

Midwestern Bishops Approve Land Statement

CHICAGO (NC) — Midwestern bishops attending the April meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) in Chicago unanimously approved a radical statement on land based on the concept that the land is a gift from God to be used for the benefit of all people.

The statement, "Strangers and Guests: Toward Community in the Heartland," analyzes current land issues in light of the Judeo-Christian principle of stewardship and proposes specific measures aimed at bringing about "justice in the distribution and use of the earth's resources."

The signing of the document by the bishops represents the culmination of a two-year process that involved some 12,000 people at 400 open

hearings in the 12-state area, which includes 44 dioceses.

Amendments, additions and deletions suggested by participants in the diocesan hearings were incorporated into the second draft of the statement, which was then sent to the 44 bishops and diocesan hearings coordinators for further discussion and revision.

The final statement, completed by 40 bishops who participated in two meetings at the end of April, is the fifth draft.

Also approved at the Chicago meeting was a proposal to sponsor an extensive follow-up effort that will include producing a one-half hour documentary film about the land statement and publishing a study guide to accompany the document.

These efforts will be funded jointly by the 44 dioceses and carried out by the Heartland Project, the office set up by the bishops to coordinate the rewriting of the statement.

The 12 states involved in the land statement are Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

In the prologue to the statement, the bishops describe the conditions that occasioned the writing of "Strangers and Guests."

"Land ownership is being restructured, agricultural production is becoming more heavily industrialized and concentrated in fewer hands, and the earth all too frequently is being subjected to harmful farming, mining and development practices.

"Such changes are adversely affecting our rural people, their way of life, their land and the wider national and international communities which depend on them to satisfy their hunger," according to the bishops.

It is also stated in the prologue that it is the intention of the bishops to speak on behalf of "those who have suffered most from the changes in the rural scene: family farmers, farm-

Considering Tax Status Challenge

NEW YORK (NC) — The head of an abortion rights group said his organization is considering how to compel the government to revoke the tax-exempt status of church-related agencies backing political candidates who oppose abortion.

Among those cited for violations is the St. Louis Review (report in St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Nov. 3, 1978).

"We have done nothing yet; we're studying strategy," said Lawrence Lader, president of Abortion Rights Mobilization (ARM), on April 30 in New York. Earlier, he had said ARM planned to go to court unless the government began enforcing the tax exemption laws against churches whose facilities are used to back political candidates opposed to abortion.

At the time he made that threat, he cited 10 cases from ARM's files. All but one involved Catholic churches or in-

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us are not telling the public that there is relatively little the police can do about crime

Taxation is immoral

BY REV. HARRY VALASEK

Do we need taxation?" Invariably the answer given is — "We need money to run government!" This is not the answer to the question asked.

The answer should be — "no." Taxation is only one method of raising money for governments. Governments (politicians) then spend it for what they think will get them reelected.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English language defines taxation as: a burdensome or excessive demand; a strain. Some older dictionaries also defined it as: a fine. These two definitions best describe taxation.

When a police officer issues a citation for reckless driving, a fine is usually paid with money or time spent in jail. The money collected is used for law enforcement, driver education, and other legitimate functions of government. The purpose of the fine is to discourage certain conduct. Little objection can be made to that.

During our daily living we pay many taxes, most obvious is the sales tax. It is a burden, a strain, and increases the price of what is purchased. It can also be viewed as punishment for conducting a sale.

What is the difference between a slave and an income taxpayer? One hundred percent of what the slave produces is confiscated by the "slave owner," only a portion of what labor produces is confiscated by the "tax collector." The difference is a matter of degree, not substance. In both cases the workers production is unjustly taken.

The Eighth Commandment says "Thou shalt not steal," the most violated of all commandments, and most often violated by the tax collecting powers.

Rev. Valasek is an Engineer at NELC.

POLITICAL ECONOMY • The science of the nature, production and distribution of wealth.

LAND • The whole universe except man and the things produced by man that have exchange value.

LABOR • Human energy, however much it be physical, however much mental, exerted in producing wealth.

WEALTH • Any material thing produced by man from land or its products that has exchange value.

CAPITAL • Wealth, by the use of which labor is being applied to other wealth, or to land, in the production of wealth.

RENT • The landowner's share* of wealth for granting access to land from which or on which wealth is produced (whether or not the community be the owner). Note: The rent of any given land is determined by its productivity over the productivity of the poorest land in use.

WAGES • The labore's share* of wealth for labor performed.

INTEREST • The capital owner's share* of wealth for granting permission to use (i.e., for lending) the wealth used (as capital) in producing it.

*If the laborer uses his own land, then, being both landlord and laborer, he receives both rent and wages; if he owns the capital used but not the land, being laborer and capitalist, he receives both wages and interest; if he owns both land and capital, being laborer, landlord and capitalist, he receives all three—rent, wages and interest. When no capital is used (or when capital is used the lending is not for profit).

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Land must not be sold in perpetuity,
for the land belongs to me
And to me you are only strangers and guests (25:23).³⁸

The people were not to regard the land as something to be possessed for the exclusive benefit or control of individual owners; the land was a community benefit. The people were to regard themselves as "strangers and guests" upon the land. They were to avoid the practice of perpetual proprietorship, which would change the land from a community benefit to a private preserve.

77. We, too, must be "strangers and guests" upon the land. We must keep in mind the land's inherent status as a gift from God for the human family -- God's children -- and our own responsibility to be God's stewards upon it for the benefit of all people.

Strangers and Guests

Toward Community
in the Heartland
A Regional Catholic Bishops' Statement
on Land Issues

May 1, 1980

3: The Future of the Land

78. The future of the land, of its inhabitants and of all who depend on its resources will be affected by what we do in the present. The way in which we relate to the land will affect the extent to which the land will continue to provide our sustenance and livelihood. The way in which we relate to each other will affect the extent to which we will grow together as a community in which each member is concerned about the wellbeing of every other member.

79. After considering concerns people expressed at the hearings, conditions present in this region and Catholic social teachings, we the bishops of the heartland would like to suggest some means by which the care and right use of the land might be promoted. We hope that what we propose will reflect what we have heard, be faithful to the Gospel and the Church's social ethical tradition, heighten people's awareness of the problems and issues involved and be a basis for common action by all those who share our concern for the land.

80. As members of the Church, we are challenged to work for a better future for the land and for the people. We must respond to this challenge with prayer, preaching and public witness. In prayer we seek a deepening of our own responsibility both individually and collectively to steward the earth which the Lord has entrusted to our care. By preaching the Gospel we seek to proclaim the Good News of God's loving care for all people and God's command that the earth and its resources be distributed and used in such a way as to benefit all peoples, all of whom represent interdependent communities of the same human family. Through our public witness of our own stewardship of the land and its resources and of our social action on behalf of every neighbor -- within our local community or in the global community -- we seek to influence others also to act as stewards of the land and neighbors in the community.

81. Our concern for the future of the land and its people has led us to issue this statement with two objectives in mind. Our primary ob-

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