

For Immediate Release  
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## **Washington’s Catholic Bishops: ‘Poverty has a face’ Pastoral letter asks “Who Is My Neighbor?”**

The Catholic bishops of Washington state today released a letter expressing their concern that poverty is reaching “crisis proportions” and called on all people to take direct action in solidarity with those who are homeless, mentally ill, addicted and hungry.

The pastoral letter is a formal declaration by the bishops that recognizing and taking action to address poverty are moral issues and priorities for Catholics and all people of good faith.

The bishops— Archbishop J. Peter Sartain and Auxiliary Bishop Eusebio Elizondo of Seattle, Bishop Thomas Daly of Spokane and Bishop Joseph Tyson of Yakima — met with people from around the state who shared their experiences of poverty in listening sessions held over the past year. “We heard in the voices of people who are poor both a plea for mercy and a desire to participate fully in the life of their communities,” they write.

In their letter, the bishops invite those who enjoy the material necessities of life to “stop and look into the face of poverty” and “recognize that ‘the poor’ are not strangers. They are our sisters and brothers, members of our human family.”

The pastoral letter, entitled “Who Is My Neighbor? The Face of Poverty in Washington State” emphasizes the “the urgent need for action.” The letter urges Catholic people and parishes, government and public officials to “take direct action that demonstrates concern for our sisters and brothers.”

“Some things are best addressed by individuals, families, churches and charities; but when problems such as homelessness, hunger, drug addiction and mental illness are common to every community, it is a just and reasonable expectation that society will act cooperatively to address these problems,” the bishops write.

“It is not our intention to prescribe specific policy options,” they add, “but to propose a moral basis for determining whether public policies serve justice (i.e., whether public policies serve *people*).”

The letter urges Catholics to advocate “on behalf of those who lack the basic rights of food and shelter, access to health care, a living wage and education” and to ask difficult questions and search for solutions.

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