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Irish bishops: economy should be 'at the service of the people'

by Cian Molloy by Catholic News Service

DUBLIN -- With Ireland's economy nearing bankruptcy and in need of emergency help from bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and the European Union, the Irish bishops said that the opportunity exists to build a profitable and growing economy "at the service of the people."

In a statement issued Dec. 14, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference called for "an economy which brings benefit to all our citizens, especially the children of our nation, the elderly and the most vulnerable."

The statement, "In Helping Each Other, There Is Hope," came at the conclusion of a one-day meeting of the bishops in Maynooth. The meeting was shortened after being postponed a week because of severe winter weather.

The Irish economy has been racked by the collapse of the real estate market and reckless lending by the country's financial institutions. The recent problems are a far cry from the "Celtic Tiger" boom years of 1995 through 2004, when Ireland became one of Western Europe's wealthiest countries.

Unemployment stands at 14 percent. Four percent of mortgage holders are at least three months behind in payments.

Citing charities such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul that have increases as high as 35 percent in the number of people seeking help, the bishops expressed concern that things could worsen as salaries continue to fall while additional government cuts in social service funding and tax increases are expected in the next three years.

"As Ireland prepares to host the 50th International Eucharistic Congress in 2012, let us acknowledge our urgent need for 'Communion with Christ and with one another,' the theme of the congress. It is in such communion and solidarity that there is real cause for hope."

The bishops added, "The people of Ireland have always shown resilience when faced with situations of great challenge in the past. We believe in our ability as a nation to address the challenges that confront us now."

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