

Spring 1982 MPLS-ST. PAUL CATHOLIC CHARITIES
DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Survival Not Enough

Editor's Note: Msgr. Boxleitner's report delivered at the May 5th annual meeting was so well received that we believe his principal message should be repeated here. A copy of the full report is available upon request.

At this meeting a year ago there was great concern for the impact of budget cuts on the people served by Catholic Charities. And we have, in fact, many new poor today.

Your response to the needs of people in our community has been tremendous. We have opened the Dorothy Day Center in St. Paul, increased the food shelf capacity and meals at the three Minneapolis Branches, funded shelter programs in both cities and completed a major fund drive to remodel St. Joseph's Home for Children.

That's the good news. The bad news is that I don't think Catholic Charities has really felt the impact of the national shortage of money available to support social programs. We are looking at cuts of up to \$40 billion in these areas. Private philanthropy and gifts from corporations and individuals will at best contribute \$6 billion to these causes. So we are confronted with a shortfall of \$34 billion. I don't think anyone has any idea of how this nation is going to handle this enormous shortage of money. The competition for the dollar will become increasingly fierce, and lobbying will be intense. But most of the people we serve are voiceless and voteless.

I watch with interest the reaction of the private colleges to the proposed cuts in the federal student loan programs. These cuts could be catastrophic to students and to colleges, except there are alumni — alumni with financial resources and political clout, alumni who are literate and letter-writing.

We have no such alumni. The people we see just bear the brunt of budget cuts. Yet, the response in donations has been great. But there are many in need whom we do

Why does a person sometimes prefer to dig in a dumpster for food rather than take a handout at a free food location? Why does a person prefer to sleep under a bridge and spurn an offer to sleep in a church basement? The answer is complex, but part of it is obvious. This person prefers that small exercise of freedom over being told what's for supper and being given a list of arbitrary rules for sleeping. Freedom is the image of God in us. Much of our well meaning philanthropy diminishes freedom and the only choice we allow the needy person is to refuse our generosity.

These people have no lobby. Children have no lobby and their services are being cut and the absence of the care they need is extinguishing their hope. Soon they, too, will have nothing to lose.

You and I must be their lobbyists.

Catholic Charities cannot bask in the comfort of what we have accomplished thus far. There is a great deal more to do. As far as we know, people are not starving in the metro area and no one has frozen to death. To keep this record will require far more effort in the year ahead. But can we be content with that? Is this going to be our bottom line?

I don't think we want to accept that. Human needs reach beyond mere survival to include respect, a feeling of self-worth and personal dignity — not just being the object of our sometimes whimsical generosity. We need to restore the conscience of this country.

I would invite the skeptical to see how the budget cuts translate in our Archdiocese.

- Witness the scramble when three-day-old bakery goods become available at one of our Branch offices.
- Watch the lines outside the buildings where a free meal is being served.
- Look at the grimy bed rolls, the tattered grocery bags that hold the life's possessions of a person without a place to sleep.
- Or see the kid who has scarred up his arms with cigarette burns or cuts because he doesn't care — and thinks no one else does.
- Mostly, look into the eyes of the poor — eyes that have a flat look of dimmed hope.

Jesus championed the poor. His prejudice is for them. He did more than feed them. He gave them hope. We cannot do less.

L. Bernard