

# Prologue

1. We are witnessing profound and disturbing changes in rural America. Land ownership is being restructured, agricultural production is becoming more heavily industrialized and concentrated in fewer hands<sup>1</sup> and the earth all too frequently is being subjected to harmful farming, mining and development practices. Such changes are adversely affecting our rural people, their way of life, their land and the wider national and international communities which depend on them to satisfy their hunger.

2. A generation ago, we could see throughout the region innumerable owner-operated family farms, stable and thriving communities, seemingly limitless prime soil and extensive areas of natural beauty. But this picture has changed. On much of the rural landscape now we see deserted and dilapidated farm buildings, dying communities, eroding soil, urban sprawl, and mining scars.

3. We are concerned about this transformation on the land in America's most productive agricultural region. We have seen people leave the land, churches and schools emptied, and communities condemned to decay. We must ask: Why is this happening?; and: What might be done about it?

4. We have searched our religious heritage to see how members of the Judaeo-Christian community have responded to similar situations in previous eras. Their voices speak to us from ages past; we seek to utilize their insights in our present historical moment. Of particular importance for us are their perspectives on the traditional Judaeo-Christian concept of stewardship of the land and its resources.

5. Our reflections on our situation and our tradition have led us to speak out, not only for ourselves but also and especially for those who have no voice, for those who have suffered most from changes in the rural scene: family farmers, farmworkers, Native Americans and the world's hungry. We have heard their cries of anger and pain. We have

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

the people and the land and to stimulate people to respond creatively to that good news and effect justice in land use and distribution; second, to suggest ways in which people might work with and through legislative bodies to promote stewardship of the land if our efforts at moral persuasion fail.

10. We believe that while we evangelize others we must also evangelize ourselves. We resolve to be more conscious of our own responsibility to be stewards of the land as well as pastors of the people on the land.

11. We offer this statement to the heartland people. We thank those of you who helped us to formulate it through your critical comments at the diocesan hearings. We pray that God will guide and strengthen us as we struggle together for justice in the heartland.

# 1: Tenure of the Land

12. The heartland region is varied in its terrain and in the composition of its inhabitants. Mountains and valleys, forests and prairies, farms and cities comprise the forms taken by or on the land. People of diverse races, cultures and perspectives dwell on the land and draw from it their sustenance and livelihood.

13. The region encompasses roughly the central part of the United States and is characterized by distinctive values and ways of life. It provides much of the nation's and the world's staple food. Its people share a strong tradition of community involvement and family centered activity, and are known to be optimistic and to value hard work. These regional characteristics have created strong community bonds, especially in rural areas.<sup>4</sup>

14. The tenure of the land on which people live and work has passed through several hands. Those who have owned the land or otherwise controlled its use have changed over the course of time. Past and present land tenure practices influence the future structure of land ownership and future uses of the land.<sup>5</sup> They must be understood and analyzed in order to discern what might be the future of the land and its people.

## Roots in the Land

15. As we look at our history, the history of the land and of the peoples who have dwelt on it, we can see the relationships that have existed between the people and the land and the people with each other.

16. The first human inhabitants of the land were nomadic American Indians. Although belonging to distinct groupings and cultures, these Native Americans shared an attitude of respect for the earth and for all the natural world. Their way of life and their religion were based on a

sense of harmony with nature and a sense of gratitude to the Spirit who provided for their needs through the bounty of the earth and other living creatures.<sup>6</sup>

17. As time passed, new faces and a new culture came into the region: hunters, traders, trappers and eventually homesteading farmers and ranchers came westward from settlements founded by Europeans on the eastern coast of the continent.

18. Control of the land was taken away from Native Americans by the expanding United States of America, and the face of the earth was transformed. Carefully cultivated fields replaced the random production of nature. Fenced in livestock replaced the free roaming buffalo and deer. Property boundaries marked off land previously regarded as belonging to all and therefore to none. This transformation laid the foundation for the great agricultural productivity of the late twentieth century.

19. During this period laws were passed that promoted moderate sized owner-operated family farms. Among these laws were the Preemption Acts (1841) which in effect legitimated squatters' claims to land along the frontier;<sup>7</sup> the Homestead Act (1862) which made parcels of federal land available to settlers and initiated the family farm system of agriculture;<sup>8</sup> the Morrill Act (1862) which established a system of land grant colleges; the Hatch Act (1887) which created and funded agriculture experiment stations; the National Reclamation Act (1902) which limited the size of holdings that could be irrigated through federal reclamation projects;<sup>9</sup> and the Smith-Lever Act (1914) which authorized the Cooperative Extension Service. All of this legislation encouraged and assisted family-sized agricultural holdings. Forest lands and, especially, prairie lands were converted to farmland as a result. The form of the land became shaped more by human hands than by nature, as increased agricultural production was promoted to meet the needs of an ever-increasing national population. Ranching, forestry and mining also became prominent industries through which people transformed the natural environment into areas of human productivity to meet human needs and wants. Cities began to grow at centers of travel and industry.

20. Throughout this transformation, people and the land were sometimes abused.

21. As some groups of people planted their roots deep in the soil, other groups were uprooted or denied land in which to establish roots. Native Americans particularly suffered, as they were barred from freely roaming over limitless lands, saw the buffalo which provided their food and clothing killed off nearly to the point of extinction and

were confined to reservations ever-diminishing in size and located on the poorest land. Meanwhile, some aspiring farmers found that the intent of the law to provide abundant land for settlement had been subverted by speculators and greedy settlers who appropriated for themselves extensive tracts of land for farming, ranching, forestry or mining.<sup>19</sup> Thus, as is so often the case in human history, the prosperity of some was purchased at the expense of the suffering of others. The words the prophet Micah cried centuries before found a contemporary relevance:

They covet fields and seize them,  
houses, and they take them;  
They cheat an owner of his house  
a man of his inheritance (2:2).

22. The land also suffered. It suffered from neglect of conservation practices by some of those who worked it. It suffered from the nutrient-depleting practices of others. It suffered from lack of reforestation in some areas where timber was extracted. It suffered from overgrazing by some ranchers' cattle or sheep. It suffered from such careless mining practices as waste of water resources and destruction of hills, trees and prime agricultural land. It suffered from a lack of appreciation for the limited nature of the gifts it gave from on its surface and from beneath its surface. It suffered from a lack of appreciation for its beauty and for the physical benefits provided on it for the human community in the form of clean earth, water and air.

23. Despite the suffering of the people and the land, a sense of community and of shared purpose came to be characteristic of people in many rural areas. They translated this attitude into renewed efforts to treat the land well and conserve it as the most important resource the region provided for the family and the community. Such respect for the land was especially prevalent among family farmers.

### **The Family Farm**

24. The family farm has helped to form the heartland's heritage. It has occupied most of the land in this region, and therefore is the focal point for most discussions of land ownership or use. It has played a key role as a way of life that preserves and promotes such values as faith, hope, perseverance, generosity, trustworthiness, honesty and concern for the neighbor. It has helped promote harmony among rural people and between rural people and the land which provides their livelihood. It has helped foster concern for the other people who depend on its

production for their very sustenance. It has inspired care of the land as a limited natural resource. On the family farm have been celebrated and affirmed many rural Americans' identity as a people and their contribution to the wellbeing of all peoples. The values which people have derived from their vocation as family farmers have helped promote the stability, harmony and prosperity of rural communities.

25. The family farm historically has been a moderate-sized farm the majority of whose land is owned, operated, managed and inhabited by members of the same family related by blood, marriage or adoption; a farm on which the majority of the labor is done by that same family; and a farm which provides a substantial part of the net income with which that family supports itself, an income adequate to meet that family's needs, ensure the survival of the farm and provide some security for the future.<sup>11</sup>

26. When the family farm began in the Heartland, most settlers owned all of the land they worked. Later, when less land was available for new farmers<sup>12</sup>(whether new residents of the region or children of existing farmers), tenant farming became common and served as a means of entry into farming for beginning farmers and their families. Today, the traditional family farm system that once was the foundation of American agriculture is in jeopardy.

27. In an agricultural economy built on a "bigger is better" philosophy, family farm operators have expanded in size and capitalization in order to survive, to provide land for their heirs or to satisfy personal greed. Young people aspiring to be farmers experience difficulty in finding a point of entry into agriculture.<sup>13</sup> Some farm equipment has increased in size and cost to such an extent that farmers do not control but rather are controlled by technology.<sup>14</sup> Higher concentrations of expensive chemicals seem necessary each year. Survival seems to require expansion; expansion necessitates increased capitalization; capitalization forces further expansion. Meanwhile, prices never keep pace with growth and inflated costs. Many people continually face financial collapse.

28. When people are forced off the land because of that cost-price squeeze, their property might be bought by nonfarmers who do not depend on the land for their livelihood.<sup>15</sup> Such owners might not adequately care for the land. If they are absentee landowners, with neither residence in nor concern about the local community, rural areas become adversely affected through the loss of businesses, schools, community services and a sense of shared responsibility for the community's wellbeing.<sup>16</sup>

29. Some farm families have been forced to depend on nonfarm income in order to survive. Because crop and livestock prices are well below the level where they would meet production costs, a family member might work as a teacher, salesperson, secretary or laborer to earn additional family income. There also have been individuals who have chosen to work off the land because of their interests or abilities.

30. The part time farming which has resulted in either case -- to survive or to meet individual needs -- has been a mixed blessing for families, the land and rural communities. Family farms have been preserved, but sometimes at the cost of family unity or stability. In some cases, the land has not been properly cared for, because the part time farmer cannot spend enough time on the farm to do so. Soil erosion and poorly cared for crops on one farm can harm adjoining farms, and so ill feelings among neighbors have resulted at times.

31. The family farm traditionally has been a diversified operation. The combination of crops (several kinds) and livestock (for dairy or meat products) provided a stable income in the long term and thus a moderate degree of self-sufficiency and security. In recent years, however, monoculture -- specialization in a single crop -- has replaced diversification in much of the heartland.<sup>17</sup> This has depleted the soil in some areas and threatened the stability and existence of family farm agriculture in others.

32. The family farm has suffered also from the increasing vertical integration of the agricultural sector of the economy. Vertical integration in agriculture means that a single large corporation owns or controls much of the entire farm-to-market process. The corporation might not own any land, but it might sell seed, feed, chemicals and tractors to farmers, provide trucks or railroad cars for shipping, and own canneries, packing sheds or supermarkets. In this situation, many farmers become bound by contracts to fulfill the profit maximization goals of agribusiness and of other national and trans-national corporations. Usually in such arrangements the farmers take most of the risks (such as dealing with changes in weather or market conditions) while the corporate investors take most of the profits.

33. The personal and social economic consequences of such an arrangement are the loss of many individual family farms, a change in agricultural values, the concentration of land ownership in fewer hands and the increasing domination of agriculture by giant corporations whose major economic base is nonagricultural.<sup>18</sup> The Family Farm statement issued by the Committee on Social Development and World Peace of the United States Catholic Conference describes how agricultural values and structures might change:

Besides its implications for personal values, the small and moderate-sized family farm is the basis for a humane, responsible and effective national food production system. The alternative to this system is one dominated by large investor-owned corporations and massive farms.<sup>19</sup>

34. Many farm people, like other people in our society, are being strongly influenced by social values that contradict traditional religious values. These social values include excessive competitiveness, consumerism, orientation toward profit maximization and an unquestioning acceptance of economic, political and legal structures that oppress people at home and abroad. They do not recognize that the economic system which they often unquestioningly advocate is usually the root cause of many of the problems they face. Many of them are often forced to make investment and marketing decisions based on what that system imposes rather than on what they as individuals would wish to do. Economic necessity usually resolves this conflict of values in favor of the overriding requirements of the economic system, which usually are determined by the large corporations whose interests and power manipulate its workings.

35. Farmers are not the only ones involved in agriculture who suffer from this system. The plight of migrant agricultural workers, often members of racial and ethnic minorities, is scandalous in some areas. Many farmworkers, despite their long and arduous hours of physical labor, are poorly paid, ill clothed, undernourished, condemned to live in substandard housing and denied bargaining power.<sup>20</sup> Family farmers are often squeezed between the just demands of farmworkers for better wages, housing and working conditions, and the contractual requirements imposed by large corporations that prefer mechanization in the fields. Farmers and farmworkers together form the most vital productive group in society, because without the food they produce few people could survive. Farmworkers' suffering is a particular affront to Christians who consider the words of Saint Paul:

The Scripture says, "You shall not put a muzzle on an ox when he is threshing the grain," and also, "The worker deserves his wages" (I Tim. 5:18).

#### **Mining and Energy Resources**

36. The heartland region is rich in natural resources. Oil and natural gas have been produced. Uranium, coal, gold, copper and iron have been mined. The nation as a whole benefits from this production

both in its use of manufactured goods and in its ability to meet energy needs for home and business.

37. Mining has had some harmful effects on the land and on people. Land valuable for its productive capacity or for its scenic beauty has been lost forever in some areas.<sup>21</sup> Water supplies have been polluted. Acid rain falls in some places, hurting crops, livestock and people. Companies have at times used their power of eminent domain without regard for the needs of people or the environment. Working conditions for miners have been unsafe. Radioactive tailings have been left exposed at uranium mining sites, endangering human and animal health. Peat mining has seriously damaged the natural ecological balance of some areas.

38. The potential benefits of the ore to be extracted through mining often have not been carefully weighed against the potential harm from mining. A balance has not been struck between satisfying perceived human needs and avoiding the harmful social and environmental consequences that can result from meeting those needs. Consequently, the land, crops, animals and people have suffered at times from mining practices.

#### Other Impacts on the Land

39. There have been other uses and abuses of the natural resources of the heartland region.

40. Forestry has become a major industry along the northern part of the heartland. The timber that is harvested there provides many useful products for the nation. Wood is a renewable resource when it is carefully cultivated, when trees that have been cut down are replaced with new plantings. Unfortunately, this has not always been done, and erosion of the land and loss of timber resources have resulted.<sup>22</sup>

39. Technology is coming under closer scrutiny today. Agricultural technology, whether in the form of new machinery or of new farming techniques, has provided many benefits to the farmer. It has made work easier. It has aided productivity and efficiency. The question is not whether technology is needed -- for it certainly is -- but rather what types of technology are appropriate for small to moderate sized family farms in an age of growing unemployment, energy scarcity and depletion of soil and water resources. This question often either has been not asked or not seriously considered, not only with respect to agriculture but in other areas as well. For example, urban workers have been displaced by high energy consumptive machinery, and consumers have demanded more and more energy consuming goods for home or recreational use.

42. Pollutants are harming the heartland's natural resources and people. Pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers have enabled farmers to increase their crop yields, but they sometimes have harmed the farm family, the food chain and the environment in general, especially when used excessively or carelessly.<sup>23</sup> The real needs of the soil, environment, crops, human and animal health and the world's hungry often have not been evaluated to determine the extent to which these substances should be used.

43. Chemical pollution is not just an agricultural issue. Water quality suffers from industrial waste dumping and individuals' littering as well as from agricultural nonpoint sources of pollution. Air quality is lowered by industrial and automotive pollutants, especially in urban areas. Land has become the disposal site for urban industrial and residential wastes. As a result of these types of water, air and land pollution, people's health has suffered and the harmony of nature has been disrupted.

44. Urban and rural people need decent housing. In some cities people are forced to live in slum apartments, while in some rural areas they must live in substandard houses. In both cases, a healthful living environment is lacking. When developers and government officials have tried to meet people's housing needs, sometimes they have not considered what might be the land's best and highest use. Urban sprawl has claimed prime agricultural land, for example, when investors trying to minimize construction costs have developed on it new housing subdivisions and their accompanying shopping centers and transportation facilities. Meanwhile, vacant urban lots have remained undeveloped, downtown businesses have disappeared and central urban living and shopping areas have been allowed to decay.

45. Transportation facilities and systems are using increasing amounts of land throughout the region. The demand for new or expanded airports and highways, for example, seems to be ever on the rise. Sometimes new highway routes are plotted to replace existing routes, with the result that more prime agricultural land becomes paved over. Necessary and existing rail transportation facilities, which especially benefit small farmers and low or middle income urban commuters, often are abandoned or neglected while increasing amounts of money are spent on highways.<sup>24</sup> Higher costs and higher consumption of petroleum products have resulted from this practice.

46. Finally, greater amounts of land are being used for power plants and power lines. Certainly the energy needs of homes and places of work must be met. However, coal burning and nuclear power plants

can actually or potentially adversely affect people and the natural environment, and high voltage power lines can have an adverse health impact on people and livestock. Such effects from energy production and distribution often have not been seriously evaluated or considered in the siting and construction of energy systems.<sup>25</sup>

47. As land ownership in the heartland has changed, and as land use has become diversified, one consequence has been more strained relations between urban and rural people. Competition for limited resources often has created or increased antagonism between the city and the country. Common strategies for development and use have not been formulated. A sense of community has been lost where conflict has replaced both a willingness to compromise and a commitment to the service of others.

48. We in the heartland inherited from both the Native American and Judaeo-Christian traditions a sense of reverence for the land as God's gift for us and a mandate to share the land's benefits. We have not always been faithful to those traditions during our tenure on the land. We need to reflect once again on our responsibility to be stewards of the land.

## 2: Stewardship of the Land

49. In the Christian tradition, the biblically-based concept of stewardship describes what people's relationships should be with the land and with each other.

### Principles of Land Stewardship

50. In the Bible and the teaching tradition of the Church, these principles of land stewardship are evident:

- (1) The land is God's;
- (2) People are God's stewards on the land;
- (3) The land's benefits are for everyone;
- (4) The land should be distributed equitably;
- (5) The land should be conserved and restored;
- (6) Land use planning must consider social and environmental impacts;
- (7) Land use should be appropriate to land quality;
- (8) The land should provide a moderate livelihood;
- (9) The land's workers should be able to become the land's owners;
- (10) The land's mineral wealth should be shared.

All of these principles could be applied in the heartland.

### (1) The land is God's

51. We are God's creatures. We believe that we and the earth we inhabit are "the work of God's hands" (cf. Gen. 1-2). We affirm, therefore, the principle expressed so clearly in the Book of Psalms:

The Lord's are the earth and its fullness;  
the world and those who dwell in it (24:1).

God created the earth, those living on it and the resources it provides (cf. Genesis 1-2; Job 38:4-39:40); to God's ultimate dominion all of these are subject.

## **(2) People are God's stewards on the land**

52. The earth might be seen as the garden of the Lord, entrusted to humanity's care, as described in the Book of Genesis (cf. Sir. 7:15):

The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it (2:15).<sup>26</sup>

In God's charge to Adam is symbolized God's charge to all people on the land. Just as God entrusted the garden to Adam's care, God entrusts the heartland to the care of the people living and working in it.

53. Stewardship means caring for God's creation. It implies that civil title to a portion of the earth does not confer absolute ownership of it. That belongs to God alone. Civil title does confer responsibility for the land: for the use to which it is put and the care with which it is treated.

54. Stewardship, therefore, is expressed in two fundamental ways: custody of the land according to the civil laws governing property relationships in a particular place at a particular time, but subordinate to God's laws and the purpose for which God created the land; and conservation of the land according to the best of current knowledge so that God's creation might benefit present and future generations of humanity.

55. Those who are God's stewards on the land are also co-creators with God in guiding the land's productive power and in conserving the land's natural gifts. As co-creators, God's stewards help the land fulfill the purpose for which God created it: to help satisfy the physical, social and spiritual needs of God's creatures.

## **(3) The land's benefits are for everyone**

56. The land is given by God for all people, not just for those who hold civil title to it. This principle was affirmed by the Second Vatican Council, which stated that "God intended the earth and all it contains for the use of every human being and people," and that created goods are to be regarded as common property in the sense that they are to benefit not only their owners but others as well.<sup>27</sup> In stating this principle the Council reaffirmed a centuries-old Catholic tradition. Seven hundred years ago, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that people "ought to possess external things not as their own but as common, so that they are ready to communicate them to others in their need."<sup>28</sup> Pope John Paul II stressed this point in his addresses in Mexico in 1979, stating that "there is always a social mortgage on all private property, in order that goods may serve the general purpose that God gave them."<sup>29</sup> The land is held in stewardship for humanity. Private

property is a good because of the benefits it confers on the many, not because of the advantages it gives to the few. The Church's teaching succinctly stated is: Private ownership with community of use.

57. Because people have a right to life they have a right to food. In the words of Pope Paul VI: "The right to satisfy one's hunger must finally be recognized for everyone, according to the specific requirements of his age and activity. This right is based on the fact that all the goods of the earth are destined primarily for universal use and for the subsistence of all men, before any individual appropriation. Christ based the judgement of each human being on respect for this right (cf. Mt. 25:31 ff)." <sup>30</sup> The people's right to food implies their right to the land's benefits.

58. The land is God's gift for present and future generations of humanity. As the earth's finite resources are used, provision must be made for people's future needs. The consumption patterns of the present generation must be adjusted so that future generations might also partake of the land's bounty.

#### (4) The land should be distributed equitably

59. Land ownership should be as widely distributed as is necessary and feasible to meet the needs of the local and national communities and of the human family as a whole. In the words of Pope Leo XIII, the policy of the law with regard to ownership "should be to induce as many people as possible to become owners." <sup>31</sup>

60. When the Jews took possession of the Promised Land it was divided among them by lot (cf. Num. 33-35), so that no family would have an advantage in land selection. Later, the prescriptions of the jubilee year were promulgated. One of these stated that every fifty years all of the land was to revert to the descendants of the original families (cf. Lev. 25:10, 24). This reinforced the Jewish belief that the land was given by God to all the people. Thus, families that had become impoverished because of natural disasters, personal tragedy or poor management were given the opportunity to begin anew. The jubilee year was intended to prevent the establishment of a wealthy landed aristocracy and to promote the continued equitable distribution of the land among all the people. Jesus also advocated the jubilee year, at least as an ideal, as seen in the Lord's Prayer and the sermon in the Nazareth synagogue with which he began his ministry. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus prays:

And forgive us our debts,  
As we also have forgiven our debtors (6:12; cf. Lk 11:4) <sup>32</sup>

In Luke's Gospel Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah:

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me;  
therefore he has annointed me.  
He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,  
to proclaim liberty to captives,  
Recovery of sight to the blind  
and release to prisoners.  
To announce a year of favor from the Lord" (4:18-19).<sup>33</sup>

and then declares:

Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled  
in your hearing (4:21).

61. In the heartland, the concentration of land in fewer and fewer private hands directly contradicts the biblical concept of equitable land distribution. In some areas, the inequity of distribution is more evident in the quality than the quantity of land in individual or corporate hands: while some live comfortably because they own prime land, others are forced to eke out their existence on poor land. In questions both of land concentration and of land quality the principle of equitable land distribution must be considered.

**(5) The land should be conserved and restored**

62. Stewardship implies conservation of the land. As Pope John Paul II stated in Des Moines, Iowa in 1979:

The land must be conserved with care since it is intended to be fruitful for generation upon generation. You who live in the heartland of America have been entrusted with some of the earth's best land: the soil so rich in minerals, the climate so favorable for producing bountiful crops, with fresh water and unpolluted land all around you. You are stewards of some of the most important resources God has given to the world. Therefore conserve the land well, so that your children's children and generations after them will inherit an even richer land than was entrusted to you.<sup>34</sup>

63. Farm land is to be nurtured carefully so that it might retain its topsoil and its nutrients, and so the productive power given to it by the Creator. It is to be cared for in this way so that succeeding generations

of farmers might produce food and fiber on it and so that succeeding generations of humanity might be fed and clothed from it.

64. In biblical times, the practice of the **sabbatical year** (cf. Lev. 25:2-5) in which the land was left fallow every seven years, was one way in which farmers sought to conserve the land.<sup>35</sup> Given the world's food needs, we could not as a region follow this practice, and we have developed other conservation techniques unknown to ancient peoples. These techniques must be utilized -- and others developed -- to regenerate the soil periodically.

65. When the subsurface resources of the earth have been extracted for human benefit, the land must be restored as nearly as possible to its original condition. When mining or other industrial interests do not restore the land deep and broad scars are left on the earth, valuable agricultural land is lost, areas of natural beauty are blighted, and a segment of God's land is left ruined. Prior to mining operations, companies should commit themselves to disturbing the land as little as possible and to restoring the land when their work is done.

66. The land is living and helps provide life for all creatures. When it is abused, the land and all creatures dependent on it suffer. Abuse of the land is therefore abuse of people, abuse of God's creation and abuse of the responsibility of stewardship. On the other hand, conservation of the land promotes its vitality, assures a harmonious relationship between people and the natural environment and fosters the wellbeing of all creatures.

**(6) Land use planning must consider social and environmental impacts**

67. The face of the land has been shaped over the course of millions of years by nature and, more recently, by humanity. As we appropriate the earth's resources for our use, as we alter the land to satisfy our needs and as we change the way in which we use different segments of the land, we must be conscious of the social and environmental consequences of our actions.

68. In order to minimize adverse effects on the land and the people, land use planning must evaluate the impact that proposed courses of action would have on them. This would especially be true in cases of industrial development, power plant siting, power line construction, mining and urban development of rural land. The people most affected by proposed land use changes should have the principal right, where possible, to decide whether or not such changes should occur. Government exercise of the right of eminent domain should be rare

and truly in the public interest. The impact of land use changes on water supply systems and on natural formations should also be considered.

**(7) Land use should be appropriate to land quality**

69. The land should be utilized according to its "best and highest" use. That is, because land is a limited resource any determination of how a given portion of it will be used should take into consideration the quality of the land and how it might best serve the community as a whole. Prime farmland, for example, should not be used for an airport, a highway or a shopping center; neither should range land be converted to farmland when such a conversion would severely deplete water reserves and destroy necessary soil cover. Strip mining on prime or good farmland should be avoided. Urban land uses should benefit urban dwellers and workers. In any case, since land is a community resource the way it is used should be based on a careful consideration of the various possibilities for its use and the short and long term consequences of each.

**(8) The land should provide a moderate livelihood**

70. Those who work on the land should be able to earn through their labors sufficient money to provide for their needs and the needs of their family. Their financial return on their work should be, in effect, equivalent to the "living wage" which the church has consistently advocated for workers in industrial occupations. In the area of agriculture, for example, farmers should receive a financial return sufficient at least to meet their expenses and provide some reserve for the future. Farmers, for their part, must not yield to the temptation of greed personified by the landowner in Jesus' parable in Luke's Gospel:

There was a rich man who had a good harvest. "What shall I do?" he asked himself. "I have no place to store my harvest. I know," he said. "I will pull down my grain bins and build larger ones. All my grain and my goods will go there. Then I will say to myself: You have blessings in reserve for years to come. Relax! Eat heartily, drink well. Enjoy yourself." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life shall be required of you. To whom will all this piled-up wealth of yours go?" That is the way it works with the man who grows rich for himself instead of growing rich in the sight of God (12:16-21).

**(9) The land's workers should be able to become the land's owners**

71. People working in a variety of occupations often look toward the day when they might achieve a certain amount of independence and security by becoming owners of the enterprise in which they work. Thus, tenant farmers hope to have their own farm someday; company employees hope to become independent entrepreneurs, or owners of the company in which they work.

72. In his encyclical *Mater et Magistra* Pope John XXIII wrote that "it is very desirable that workers gradually acquire some share in the enterprise by such methods as seem more appropriate."<sup>36</sup> His thought closely paralleled that of Pope Pius XII who declared that the social order should make possible "a secure, although modest, property to all classes of the people."<sup>37</sup>

73. People who work on land that is owned by others should have some means of gradual entry into ownership of the land or corporation, either as individual owners or as shareholders. Farm renters and farmworkers should have the opportunity to become owner-operators of modest-sized family farms; and mine, timber and factory workers should be able to share directly in the management and profits of the corporations for which they work.

**(10) The land's mineral wealth should be shared**

74. The mineral resources of our region are limited. They benefit the companies that extract them through the profits they provide, and they benefit people in general through their utility as fuel or as manufactured products. Their benefit to the people in the area in which they are mined, however, is short-lived: for the time in which they are available they provide jobs and short term economic prosperity.

75. The benefit which the people in the region derive from their natural resources should outlive the availability of those resources. Mining companies should not reap high profits over the short term to the disadvantage of the area's inhabitants over the long term. The profits resulting from mineral resources extracted from the land should be shared in part by the people of the State in which mining occurs.

**Strangers and Guests**

76. The idea that the land was entrusted to us by God as our common inheritance, for which we must be stewards, is perhaps most clearly outlined in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Book of Leviticus. When the Jewish people finally arrived at their new homeland, and apportioned the land among themselves, God described for them what their attitude should be toward the land as property:

Land must not be sold in perpetuity,  
for the land belongs to me  
And to me you are only strangers and guests (25:23).<sup>38</sup>

The people were not to regard the land as something to be possessed for the exclusive benefit or control of individual owners; the land was a community benefit. The people were to regard themselves as "strangers and guests" upon the land. They were to avoid the practice of perpetual proprietorship, which would change the land from a community benefit to a private preserve.

77. We, too, must be "strangers and guests" upon the land. We must keep in mind the land's inherent status as a gift from God for the human family -- God's children -- and our own responsibility to be God's stewards upon it for the benefit of all people.

### 3: The Future of the Land

78. The future of the land, of its inhabitants and of all who depend on its resources will be affected by what we do in the present. The way in which we relate to the land will affect the extent to which the land will continue to provide our sustenance and livelihood. The way in which we relate to each other will affect the extent to which we will grow together as a community in which each member is concerned about the wellbeing of every other member.

79. After considering concerns people expressed at the hearings, conditions present in this region and Catholic social teachings, we the bishops of the heartland would like to suggest some means by which the care and right use of the land might be promoted. We hope that what we propose will reflect what we have heard, be faithful to the Gospel and the Church's social ethical tradition, heighten people's awareness of the problems and issues involved and be a basis for common action by all those who share our concern for the land.

80. As members of the Church, we are challenged to work for a better future for the land and for the people. We must respond to this challenge with prayer, preaching and public witness. In prayer we seek a deepening of our own responsibility both individually and collectively to steward the earth which the Lord has entrusted to our care. By preaching the Gospel we seek to proclaim the Good News of God's loving care for all people and God's command that the earth and its resources be distributed and used in such a way as to benefit all peoples, all of whom represent interdependent communities of the same human family. Through our public witness of our own stewardship of the land and its resources and of our social action on behalf of every neighbor -- within our local community or in the global community -- we seek to influence others also to act as stewards of the land and neighbors in the community.

81. Our concern for the future of the land and its people has led us to issue this statement with two objectives in mind. Our primary ob-

jective is to work with the heartland's people to understand better both regional land issues and our common responsibility to be stewards of the land. We hope that this effort at moral education will bring about justice in the distribution and use of the earth's resources. Our secondary objective is to act with those who share our concerns to effect legislative remedies for regional land problems if moral appeals for land stewardship do not alter the present situation. We believe that when private efforts at moral persuasion fail, governments as public bodies have the responsibility to mediate in a just manner the conflicting claims of the governed. While doing so they must be especially concerned about safeguarding the rights of those with the least economic and political power.

### **Social Policies**

82. Significant social change originates with the conversion and commitment of individuals. The reforms suggested by the application of Judaean-Christian moral principles to land issues will be promoted in public policies only if individuals become convinced that they are just and necessary, and work with other individuals as a group to have them enacted. We bishops are convinced that the application of the principles we have described is just and necessary. We would like to suggest now some policies that a responsible government might enact for the common good if individuals do not practice stewardship of the land.

### **Land**

83. In order to affect the trends and structures of land ownership in the heartland, and in the light of the Church's moral tradition, we urge a broad reform of land ownership and use which would promote the opportunity of all people to own or responsibly control the land on which they live and labor.

84. Land is a resource to be cherished and used, not a commodity upon which to speculate. We have seen investor companies and foreign and domestic speculators use their financial power to purchase substantial amounts of agricultural land. We propose that the rights of individual investors and of investor-owned companies to acquire land be limited.

85. Land consolidation and speculation have been promoted through the capital gains and investment credit provisions of the tax laws. We propose that the favorable treatment which tax laws give to income from capital gains be eliminated, since that favoritism works to the advantage of wealthy investors and land speculators and to the disadvantage of small and low income farm families.<sup>40</sup> In the area of

taxation, we also urge that agricultural land be taxed according to its productive value rather than according to its speculative value. When any of these changes in taxation are made, the needs of family farmers, of the poor and of those on fixed incomes must be considered.

86. Mining companies have not always practiced stewardship on the land they control. We urge strict enforcement of the Federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977, and the passage by the States of our region of severance tax laws and of laws prohibiting the mining of prime agricultural land<sup>41</sup> and of land on which rural communities are located. We propose that some of the income derived from severance taxes be used for conservation of existing land and water resources, and for resotration of the productive capacities and ecological balances of exploited areas. Severance tax income also should help provide for education and other community needs.

87. Timber companies have not always practiced stewardship of the land they harvest. We encourage responsible practices on the part of the timber industry as it works to meet the country's wood needs. We hope that it will carefully evaluate and balance humanity's needs for lumber, recreation areas and healthy air in the atmosphere, all of which are provided by the trees of our forests.

88. We have seen land consumed by urban sprawl, transportation networks and power plants and lines. We propose as alternatives renovation of existing houses, the development of vacant city lots and of mass transportation systems (especially railroads and river systems where feasible) and energy conservation and decentralization.<sup>42</sup>

#### Agriculture

89. The ownership and use of most of the land in this region is an agricultural issue. We are particularly concerned about the severe decline in the number of owner-operated family farms here over the past generation. We endorse and urge farm families to support the proposals set forth in the Family Farm Statement published by the United States Catholic Conference. We urge that modest land holdings, sufficient to support family farms, be encouraged by taxing land progressively at a higher rate according to increases in the size and quality of holdings. We also suggest that estate taxes be revised and enforced to promote moderate-sized family holdings and prevent hardships on bereaved families.<sup>43</sup> We believe that monoculture is a poor use of land and increases the danger of financial collapse of a family farm, and so we encourage agricultural diversification.

90. Some farmers feel forced to buy more crop land because they receive a poor financial return from their harvest. We believe that agricultural prices, including prices for farm labor, should be equitably managed according to public policy and law. Farm prices ought to be stabilized at levels which provide fair and equitable returns to producers, and adjusted for changes in the cost of production, so that a day of labor on the farm and a dollar invested in farming yield economic returns comparable to similar contributions in other occupations.

91. Farmers' individualism often hinders their efforts to receive fair prices for their products. We encourage producers, processors and handlers to perfect and practice collective bargaining techniques, so that they all might receive equity and justice for their production and labor.<sup>44</sup>

92. Aspiring farmers, beginning farmers and tenant farmers have great difficulty in saving or acquiring sufficient capital and land to be able to survive as independent owner-operators. We urge assistance for them such as low interest loans, provision of tax incentives for retiring or bereaved farm families to encourage them to sell their land to them and the development of private and public land trusts and land banks that would benefit them.

93. Millions of the world's people are suffering from starvation or malnutrition as a result of global or domestic economic structures and a lack of agricultural resources. We endorse public policies which stabilize international food prices and in the biblical tradition, provide for a reserve of food to meet the needs of the many when the harvest is poor. We advocate increased exports of food to meet the needs of the world's hungry, at prices that poor nations can afford or as outright grants where necessary, and without regard for political ideologies. We support the education of indigenous peoples -- in cooperation with such international agencies as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations -- in agricultural practices appropriate to their climate, geography, energy resources, labor needs, food requirements and culture.<sup>46</sup> We believe that although we are responsible for helping to feed the world because of its people's current extreme poverty, we must also help people to develop economic self-sufficiency and, where possible, agricultural self-sufficiency in the long term. The latter might be promoted through such means as development of land and human resources, appropriate technology and the conversion of land dedicated to export cash crops to land dedicated to meeting domestic food needs. Finally, we forcefully affirm the principle that food should never be used as a weapon against any nation or people as a tool of oppression to starve them into submission.

94. Public authorities should enact and enforce legislation to prevent the loss of the heartland's life-sustaining land and water resources. We propose that state land preservation programs be designed to prevent the needless consumption of agricultural land and its irreversible removal from food production to accommodate such nonagricultural uses as haphazard urban residential and industrial development. We believe that agricultural zoning should be used, where necessary, to preserve prime agricultural land.<sup>47</sup> Urban developers should improve land unsuited for agriculture and unnecessary for the ecological balance of a given area. We urge also the preservation of water quality and quantity through restrictions on agricultural, industrial and residential pollutants and their disposal and on the amount of water that might be appropriated by new development or the expansion of existing facilities.

95. Agricultural land also is lost through erosion. We praise those farmers who are good soil conservationists. We urge all farmers to conserve the land, and we call for increased federal financial assistance to help them do so. Conservation of the soil and of other natural resources is both a form of stewardship and a public good for which we all share responsibility. Accordingly, public investment in conservation should constitute a covenant with the present and future owners of the land in which the investment is made. Any owner who destroys a publicly-assisted conservation improvement -- for example, by removing shelter belts, terraces, culverts or green waterways -- should be required to pay back the government for the appreciated value of the public's conservation investment.<sup>48</sup>

96. We encourage members of the agricultural research establishment, particularly of the land grant universities, to intensify their efforts to develop a farm technology which enhances the relationship between people and the land, which protects the natural world and which fosters the wellbeing of small farmers. We urge those federal and state government officials who provide funding for these establishments to facilitate that task through adequate appropriations for them from the public treasury.

97. Finally, stewardship of the land and life itself are both symbolically and naturally joined in the life-generating capacity of the seed. We must preserve for ourselves and for future generations the genetic variety of plants necessary to protect humanity from the hazards of inbreeding. We note with concern that inbreeding has become a major practice in our present agricultural system as greater yields and profits have been pursued. We also are disturbed by the acquisition of seed companies and patents by multinational cor-

porations. The control of seeds, because it implies also the control of food production and indeed of life itself, should not be appropriated to itself by any company or nation. We therefore urge a careful review of present and pending seed patent legislation.

### **Rural Development**

98. We believe that rural communities in the heartland should be served justly by state and federal programs designed to provide economic development, jobs, social services, health care and housing. There should be no discrimination against small communities in the administration of these programs and in the distribution of funds under them.

99. Rural development policy should promote the development of people within their own communities, and therefore must include measures which strengthen rural communities' independence and self support, as well as provide them with financial support when they need it. Laws restricting the draining of financial resources from rural communities should be strengthened so that rural people are not deprived of their own resources for self development. Additionally, people in villages and small towns should explore ways in which they might work as a community to help each other and thereby minimize their need for government aid.

### **Wages and Working Conditions**

100. Those who labor on the land or under the earth have often received low wages and endured poor working conditions. We believe that all those who work another's land must be justly compensated and protected from health hazards. They should receive a nationally established minimum wage based on need and productivity, as does organized labor in other occupations. Their places of work ought to be free of harmful substances and dangerous conditions, to the maximum extent possible. Those whose health is impaired, whose income is lessened or whose employment is terminated because of employment-related injuries must be compensated with medical services and an income sufficient to provide their families with life's necessities. All working people have the right to organize to achieve these objectives. We are especially concerned about the rights of farmworkers, miners and timber workers to just wages and reasonably healthy working conditions.

101. Respect for the land and gratitude for its bounty were characteristic attitudes of the Native Americans who inhabited the heartland long before the first European settlers arrived. These American Indians tried to live in harmony with nature and, within individual tribes, shared the land and its gifts as public benefits rather than as private property.<sup>49</sup>

102. We believe that the people of the heartland might learn from American Indians ways of living in harmony with the land, and thus of fulfilling their own responsibility to be its stewards.

103. We know that American Indians have suffered greatly over the years. With our brother bishops in the United States Catholic Conference "we recognize our own responsibility to join with our American Indian sisters and brothers in their ongoing struggle to secure justice," particularly in such areas as "the speedy and equitable resolution of treaty and statute questions" and "protection of Indian land and resource rights."<sup>50</sup>

### **Individual and Corporate Responsibilities**

104. Remedying the injustices associated with land tenure and use in the heartland is the responsibility of each of us as individuals and as participants in the systems which have brought us to our present state. All people, urban and rural, must recognize that their lifestyles, purchasing habits and expectations contribute directly and indirectly to the concentration of land ownership and the consequent abuse of the land. We are called by God to change our consumption patterns and to act to effect justice in the land. We are called as Christians to "break with the frenzy of consumerism," to "find a simple way of living,"<sup>51</sup> as we become more aware of how our consumption hurts people at home and abroad, depriving them even of life's necessities. We are called to live more in the spirit of the beatitudes (cf. Luke 6:20-23; Matthew 5:3-12) and to be more responsive to the needs of the poor with whom the Son of Man identifies himself (cf. Matthew 25:31-46), and who cry to us: "take of your substance and not just of your abundance."<sup>52</sup>

105. We remind the leaders of national and international corporations of the great responsibility they have to treat people and the land with respect. They also must explore ways in which their companies might promote stewardship of the land and its resources and help develop economic and political structures based on justice for all.

106. The land is given by God for the benefit of all of humanity, as are the sun which lights and warms it, the water which refreshes it and the air which caresses it. All of these natural resources, vital parts of our natural, life-generating environment, must be conserved by us who are called to be God's stewards. We hope to work with those who participated in the land hearings, or who wish to respond to our words or who have otherwise become concerned about the land's present and potential capabilities, to preserve and extend our rich heartland heritage.

107. We wish to praise and encourage the program and involvement of those rural organizations that have sought to promote such values as justice in land ownership and use, a just return for agricultural labor and production and concern for neighbors and the community at large. The perspective of some of these groups is very similar to our own, while not coinciding entirely. We especially commend the work of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, which has struggled for over half a century to promote stewardship of the land.

108. The efforts of all groups must be directed toward promoting community in the heartland. We must work together to overcome such conflicts among us as those between urban and rural inhabitants, consumers and producers, and industrial workers and agricultural workers; and such divisions among us as those based on race, sex, creed or ethnic origin.

109. In the writings of St. Paul we find imagery appropriate for this effort to establish community -- his teaching that we are all members of the one body of Christ:

The body is one and has many members,  
but all the members, many though they are,  
are one body; and so it is with Christ.

You, then, are the body of Christ.  
Every one of you is a member of it.  
(I Cor. 12:12, 27).

Our individual differences should contribute to the building up of the community, for we each have a gift to contribute to it. For St. Paul, too, our differences of race, sex or social class must be overcome in the church community, so that we might be witnesses to the world of unity and equality in Christ:

All of you who have been baptized into Christ  
have clothed yourselves with him.  
There does not exist among you Jew or Greek,  
slave or freeman, male or female.  
All are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:27-28).

110. Let us work toward community in the heartland -- toward overcoming the conflicts and divisions among us and toward fulfilling our respective responsibilities as God's stewards on the land. Let us build up the body of Christ in the heartland.

111. Let us work together to bring about a renewed heartland, whose fruits will be not only the produce grown on the rich soil of family farms, but also a spirit of community that encompasses and blesses all peoples. May God bless our efforts as we work toward that end.

+ *William M. Cosgrove*

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