents a compromise on everyone's

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part. Some specifics of the bill are outlined in the newsletter and comments on the legislation presented.

With Lent approaching, CSR Rice Bowl offers a way for us to engage in the three pillars of lent – prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The newsletter contains information on this years' Rice Bowl.

Thanks for all you do for those we serve.

Blessings,

Warren Wright  
SVdP Mideast VOP Representative

*“We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community . . . Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.”*

*-Cesar Chavez*

## Hunger and Housing for the Working Poor

By Marybeth Auletto

On Saturday, February 1<sup>st</sup>, The Social Concerns Ministry at Church of the Resurrection in New Albany Ohio hosted a panel presentation entitled, "Hunger and Housing for the Working Poor." A simple pasta dinner was served by the parish's Knights of Columbus. It was attended by approximately 170 parishioners and community members. Voice of the Poor Member Diedra Bruskin organized the event, wanting to provide educational awareness about the needy and organizations that serve them in the area local to the New Albany Parish. Panelists included representatives from the food pantries of Westerville Area Resource Ministries (W.A.R.M), Gahanna Residents In Need (G.R.I.N), and New Albany Village Coalition against Hunger. Each representative presented sobering statistics about increasing food insecurity in the areas they serve. Vincentian and V.O.P. Member Lesha Farias spoke about her experiences visiting with families who struggle economically. Sue Melnyk, from Habitat for Humanity-Mid-Ohio, shared how their mission

addresses the unmet need for affordable housing both locally and around the world. A highlight of the evening was the testimony given by a woman who attended with Sue. She and her daughter worked with Habitat on her new home; she shed tears of joy as she told her story and the audience gave her a standing ovation to show their support. The final panelist was Jerry Freewalt, Columbus Diocese Social Concerns Director. Jerry spoke about our faith's commitment to the poor, frequently quoting Pope Francis.

The event ended with a closing prayer that has hopefully stayed in everyone's heart: *We desire to be your presence to the least among us and to know your presence in them as we work through you to bring justice and peace to this world in desperate need.*

*"We do not inherit the earth  
from our ancestors,  
we borrow it from our children."*

– Native American Proverb

## *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*

By Warren Wright

Pope Francis issued this apostolic exhortation on November 24, 2013. It consists of 288 numbered paragraphs consisting of an introduction (p 1 –18) and 5 chapters: The Churches Missionary Transformation (p 19 – 49); Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment (50 – 109); The Proclamation of the Gospel (p 110 – 175); The Social Dimension of Evangelization (p 176 – 258); and Spirit-Filled Evangelizers (p 259 – 288). Francis makes clear that we are all called to be evangelizers. Evangelization has individual as well as communal components. Everyone, including and especially the poor, needs to be welcomed into the community. We

must be open to encountering the poor and letting them transform our lives. Pope Francis speaks out against an economy of exclusion, the idolatry of money, a financial system that rules rather than serves, and inequality which spawns violence. The poor must see their place at the table and help shape the decisions of society.

Several excerpts on these elements are presented below for your reflection:

Please see *JOY* on page 5

## Lansing Update – Michigan Catholic Advocacy Network

Michigan's Catholic Advocacy Network has been busy during this latest legislative session. Below are excerpts from their January Lansing Update about two important issues: human trafficking and helping parolees find work.

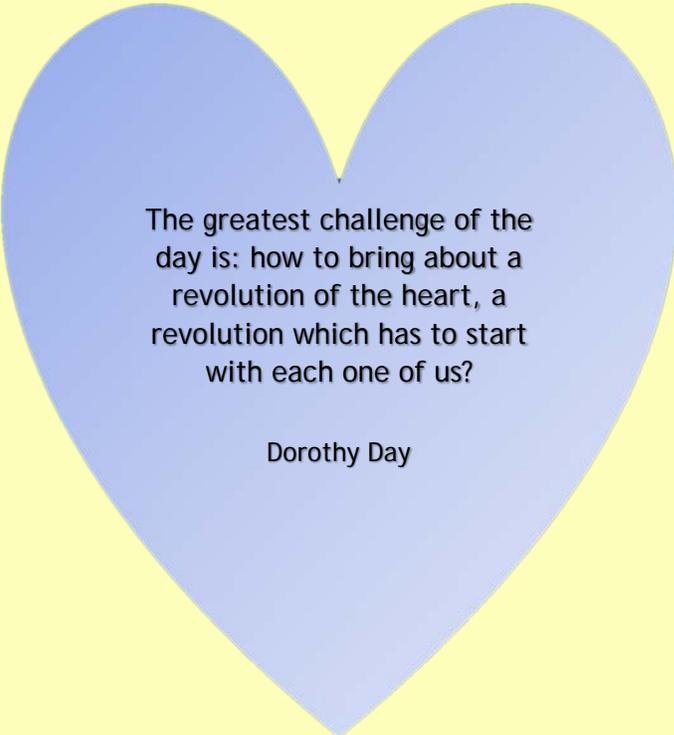
### House Approves Several Human Trafficking Bills:

“ . . . [T]he Michigan House of Representatives approved three human trafficking bills, each by a bipartisan vote of 109 – 1. HBs 4209 and 4210 would make it a felony to solicit a sixteen or seventeen year old to commit prostitution, and HB 5158 would create a permanent Human Trafficking Commission under the Office of the Attorney General to evaluate and address the state's responses to human trafficking. Each of the bills will now be sent to the Senate for its consideration.

“The House Criminal Justice Committee also took testimony on House Bill 5025, a measure which allows human trafficking victims to have their criminal records expunged for an offense committed while being trafficked, such as prostitution. Similar legislation has been discussed in the Senate. Michigan Catholic Conference supports the legislation, which now awaits Action on the House floor, and looks forward to continued efforts to treat victims as victims, not as criminals.”

HB5025 was passed by the House on February 12. In addition, HB5231, legislation that removes gender-specific references in prostitution-related references and increases the fine for operating a house of prostitution, and HB 5232, legislation that imposes stricter penalties for “pandering and accepting the earnings of a prostitute” and removes gender-specific references from relevant sentencing laws, were also passed.

**House Commerce Committee Considers Legislation to Help Parolees Find Work:** “. . . House Bills 5216–5218 were introduced [that] would allow the Department of Corrections to award a “certificate of employability” to suitable parole candidates to help them find employment upon their release. The certificate would be awarded after consideration of several factors, including the criminal history of the prisoner, job skills of the applicant, and the institutional history of the program, such as record of misconduct and completion of counseling or a GED. . . Michigan Catholic Conference indicated its support for the legislation, which will help parolees to overcome roadblocks to obtain meaningful employment and to re-establish themselves as members of the community. The committee is expected to take further testimony in the coming weeks.”



The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us?

Dorothy Day

## CRS Rice Bowl 2014 Brings Lent to Life, Puts Faith in Action

By Susan Gossling Walters

CRS Rice Bowl, Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) Lenten program known for its colorful cardboard rice bowls that help transform the lives of those in need, has been revamped with the addition of three new features: a free CRS Rice Bowl App for iPhone and Android devices; a new, simple meal cooking show series called CRS Rice Bowl Global Kitchen; and a photo challenge called "How Do You Rice Bowl?"

"CRS Rice Bowl is an inspirational call to people of all ages to change the lives of others while experiencing a deeper Lenten observation," said Joan Rosenhauer, executive vice president of U.S. Operations for CRS. "Rice Bowl has become a Lenten tradition for Catholics around the United States who use the program's activities and features to bring meaning and relevance to their spiritual lives."

Pope Francis has captured the world's attention to the plight of hunger and poverty around the world. He said, "the scandal that millions of people suffer from hunger must not paralyze us, but push each and every one of us to act: singles, families, communities, institutions, governments, to eliminate this injustice." CRS Rice Bowl is a great way to answer this call.

The CRS Rice Bowl App provides all the resources needed to make Lent a more personal experience in the most convenient way. With the App people can schedule delivery of daily reflections to their mobile device, set and track their progress towards a personal Lenten goal, view simple, meatless recipes to prepare and serve on Fridays during Lent, and read or watch stories about the people whose lives have been changed. The App is free and can be downloaded from the App Store and Google Play Store or at [crsricebowl.org/app](http://crsricebowl.org/app)

Also this Lent, Fr. Leo Patalinghug of *Grace Before Meals* hosts a series of five shows called CRS Rice Bowl's Global Kitchen, in which he prepares recipes from the program's featured countries, like Kenya, Guatemala, the Philippines, Malawi, and Haiti. The recipes are one of the most popular resources each year. They come with stories, photos and videos that help participants relate to the lives of people in developing countries and in dioceses around the U.S. who are supported by the program. CRS Rice Bowl's Global Kitchen debuts on [Catholic Relief Services' YouTube channel](#) and on [crsricebowl.org/recipe-archive](http://crsricebowl.org/recipe-archive) February 17.

This year, CRS Rice Bowl also features a digital photo challenge on social media. Titled "How Do You Rice Bowl", it is a creative opportunity to document the various ways individuals and communities bring Lent to life. Beginning March 5, Ash Wednesday, digital photographs showing how CRS Rice Bowl is shaping participants' Lent can be submitted online through Instagram or Twitter using #VivaLent, or through the CRS Rice Bowl Facebook page or [crsricebowl.org/photo](http://crsricebowl.org/photo). One grand prize winner will receive a CRS Fair Trade Easter Basket.

CRS Rice Bowl is in its 39<sup>th</sup> year with more than 13,000 Catholic parishes and schools participating in the program. Last year CRS Rice Bowl raised more than \$7 million to support CRS programs overseas, bringing sustainable solutions to fight poverty and hunger. Twenty-five percent of Rice Bowl donations remain in the dioceses where they are raised to address local needs.

For more information please visit [crsricebowl.org](http://crsricebowl.org) or see the online [media kit](#).

*JOY* from page 2

**Paragraph 188** – The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by the few.

**Paragraph 198** – For the church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political, or philosophical one. God shows the poor “his first mercy.” ... This is why I want a church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way.

**Paragraph 205** – I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor! It is vital that government leaders and financial leaders take heed and broaden their horizons, working to ensure that all citizens have dignified work, education and healthcare. Why not turn to God and ask him to inspire their plans? I am firmly convinced that openness to the transcendent can bring about a new political and economic mindset which would help breakdown the wall of separation between the economy and the common good of society.

**Paragraph 220** – People in every nation enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens, not as a mob swayed by the powers that be. Let us not forget that “responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in a political life is a moral obligation.”

**Paragraph 272** – Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God. If we want to advance in the spiritual life, then we must constantly be missionaries. The work of evangelization enriches the mind and the heart; it opens up spiritual horizons; it makes us more and more sensitive to the workings of the Holy Spirit, and it takes us beyond our limited spiritual constructs.

*“The Church should, above all, be the church of the oppressed, the refugees, those persecuted for their faith, those relegated by the rich and powerful to the margins of society.”*

– Pedro Arrupe, S.J.

## Comprehensive Immigration Reform Update

By Warren Wright

In early 2014, House Republicans listed their principles for the immigration reform debate that may take place in the House this year. They include focus on border security and legal status for undocumented immigrants. The message taken to Capitol Hill during the 2014 CSMG included requests for: **a path to citizenship** (not amnesty) for those who pay back taxes, a fine, acquire English proficiency, and wait their turn; **family-based immigration**, opposing the trade-off with employment categories; **a temporary worker program**; **opposition to SAFE Act legislation** requiring or encouraging state and local law enforcement to enforce federal immigration laws; **opposition to a requirement that border triggers be in place prior to immigrants receiving legal status**; and **addressing the root causes of migration**. Addressing the elements of immigration reform in a piecemeal fashion, as House leaders have indicated, was not opposed, as long as all of the pieces are there in the end. The Ohio delegation to CSMG met with Speaker Boehner’s lead aide on immigration who said that the Speaker is committed to seeing immigration reform through.

# *The Agricultural Act of 2014*

## *An Overview and a Response from the USCCB and National Catholic Partners*

By: Deb Zabloudil with excerpts from multiple press releases

According to US House and Senate agricultural leaders, bipartisan and bicameral agreement on a five-year farm bill was reached and forwarded to President Obama for his signature. The bill was signed into law on February 7 at Michigan State University. According to an overview released by Congress, “[e]nacting the Agricultural Act of 2014 will reform agriculture programs, reduce the deficit, and help farmers, ranchers and business owners grow the economy. The legislation:

1. Repeals the direct payment program and strengthens risk management tools
2. Repeals outdated programs and consolidates duplicative ones eliminating nearly 100 programs or authorizations
3. Helps farmers and ranchers create jobs and provides certainty for the 16 million Americans working in agriculture
4. Strengthens conservation efforts to protect land, water and wildlife for future generations
5. Maintains food assistance for families while addressing fraud and misuse in SNAP [and]
6. Reduces the deficit by billions of dollars in mandatory spending

“While we are disappointed that the final compromise continues to call disproportionately for sacrifices from hungry and poor people in this country and around the world, especially when large industrial agricultural operations continue to receive unnecessary subsidies, we are glad to see support will continue for domestic and international nutrition and development aid, rural development and conservation,” said Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami, chair of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in a statement issued a week prior to the passage of the final bill.

US Bishops and their Catholic partners from agencies like St. Vincent de Paul, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities (USA), and Catholic Rural Life have “commend[ed]” the House and Senate’s “ability to set aside partisan differences,” however they continue to be

“vocal in their opposition to harmful cuts and changes to . . . SNAP.” Cuts totaling \$8.6 billion over 10 years will be achieved by “increasing the threshold at which persons receiving the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) may receive SNAP benefits. However, the bill does include increases for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).” The bill includes funding to “invest in new pilot programs to help people secure employment through job training and other services. Incentives are included to help veterans start agriculture businesses. Assistance for food banks has also been increased to assist with emergency food needs and rural development initiatives have been strengthened to upgrade infrastructure and create a better environment for small businesses.”

“With one in eight persons around the world struggling to feed themselves each day, we welcome the renewed commitment by Congress to programs that tackle root causes of chronic hunger and appreciate its foresight in making programs more cost effective so we can serve more people with the limited resources available,” comments Bishop Richard E. Pates, chairman of the [USCCB] Committee on International Justice and Peace.

James Ennis, executive director of Catholic Rural Life stated, “We are disappointed to see that necessary reforms to farm commodity programs and payment levels have been struck down in the final bill.”

The USCCB and its Catholic partners have urged “Congress to finalize a Farm Bill that focused its priorities on the poor and hungry, small and medium sized family farms, sustainable stewardship of the land and rural communities in the US and around the world. While the Agricultural Act of 2014 did not meet all of the USCCB’s goals, many provisions of the new act will assist those in need.”

Sources: USCCB press release – January 29<sup>th</sup>  
<http://www.usccb.org/news/2014/14-027.cfm>;

House Committee on Agriculture press release – January 27, 2014  
<http://agriculture.house.gov/press-release/house-senate-negotiators-announce-bipartisan-agreement-final-farm-bill>

## Pope Francis' Message to Davos World Economic Forum

Below are excerpts from Pope Francis' message to Davos. The full text is available at

<http://www.news.va/en/news/message-of-pope-francis-to-the-world-economic-foru>

. . . Trusting that the meeting will provide an occasion for deeper reflection on the causes of the economic crisis affecting the world these past few years, I would like to offer some considerations in the hope that they might enrich the discussions of the Forum and make a useful contribution to its important work. . .

. . . In fact "we must praise the steps being taken to improve people's welfare in areas such as health care, education and communications" (Evangelium Gaudium, 52) . . . and we must recognize the fundamental role that modern business activity has had in bringing about these changes, by stimulating and developing the immense resources of human intelligence. Nonetheless, the successes which have been achieved, even if they have reduced poverty for a great number of people, often have led to a widespread social exclusion. Indeed, the majority of the men and women of our time still continue to experience daily insecurity, often with dramatic consequences.

. . . I wish to emphasize the importance that the various political and economic sectors have in promoting an inclusive approach which takes into consideration the dignity of every human person and the common good. I am referring to a concern that ought to shape every political and economic decision, but which at times seems to be little more than an afterthought. Those working in these sectors have a precise responsibility towards others, particularly those who are most frail, weak and vulnerable. It is intolerable that thousands of people continue to die every day from hunger, even though substantial quantities of food are available, and often simply wasted. Likewise, we cannot but be moved by the many refugees seeking minimally dignified living

conditions, who not only fail to find hospitality, but often, tragically, perish in moving from place to place.

I know these words are forceful, even dramatic, but they seek both to affirm and to challenge the ability of this assembly to make a difference. . . What is needed, then, is a renewed, profound and broadened sense of responsibility on the part of all. "Business is – in fact – a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life" (Evangelii Gaudium, 203). Such men and women are able to serve more effectively the common good and to make the goods of this world more accessible to all.

Nevertheless, the growth of equality demands something more than economic growth, even though it presupposes it. It demands first of all "a transcendent vision of the person" (Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, 11), because "without the perspective of eternal life, human progress in this world is denied breathing-space" (ibid.). It also calls for decisions, mechanisms and processes directed to a better distribution of wealth, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality.

. . . I ask you to ensure that humanity is served by wealth and not ruled by it.

"A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness, and respect for every human being."

-Pope Francis (38<sup>th</sup> conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) June 20, 2013)

**Voice of the Poor (VOP)** Voice of the Poor does not take positions for or against a political party or individual candidates. However, Voice of the poor is interested in working with those elected officials, whether Republicans or Democrats, who support initiatives that will benefit the poor, children, elderly, immigrants – documented or not, and all of those who SVdP cares for and serves.

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*We're on the Web!*

*Visit us at:*

<http://www.vincentianvoice.org/voceofpoor.html>

## Pope Francis' Lenten Message

“In imitation of our Master, we Christians are called to confront the poverty of our brothers and sisters, to touch it, to make it our own and to take practical steps to alleviate it. *Destitution* is not the same as *poverty*. Destitution is poverty without faith, without support, without hope. . . In response to this destitution, the Church offers her help, her *diakonia*, in meeting these needs and binding these wounds which disfigure the face of humanity. In the poor and outcast we see Christ's face; by loving and helping the poor, we love and serve Christ. Our efforts are also directed to ending violations of human dignity, discrimination and abuse in the world, for these are so often the cause of destitution. When power, luxury and money become idols, they take priority over the need for a fair distribution of wealth. Our consciences . . . need to be converted to justice, equality, simplicity and sharing.”

[\(Full text available on the Vatican Website\)](#)

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