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To: The Faithful of the Diocese of London

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, celebrated this year on 15 November, marks the **Fourth World Day of Prayer for the Poor**. The theme chosen by Pope Francis, “Stretch out your hand to the poor” (Sirach 7:32), is meant to draw our attention to our brothers and sisters in need and to encourage us to be generous in serving them. At the same time, the pope reminds us that we must address the structural causes of poverty, otherwise the cycle of poverty not only continues, it grows claiming more and more victims.

By washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus teaches us that loving service is a criterion for discipleship: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Moved by Jesus’ example, the early Christians gave a powerful witness that faith, prayer and loving service are inseparable (Acts 2:42-47).

Throughout our diocese, I see many examples of hands stretched out in service of our brothers and sisters. To name a few, we have parishes that work closely with the local soup kitchen, that host meals, that sponsor refugees, that support women’s shelters, that are advocating for the poor and supporting them in their cries for justice.

The service offered by parishioners through their membership with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP) is an expression of faith and love: “The Church’s love for the poor ... is a part of her constant tradition” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2444). We have in our diocese over 1300 Vincentians in 62 SSVP conferences. They visit people, coming not as an agency but as disciples of Jesus who bring assistance and bear witness to his presence among us. They pray with and for the people they serve. They host community meals and operate St. Vincent de Paul stores. It is good for us to recognize that this outreach is being done without fanfare and with great generosity.

We should be grateful for all these acts of service that are being done in our diocese. They offer us an opportunity to welcome Christ’s presence into our lives (Matthew 25:37-40).

I encourage you to “stretch out your hand to the poor”, and I thank you for your support and your donations of time, treasure and talent which are enabling much good work to be done. May God bless us as we seek to live as disciples of Jesus.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London