

"I have given you a model to follow,
so that as I have done for you,
you should also do." — John 13:15

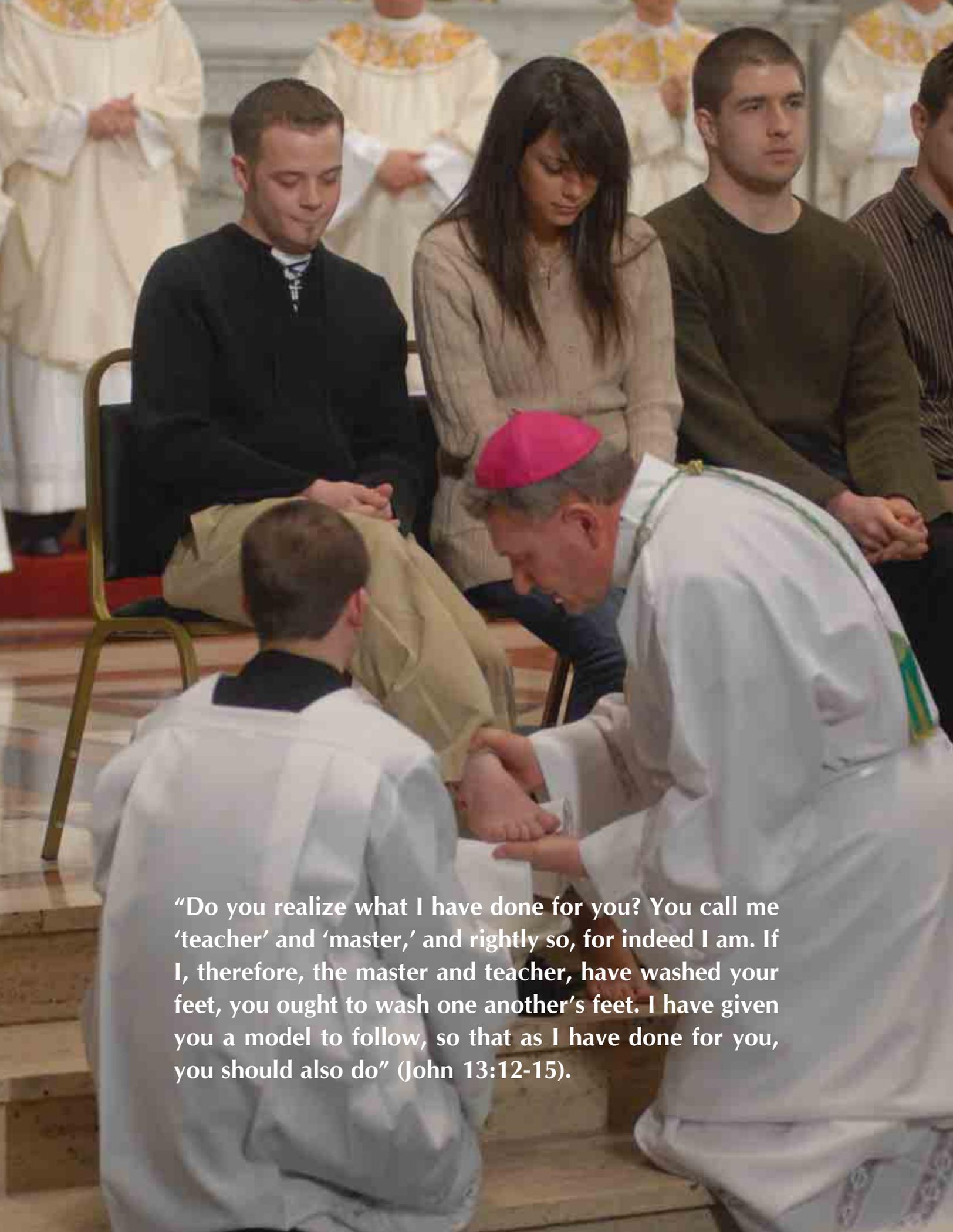
the Church SHARING!



A Pastoral Letter to the Church of Pittsburgh
on the Economic Crisis

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“Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (John 13:12-15).

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I. Prologue

1. *The Church Sharing!* A beautiful couplet of two words that are indispensable to, inseparable from, and incomplete without each other.
2. In my first pastoral letter, *The Church Alive!*, I reflected with you, the faithful of the Church of Pittsburgh, on how of all the titles of the Church, none is more profound and all-encompassing than the Church being the Body of Christ.
3. Before His Ascension into heaven, Jesus commissioned, entrusted, and emboldened His disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, ... until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20). In doing so, and until the end of time, Jesus remains with us in His Body, the Church.
4. In this pastoral letter, *The Church Sharing!*, I ask you, my faithful sisters and brothers, to join me in reflecting upon how we can best support each other in the name of, and with the heart of, Christ in these difficult times of economic duress.

II. Whatever You Do for These Least Ones, You Do for Me

5. How imperative that the Church, as the Body of Christ, be The Church Sharing. After all, sharing is a divine activity, an action of Jesus Himself.
6. By His incarnation, by becoming like us in all things but sin, Jesus didn’t simply share in our human nature. By His incarnation, Jesus *shared* divinity, His divinity with us, so that we, you and I, could become more like Him, more like the image God the Father had created us to be, more to the dream and the goal that the Holy Spirit hungers to make possible in us.
7. By His teaching, Jesus *shared* with us the Good News, the Gospel, of how deep, wide and forever is God’s love for us. Throughout the hundreds, even thousands of years before the birth of His Son in the little town of Bethlehem, God, through the patriarchs, kings and prophets, through the leaders of His chosen people, throughout the Old Testament, God revealed himself to the human race with unconditional love. It took sending His only Son in human form to teach the message once

THE CHURCH SHARING!

and for all. The completion and fulfillment of God's revelation is seen in the person of Jesus Christ.

8. By His actions, through His miracles, by His compassion, in His listening, by way of His challenges, Jesus **shared** the powerful model of a faith not simply spoken, but a faith genuinely lived; not simply a word spoken from the heavens, but the Divine Word made Flesh:

9. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him"* (John 1:1-3).

10. By His suffering, death and rising from the dead, Jesus **shared** the promise of life without end to all who would believe.

11. Sharing, then, truly is a divine activity, an action of Jesus Himself. Through and in Christ, God shares Himself with us. We are drawn into the very life of God, which is Love itself.

12. When I was a youngster growing up a half century ago in Ambridge, I would take exception when people assumed that, as an only child of my beloved parents, I was spoiled. I resented the stereotype that "an only child" didn't know how to share. As a matter of fact, nothing could be further from the truth. My parents were strict. I knew it then! I appreciate it now! My parents were people of the Church. They learned from the Church the lesson of sharing. Together with the Church, they taught me that lesson well. It was the same lesson that Jesus taught His disciples. It was the same lesson that His disciples handed down through the millennia to us:

13. *"I ask you, how can God's love survive in one who has enough of this world's goods, yet clos-*

es his heart to another in need? Little children, let us love in deed and in truth and not merely talk about it" (1 John 3:17-18).

14. Wasn't that the point of Jesus' lesson to His disciples when He taught:

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me" (Matthew 25:35-36).

15. And when asked:

"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?" (Matthew 25:37-38)

16. Then Jesus answered:

"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least ones, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

17. The Church, our Church, *The Church Sharing*—is described so beautifully in the Acts of the Apostles:

"The community of believers were of one heart and one mind. None of them claimed anything as his own; rather, everything was held in common. With power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great respect was paid to them all; nor was there anyone needy among them, for all who owned property or houses sold them and donated the

THE CHURCH SHARING!

proceeds. They used to lay them at the feet of the apostles to be distributed to everyone according to his need" (Acts 4:32–35).

18. And then, Saint Luke continues:

"Throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, the church was at peace. It was being built up and was making steady progress in the fear of the Lord; at the same time it enjoyed the increased consolation of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:31).

19. We can never forget that the Diocese of Pittsburgh, as is the case with all local Churches, was born from the soil of the early Church, the Church reaching out to serve those in need.

III. Facing "Hard Times"

20. When I think of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, I think of a Church sharing, reaching out to serve those who are in need. This is the nature of the Church of Pittsburgh in all six counties of our Diocese. It is neighborhoods, churches and schools that care for those in need without asking questions, without asking anything in return. It is about us making history now as we have done in the past.



"He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist" (John 13:5).

21. A long time ago—nearly 80 years ago, during the first years of the Great Depression—people in Pittsburgh were out of work, kids were going hungry, the elderly were being forgotten. It was a time when hope had almost disappeared, and men and women viewed their world with quiet desperation as all the old certainties were falling apart: the job at the mill, food on the table, a decent place to live, a plan for the future. All these good things that only a few years before had been the expectation when a person faced a new day were no longer there. They held onto their faith in God, but it was hard to have faith in anything else.

22. And then came another tragedy in a Pittsburgh community that seemed to have no heart for any more tragedies. On July 24, 1931, just an hour after everyone had gone to sleep, fire broke out at a home for the needy elderly people operated by the Little Sisters of the Poor on Penn Avenue in Lawrenceville. Forty-nine of the elderly poor would be killed by that fire, another 175 injured.

23. The city was shocked by the horror of it all. In too many ways, it summed up the tragedy of the Depression itself. Innocent victims consumed by something that they didn't understand, couldn't con-

THE CHURCH SHARING!

trol, hadn't caused. The bodies of those who died were taken away for burial by relatives. All, that is, except for eight victims, who lay in the morgue, unknown and unclaimed. This had been a home for the aged poor, after all, and it shouldn't be surprising that some were without anyone, not even someone to bury the dead. Homeless folks with nowhere else to go, they had been forgotten outside the walls of their last shelter.

24. Bishop Hugh Boyle, the sixth Bishop of Pittsburgh, stepped in. He brought their bodies to Saint Paul Cathedral where he would preside at their funeral Mass. And then something amazing happened.

25. At that Mass on August 3, in the midst of the Depression, eight homeless and poor folk, whose past was known only to God, were remembered by one of the largest crowds ever to gather at Saint Paul Cathedral. The people of the city filled every pew. They spilled out onto the sidewalks and streets. Catholics and Protestants, Christians and non-Christians, believers and non-believers, they had come together to pay what respects they could to the remains of eight human beings lying in donated caskets. It was as if the city itself was coming together to come to terms with its grief over the fire and, perhaps even more so, to come to terms with the Depression itself.

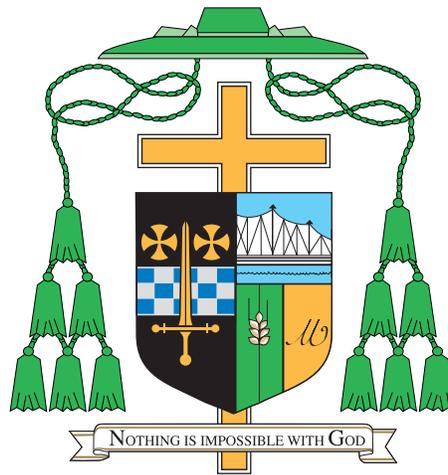
26. The story does not end there. A week after the funeral, Bishop Boyle went on the radio—the first

Pittsburgh bishop to do so—to ask for help. The Little Sisters of the Poor and those whom they served were homeless. It may have seemed a fool's errand at a time when so many had nothing to even care for their own. But the bishop asked for donations to build a new home for the Sisters and those they served. He said they would need \$300,000 to rebuild. Within three months, the people of Pittsburgh contributed that, and more.

27. Like our ancestors of this story many decades ago, we are facing hard times in the months ahead, maybe even in the years ahead. No one really knows how long and that is part of the worry itself. What jobs will be lost? How high will the unemployment rate climb? Knowing that behind every percentage point there are thousands of human stories, how many more will lose their homes? We know the poor that we have with us now—their fears, their needs, their desperation. How many more will be among us tomorrow? Will hard times mean that hope is hard to come by as well? These are the kinds of

questions we go to sleep with each night and wake with each morning.

28. But then I remember those crowds eight decades ago filling Saint Paul Cathedral to honor the eight unknown poor. I think of people who had so little themselves, giving pennies, nickels and dimes to rebuild a home so that the Little Sisters of the Poor



“You and I, all of us, need to be reminded of our need to share in this important action of Jesus, in this important activity of the Church. As we continue to be inspired by the Scriptures, this is an obligation, not an optional interest.”

THE CHURCH SHARING!

could care for those in need. I think of Pittsburgh—people of every race, color and creed—reaching out to those who need help. And I realize and I take hope in the knowledge that this is the Pittsburgh as true today as it was those many years ago—a Church poised to help those in need, The Church Sharing.

29. This is the Pittsburgh I know and love. This is the Pittsburgh you know and love.

30. The time will come when economic experts will better understand what caused our current problems. They will devise long-term solutions. But in the here and now, we have to turn toward each other—to find out what we can give and what we need. This is not the time to struggle alone. This is a communal challenge we face together, not alone.

31. We know that our faith is lived in and through others. We are all connected in grace. We never know who will touch us and whom we will touch. None of us knows when we get up in the morning exactly what the day will bring. But one thing can be certain. Each day is a time of grace, and grace will be encountered in the people with whom we will share that day.

32. When we talk about sharing—a divine activity that is an action of Jesus Himself and of His Body, the Church—we are not being simply sentimental. Real sharing is that glimpse of the divine love that exists from our Creator and through His Son, the Word made Flesh in our Church, in our lives and in our world. People are God’s tender mercy in our lives, our chance to live out—and experience—His sharing.

33. Yes, sharing is a divine activity, an action of Jesus Himself. And not for Jesus alone: For His Body, the Church, and for you and me as an important part of the Church. Not an option, but a necessity! This theology derives from our Baptism—when we died

with Christ to be reborn as children of God. Christ gave His life, which resulted in the glory of the Resurrection. The divine activity of sharing mirrors the glory of the Resurrection, when death is transformed into life.

34. Hard times are here. We, the Church of Pittsburgh, are called to be The Church Sharing, just like Bishop Boyle and the generous “angels” of the Church of Pittsburgh and beyond back in 1931. We are called to be a community that cares. There are no barriers here, no conditional love. Because we are The Church Alive—The Church Alive in Pittsburgh.

IV. A Church with a History of Sharing

35. Our diocese has been a vibrant force in this community since the first Holy Mass was celebrated at the Point of the Three Rivers on April 17, 1754. In every generation, the Church of Pittsburgh has responded to the needs of the community. Waves of immigrants have been welcomed, new parishes established, schools and orphanages built, hospitals founded. The Church remembers the words of our Savior: Be attentive to “the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:3). The Church of Pittsburgh is a Church Sharing.

36. The Church of Pittsburgh has always been a friend—very often the only friend—to those in need. In 1910, Archbishop Regis Canevin organized the many private Catholic works under the name of the “Conference of Catholic Charities.” It included the Little Sisters of the Poor who cared for the indigent and aged, the Roselia Foundling Society, the Home for Working Girls, Saint Paul Orphanage, and many more. The Church of Pittsburgh is a Church Sharing.

37. At that time, Catholic Charities served 1,200 families. They were names received from other charities, kind business people and even newspaper reporters who would tell the tale of a family in trou-

THE CHURCH SHARING!

ble. Nearly 100 years later, Catholic Charities serves more than 80,000 people each year, supplying everything from free health care for the poor, to helping with gas bills to keep a home heated. The Church of Pittsburgh is a Church Sharing.

38. The struggles today are cause for worry. But they are also our way to seek out and live God's will for us in our own day.

39. When I embraced my responsibilities as your Bishop a year and a half ago, I could never have imagined that I would be writing a pastoral letter focused on the moral, spiritual and practical dimensions of an economic crisis whose length and depth have yet to be fully realized, yet to be fully understood. The economic crisis didn't seem a possibility then, let alone a reality. Less than a year and half ago, few observers foresaw the precipitous declines we have witnessed. The Church as a whole, and individual bishops like me, are not economic specialists. But the Church in her faith and rich tradition of 2,000 years is an expert in humanity and the human and divine act of sharing.

40. We live in a time when no forecast is certain. We do fear that unemployment could reach levels we have not seen in decades or more. We do fear that more people will lose their homes, their savings and their pensions. We do fear a significant increase in the demand for basic needs assistance. We do fear the rise of the unemployment rate in Pittsburgh, up sharply from a year ago. We do fear the loss of the basic necessities of life, with food banks challenged to serve longer lines of families at their door.

41. Pastors in our Diocese tell me of more and more families coming to our churches, looking for help in paying rent, in meeting the gas and electric bills, or in getting food. Catholic Charities, the charitable arm of our Diocese, last fall had already exhausted its budget for emergency assistance for individuals and

families when they were only half way through the fiscal year. However, when I called for a special collection from you last December to help restore, at least in part, the resources they use to help families on the brink, you responded very generously.

42. We who live in the Greater Pittsburgh region and western Pennsylvania are no strangers to economic struggle. Indeed, people in our area have been dealing with serious economic circumstances for the last 40 years. The loss of jobs in basic industries like steel lowered our incomes, drove up poverty rates, and hollowed out the populations of our towns along our rivers. My home town of Ambridge was one of those casualties, as well as the neighboring communities. During that time, when I was serving at Quigley Catholic High School, I saw firsthand the effects of an economic downturn in the lives of my students. They faced great hardships in family life. People were compelled to move away to find work. Our population stagnated and became increasingly gray. As we know all too well, these are the human consequences behind the economic statistics.

43. During those times, we didn't lose sight of the toll on our neighbors, coworkers and family members alike. Nor can we lose sight of that toll today. We also know that people recovered from the economic devastation that confronted this region. With faith and determination, the community, the city of Pittsburgh and some of our local towns rebounded to build new opportunities and restore jobs and a measure of prosperity to our region. Most of all, we came to know again that coming together, working together, being a people of faith together, and sharing together can restore hope in the most seemingly hopeless times.

V. "Our Brothers' and Sisters' Keepers"

44. A time of serious economic crisis also calls for a time of spiritual reflection. It is a time to recognize the ways in which our Faith challenges us to act, to share

THE CHURCH SHARING!

not only when those around us are suffering, but as we are suffering too! Faith—looking for and recognizing our need for God—is so necessary for all of us affected by our economic situation. Faith in God leads to hope, even when hope is hard to find.

45. In his beautiful encyclical of 1991, *Centesimus Annus*, the late Pope John Paul II stated: “Sacred Scripture continually speaks to us of an active commitment to our neighbor and demands of us a shared responsibility for all of humanity” (51). In the life of Faith, we are obliged to be attentive to the needs of our neighbor, to be sure. Yet, Scripture not only encourages this divine activity of sharing, but demands it. And not only for the care of our neighbor, but also for the well-being of the human family itself.

46. In his World Day of Peace Message beginning the calendar year of 2009, Pope Benedict XVI wrote that we must have “the clear recognition that we all share in a single divine plan: we are called to form one family in which all—individuals, peoples and nations—model their behavior according to the principles of fraternity and responsibility” (2).

47. When we bishops of the United States gathered in Baltimore last fall for our semiannual meeting, we

expressed support for all people being hurt by the current economic crisis, using words rooted in the Book of Genesis: “We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers” (cf., Genesis 4:9). In that passage, the Law was received by Moses on Mount Sinai resounding with the Divine command to be responsible for one another—to share with one another.

The God of Israel encourages His people to “be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). In describing Himself, the Lord emphasizes that he is One “who executes justice for the orphan and widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing them. So you too must befriend the alien” (Deuteronomy 10:18-19). “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18).

48. God profoundly and at the same time simply makes the point: **Share.** For sharing is a divine activity. Sharing is the action of Jesus. Responsibility for other persons, then, is stretched far beyond our own siblings, family, religion, even our own neighborhood, city or nation. Echoing that tradition, Jesus asks: “If you love

those who love you, what credit is that to you?” (Luke 6:32) Love must reach out to everyone we meet on our journey through life. It must include sharing with anyone with whom we share the pilgrimage of life.



“Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me’” (John 13:8).

THE CHURCH SHARING!

49. In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict more than mused on a summation of the teaching of Jesus on love as a lived experience in our lives and for its importance in the world today. He unfolds this understanding of love as “first and foremost a responsibility of each individual member of the faithful” (20). The Holy Father also notes that love of neighbor, grounded in love of God is “a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level” (20), a responsibility of the Church to share.

50. In terms that clearly reflect the teaching of Jesus on the importance of “discipleship love” that goes beyond expectations, the Holy Father reminds us that “we are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern” (31). Whether we act as individuals or as faith-filled and faithful members of the family of the Church, we must be recognized by our “heartfelt concern” and our sharing of “the richness of ... humanity” (31).

51. The point that Pope Benedict makes so clear about us as individuals in the Church, he also makes clear about leaders of society as well. He does so again in his World Day Message for Peace 2009, when he writes: “If the poor are to be given priority, there has to be enough room for *an ethical approach to economics* on the part of those active in public office and *an ethical approach to participation* capa-

ble of harnessing the contributions of civil society at local and international levels” (12).

52. Clearly, as the Church shares with all, it also invites the society-at-large to share in efforts working together to meet the needs of the needy.



“You and I can’t retreat into ourselves. ... You and I can’t hold back from others. You and I can’t be held back from others. You and I have to be servants. You and I have to be served. You and I can’t refuse to help. You and I can’t refuse to accept help.”

tors and religious leaders, Catholic and Protestant alike. Father Cox went further. He soon organized free haircuts, free shoe repairs, free medical services. He had a distribution center that shared milk for nutrition, coal for heating, and food for survival for families in need. Soon, the vacant lots around Saint Patrick Church were vacant no more! The poor came to live in ramshackle shacks, close to Father Cox! In a scant four years, it was estimated that Father Cox distributed over two million meals, a half million

VI. Solidarity

53. Once again, we see a beautiful example of this kind of sharing in our own diocese’s history. In the heart of the Depression of the 1930’s, Father James Cox, a priest of the Diocese of Pittsburgh stationed at Old Saint Patrick Parish in the Strip District, found his church full of people needing help every day, people looking for food and all the necessities of life. These hard-working folks had nothing left, their lives in ruins from an economic disaster they could never understand.

54. So Father Cox, who was already well known for his radio preaching, began a free soup kitchen, as did many pas-

THE CHURCH SHARING!

food baskets, and 40,000 free haircuts. This was the Church as the Body of Christ, sharing in the divine activity, an action of Jesus Himself.

55. This action of the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has been reflected upon throughout the course of our 2,000-year history as a Church. In the late nineteenth century, Pope Leo XIII in his 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, reflected on the Church's sharing in the divine activity of Jesus at a time when laboring men and women were faced with difficult working conditions in the emerging industrial world. Popes since Leo XIII have led the Church to bring forth from her storehouse a set of Catholic social teachings which, despite their diversity of topics, always center on the dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God. At the heart of this teaching is the moral and theological virtue of solidarity and a preferential, fundamental and essential option for the poor—a divine activity, an action of Jesus Himself in and through His Body, the Church.

56. You and I, all of us, need to be reminded of our need to share in this important action of Jesus, in this important activity of the Church. As we continue to be inspired by the Scriptures, this is an obligation, not an optional interest. As Saint James said in his epistle: "If a brother has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is that? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (2:1517).

57. Sharing with each other is more than a vague feeling of compassion for the less fortunate. Sharing is a frame of mind and heart which recognizes that we all need each other. Sharing finds its foundation in doing what Jesus did when He walked the earth and what He continues to do through the Church.

Sharing finds its moral outreach in a commitment to the common good. As Pope John Paul explained in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*:

58. *"In the light of faith, solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the specifically Christian dimension of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation. One's neighbor is then not only a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but becomes the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit. One's neighbor must therefore be loved, even if an enemy, with the same love with which the Lord loves him or her. ... At that point, awareness of the common fatherhood of God, of the brotherhood of all in Christ—'children in the Son'—and of the presence and life-giving action of the Holy Spirit will bring to our vision of the world a new criterion for interpreting it. Beyond human and natural bonds, already so close and strong, there is discerned in the light of faith a new model of the unity of the human race, which must ultimately inspire our solidarity. This supreme model of unity ... is what we Christians mean by the word 'communion.'" (40).*

59. As Pope Benedict said on the occasion of the twenty-second World Youth Day in Australia, it is important for us to exercise solidarity with all the human family, being "creative in charity, persevering in your commitments, and brave in your initiatives," so that each of us can offer a "contribution to the building up of the 'civilization of love.' The horizon of love is truly boundless: it is the whole world!" (8).

60. When we as the Church commit ourselves to sharing with the suffering, we can anticipate that new creation where "the old state of things is gone" (2

Corinthians 5:17). The “old state of things” is a world of exaggerated individualism and consumerism gone wild. It also often—and sadly—exists side by side with a purely secularist view of the human person and human society in general. And so importantly, and in contradiction to this secularism, is the Gospel of Life, the respect of all life from the first moment of conception to the last breath of natural death.

61. In that “old state of things,” the individual is encouraged to think of himself or herself as a totally self-reliant, self-determining “rugged individual,” competing against others in the modern world’s quest for personal wealth, power and prestige. By contrast, the follower of Christ sees the world as the place to share, recognizing in each person the very face of Christ. When we meet Christ in the other, Christ calls us out of our isolated selves. When we meet Christ in the other, Christ extends our hand to other members of the human family who deserve the help we are obliged to offer. When we meet Christ in the other, He gently opens the hands of the recipients to receiving help and by so doing increases their own dignity, not diminishing it.

62. To share is to imitate the compassion of Jesus Himself, who encourages us instead to be “rich in what matters to God” (Luke 12:21). Sharing with the poor, then, is not a social virtue alone. It is nothing short of continuing the work of Jesus Himself. It is, pure and simple, embracing the same trust that Jesus gave to His disciples shortly before His Ascension and continue His work of growing His Church.

VII. We Must Give ... We Must Receive

63. Recently, I had the humbling experience of joining our seminarians as we served steak dinners to a number of guests who came to the Jubilee Soup Kitchen in the Hill District of Pittsburgh. So many of our guests that day commented that it was the first time in their lives that they had eaten steak. Their dig-

nity that day, by their own admission, was increased! So was the dignity of our seminarians! So was my dignity as Bishop! In our action, we met Christ. In our action, those served also met Christ.

64. During the Great Depression, a soup kitchen had been set up at the Chancery on South Craig Street in Oakland by Bishop Boyle, who lived next door near the Cathedral. The story is told that the bishop’s mother was visiting her son one day. Looking out the chancery window, she noticed something and called to her son, “Hughie, there’s a poor old man out there who has had two meals already and is back in line for a third!” Bishop Boyle replied, “I had no idea the food was that good. I am going to get some myself!”

65. Each year during the traditional season of Lent, every follower of Jesus is invited by Him to do three specific actions. Sharing is recognized, along with prayer and fasting, as a very important means to prepare for the Risen Lord. Sharing is an essential obligation of Christian life not only during Lent but 24/7/365. When we give, we can’t ask how much is too much. Nor can we ask if someone has gotten in line too many times.

66. Early in the Acts of the Apostles we see that the deacons were charged with making certain that the needs of those in need were being addressed. Sharing finds expression today in giving attention to the common good, in a preferential option for the poor, and in promoting the rights of people not only to the bare necessities of life, but also to their right to full dignity as intended by God the Father and the Creator of all. A sense of solidarity, the promotion of social justice, and a commitment to sharing, each and all are seen in both our individual acts and in our collective efforts as Church. These acts of sharing are new forms of almsgiving that the Holy Spirit has given to us through the Church.

THE CHURCH SHARING!

67. As we together face serious economic troubles and suffering, I invite you, the faithful of the Church of Pittsburgh, to join me to consider almsgiving, to share from the bottom of our hearts and to reach out to the needs of the needy.

68. Give generously to Catholic Charities. Give generously to your parish and all that it supports. Give generously to the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and all the Catholic agencies that are doing such good. Give generously to all social services regardless of religious affiliation or no religious affiliation that are doing good in our community. Give generously of your time. Give generously of your talent. Give generously of your treasure, for “where your treasure is, there also will your heart be” (Matthew 6:21).

69. It is not my intention to share with you some platitudes. It is not my intention to paint any rosy pictures about a less materialistic world. These times we face are rough. We are in this together as individuals and as Church. To say that we are in this together is to recognize our understanding of what the Church is, what it means to be Church, and what it means to say that sharing is a divine activity, the action of Jesus Himself continued in His Body, the Church.

70. We are the Church of Pittsburgh together in Christ. Every parish, every Church-related institution and, most important, every Catholic is an integral

part of this Church of Pittsburgh. I hope that no one of you is tempted to try to get through these hard times alone. Through the sacrament of Baptism we are one people, and we are all in this together, as the Body of Christ.

71. You and I are called to be servants. You and I are called to extend the hand of service as the hand of Jesus Himself to anyone who is in need, to every person who lives in our “world”—no matter his or her faith, or no faith at all. Caring for every need, sharing in response—this is what we find in every corner of the six counties of our Diocese. It is who we are.



“I invite you, the faithful of the Church of Pittsburgh, to join me to consider almsgiving, to share from the bottom of our hearts and to reach out to the needs of the needy.”

72. You and I must face these hard times together in Christ. In a very real way, it means that you and I can’t retreat into ourselves. You and I can’t expect to find all the answers on our own. You and I can’t expect those in need to be able to get along without us. You and I can’t hold back from others. You and I can’t be held back from others. You and I have to be servants. You and I have to be served. You and I can’t refuse to help. You and I can’t refuse to accept help. How important for us to remember what Jesus did at the Last Supper when He donned an apron and washed the feet of His disciples. And when done, Jesus charged them and us:

73. *“Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for*

indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (John 13:12-15).

VIII. Epilogue

74. There is a story about Pope John Paul II that was aired during the silver jubilee of his election to the papacy. Perhaps it was shared before that special event, but it was on that auspicious occasion that I heard it for the first time.

75. On his first trip back to his homeland of Poland following his election, Pope John Paul faced many challenges, perhaps the greatest being the calculated resistance against his visit by the Communists who held political power at the time and who were foolish enough to think that they could hold power over Christ and the Pope, the Vicar of Christ on earth.

76. But the one challenge that snuck up on John Paul, the challenge that he didn't see coming until it was actually upon him, occurred as he was being driven to the airport to fly back to Rome. It was the end of his first pilgrimage to his homeland.

77. He was with a good friend in the car. He quickly came down with a heavy dose of "homesickness." He realized he was leaving his "former" home to go back to his new "home" in Rome. John Paul was

uncharacteristically quiet in the car. He said nary a word to his friend. His friend knew why. When his friend turned to John Paul, the friend saw the symptoms of the homesickness—tears rolling down the Pope's cheeks. When he got out of the car, the Pope climbed the stairs to the plane, never looking back with the tears still gently lining his face.

78. Later the Pope would reflect on those tears borne out of love for his people. But in those tears, he would recall the many tears of people all over the world, and not just in Poland, who needed him—to be the Vicar of Christ, to be Christ's voice, to be Christ's hands, to be Christ's heart, and to challenge the Church as the Body of Christ to do and be the same.

79. It can be said that humanity's greatest hope—and greatest fear—is that Jesus meant exactly what He said. He said that we must love God and show that love to our neighbor.



"I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (John 13:15).

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

THE CHURCH SHARING!

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me” (Matthew 25:31–36).

80. Remember how they responded, those good people. They looked around, stunned. They had no memory of doing such things.

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?” (Matthew 25:37–39)

81. The point of Jesus’ teaching?

“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least ones, you did for me” (Matthew 25:37–39).

82. My sisters and brothers of the Church of Pittsburgh and beyond, look around with me. Look

into the eyes of everyone whom you meet. These are people whose tears are looking for the compassionate and sharing response of Jesus through you, through me.

83. Join with me in sharing, a divine activity, the action of Jesus Himself through His Body the Church. And when we are bold enough and caring enough to look into the eyes of those in need, may we treat them as if they are Christ; may we treat them as if we are Christ—in and through *The Church Sharing!*

Grateful for our belief that “Nothing is Impossible with God,” I am

Your brother in Christ,

Most Reverend David A. Zubik
Bishop of Pittsburgh

February 25, 2009
Ash Wednesday

Questions for Discussion

1. Bishop Zubik describes *The Church Sharing!* as “a beautiful couplet of two words that are indispensable to, inseparable from, and incomplete without each other” (1). What does it mean to be a sharing Church?
2. The bishop mentions the Ascension of Christ twice during his pastoral letter. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that in the Ascension “Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father’s glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever” (666). How does the Ascension of Christ inspire you to serve?
3. Christ’s ministry can be understood as an act of sharing, Bishop Zubik suggests. “Sharing is a divine activity,” he writes, “an action of Jesus Himself” (5). What has Christ shared himself with you? How can that sharing help you serve others?
4. In describing the diocese’s response to the Great Depression, the bishop reminds us that Pittsburgh and its people have weathered similar crises with deep devotion to God and care for each other. “This is the Pittsburgh I know and love,” he writes. “This is the Pittsburgh you know and love” (29). What do the stories of service he tells have to teach us today? How can they help us meet the struggles we face?
5. The bishop notes that one of the most disturbing aspects of the economic crisis is that its “length and depth have yet to be fully realized, yet to be fully understood” (39). How can our faith help us to cope with the uncertainty that we face as a Church? How can we deal with the fears that many of us have for our jobs, pensions, and futures?
6. Drawing on the words of Saint Paul, Bishop Zubik notes that “the old state of things”—particularly the climate of economic selfishness and consumerism that has characterized recent American society—“is gone” (60). How could this moment be a blessing for the Church? In what ways does it ask us to change our own lives? How can we be “rich in what matters to God” (Luke 12:21)?
7. Bishop Zubik urges us to meet the demands of today together. We can’t retreat into ourselves, he writes. “You and I can’t expect to find all the answers on our own. You and I can’t expect those in need to be able to get along without us” (72). How can we learn to share? What are the barriers to helping others? How can we break through the isolation that surrounds us to serve each other?
8. Sometimes it is more difficult to ask for help when we need it than to give help to others. “You and I have to be servants,” the bishop teaches. “You and I have to be served. You and I can’t refuse to help. You and I can’t refuse to accept help” (72). What can be difficult about asking for help? How can we learn to accept the assistance of others with grace and humility?
9. “It can be said that humanity’s greatest hope—and greatest fear—is that Jesus meant exactly what He said. He said that we must love God and show that love to our neighbor,” the bishop writes (79). Who is our neighbor? How can we be “our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers” (cf., Genesis 4:9)?
10. Bishop Zubik ends his letter by calling us to find ways to share: “I invite you, the faithful of the Church of Pittsburgh, to join me to consider almsgiving, to share from the bottom of our hearts and to reach out to the needs of the needy” (67). What are practical ways that we can share with each other?