

heard them plead for justice. We wish to respond to that plea. We realize that the first social priority of the church is to be concerned about the most downtrodden members of society, those with whom Jesus identified himself in Matthew's Gospel:

I was hungry and you gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me drink.  
I was away from home and you gave me welcome,  
Naked and you gave me clothing.  
I was ill and in prison and you came to comfort me...  
I assure you, as often as you did it to one of these least ones,  
You did it to me. (Matthew 25:35-6,40)

We wish not only to fulfill this mandate of the Lord, but also to help empower people to control their own destiny, to be no longer powerless but rather participants in the creation of a new society based on justice.<sup>2</sup>

6. Because of the importance of our region as the agricultural heartland of the United States and as a major source of the grain exported to the global community, and because we recognize that we are called by God to be concerned about the hungry at home and abroad: we declare that our regional efforts on behalf of the "least ones" must include our affirmation of their right to food and our commitment to help them overcome their hunger.<sup>3</sup>

7. We are concerned about the people and land in our region. The opportunity people have to live a productive and rewarding life is determined to a great extent by the way in which they or outside interests relate to the land. We wish this relationship to be one of cooperative harmony, for the land -- complemented in nature by water and air -- is our most important and limited natural resource. We are concerned that this resource in its productive capacity be conserved to benefit present and future generations at home and abroad. We are concerned that its natural beauty and healthful environment be conserved to benefit present and future generations of the people of our region.

8. We realize that we are addressing very complex issues. We hope that the moral values and practical policies which we suggest here, however, will be sufficiently focused as to penetrate to the very heart of those issues, and lead to the social reforms that are necessary to preserve our land and the best of our heritage, and promote justice for our people.

9. We present this statement with two goals in mind: first, to evangelize the heartland: to preach the good news of God's concern for