

In recent years the food pantries in Cameron and Maysville have improved. In Cameron the pantry was founded as an arm of the ministerial alliance, but recently it has gone independent with its own board. The ministerial alliance still supports this work, but the pantry now has its own not-for-profit status and 501c3, so that donations can go directly there; the food goes into the mouths of the hungry, and donors receive a tax deduction. In Maysville the Community Action Partnership closed its office. This organization used to be known as EOC (the Economic Opportunity Corporation). It still provides social services, employment information and job training in Maysville, but the office was combined with the one in Cameron to cut costs. EOC and CAP used to offer food and clothing in Maysville, but those services have now ended. The Maysville United Methodist Church helped open a new food pantry and clothes closet called Living Hope, which is now accepting donations. All this is good news because it shows that private individuals want to help those less fortunate.

But the bad news is that poverty remains. Food pantries offer short-term help, but long-term solutions should also be sought. Our goal is not to create more and bigger food pantries. We need social improvements that reduce or eliminate poverty.

One out of every 8 Americans lives below the poverty line. Most Americans think a family of 4 should have a minimum annual income of \$40,000 to live comfortably, not extravagantly. But the federal poverty line for that family is \$20,000. So the 1 in 8 Americans considered to be poor does not include families of 4 making between \$20 and \$40,000 a year. Most Americans below the poverty line are white and working; most are not unemployed. The problem is that their jobs do not pay sufficient wages.

Catholic Charities USA just released a policy paper called “Poverty in America: A Threat to the Common Good.” It praises programs such as social security, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Earned Income Tax Credit, Medicaid, Medicare, housing assistance, minimum wage, civil rights and labor laws. But Catholic Charities believes we can improve food stamps and school meals, create better jobs, increase wages, provide universal health care coverage, improve access to safe child care and education, create more affordable housing, and address the growing disparity between rich and poor. To meet these goals Catholic Charities recommends tax policies that will benefit lower and middle income taxpayers while asking those who have more to pay more. This new policy paper from Catholic Charities aims to cut poverty in half by the year 2020.

At the Last Supper, right after Judas left the room, Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment: love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples.” This is how the followers of Jesus think: in terms of the good of others. We love them and want their success. Whenever we help the poor, people will know that we are disciples of Jesus Christ.