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Presidential platforms

by Phyllis Zagano

Just Catholic

I'm tired of the arguing, the truth-shading, the smirking and the jokes. I'm tired of it all. Here are the seven issues I want addressed starting today, this minute. Not tomorrow. Not next week. Not after whatever election is on the horizon. Today, please.

Feed the hungry:

Hunger is the first pain of poverty. Interlaced economies are both substance and cause of the poverty spreading more in the Third World than in the genteel First. Individuals, families, whole villages are chronically exhausted for want of food. These are real malnourished people, suffering especially a lack of protein. Some statisticians count 925 million hungry people among the more than 7 billion hanging on to the planet. In the U.S. alone, almost 47 million people are on food stamps -- government credit card aid that neither lessens the embarrassment at the check-out nor covers the entire grocery cart.

Give drink to the thirsty:

The world is rapidly losing its water supply, without which we shrivel and die. All of us. I haven't heard it said much lately, but water is the new oil. If you control the water, you control the ability to grow crops, to move goods and supplies, to create power. World leaders know water is a strategic and economic resource; more than 260 river basins are shared by two or more countries, and they don't always get along. There's been a tiff going on for years between Brazil and Paraguay over the Itaipu Dam. While individuals and corporations roam the world buying water rights, more than a billion people lack access to safe drinking water. Pollution is rampant and is killing the seas, especially the microscopic life that begins the oceanic food chain.

Clothe the naked:

It used to be a teenage ritual to sneak a look at the feathered, painted, semi-naked bodies in *National Geographic*. Now photographers document naked little ones, men in rags, women in less. They have no clothes. They have no shoes. While the polished wealthy of the world shop on Rome's Via Veneto or Los Angeles' Rodeo Drive (the World Bank says Americans spend \$50 billion annually on shoes alone), as many as 300 million children go barefoot, each one prey to injury and disease.

Shelter the homeless:

The world's political systems practically conspire to create refugees. Displaced persons trek from Somalia to Kenya, from South Sudan to North Sudan. They leave Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Myanmar and the Palestinian Territories. People in richer nations are little better off. As housing booms became housing busts, broken people removed the "better life" signs from their doors and slipped away. In Spain, in Ireland, in the United States, wherever a mortgage broker made a euro or a dollar on a family's hopes, people wonder why their dreams evaporated.

Visit the sick:

Health care is a worldwide mangled mess. Poor countries have few doctors, with less equipment and supplies. Rich countries have highly trained and specialized physicians who send as much as a quarter of their incomes to insurance companies. Hospitals go broke. Nursing homes are engulfed in scandals. In between are millions of people with colds, injuries and chronic conditions. Many can pay their bills through private or government programs. Many more cannot.

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Ransom the captive:

Too many women are subject to denigrating, humiliating conditions. In too many places, they are not allowed education. They cannot vote. They are not permitted to drive a car. In the macho world, they are regarded as baby-making factories, good only for pleasure and production. Even in civilized nations, including those with women at the helms of government and education, the stiff undercurrent of old-boy chatter blocks advancement (or even entry) into halls of power, be they private, civic or religious.

Bury the dead:

At least the world usually buries the people its wars, mayhem and negligence kill daily. But other lives are ended purposefully without a passing thought. The roadkill of the so-called civilized world includes the abortions it supports for emotional or financial convenience, without a nod to the scientific understanding that this is a human being. (That is, in fact, the biological term.) We do not know at what point that life becomes a "person." But we know for sure the conceptus would become one, not a frog.

Dear leaders, please figure it out. More wealth might help: the wealth that spills into jobs, generating goods, services and taxes. I know taxes are a tricky business. Too many taxes discourage new businesses and shrink jobs. Too few taxes endanger the infrastructure new businesses depend on, and folks need to get to work.

The back-and-forth and back-and-forth about the economy has never really addressed the creation of

wealth. But without work and a way to get there, people cannot get food, water, clothing, shelter and health care. Human dignity and respect for themselves and all creation evaporates.

I want you -- whether you are a candidate, president, bishop, king or dictator -- to take a long hard look at your dinner table tonight and think about those hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless people. I want you to think about their rights and dignity as persons. I want you to understand how human flesh and blood suffers.

And I want you to figure it out.

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