

## **In the Heartland With Bishop Pates**

### **“Brokering Dialogue”**

Earlier this year, Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace in Rome, was invited to deliver a keynote address at the annual Borlaug Dialogue of the World Food Prize (WFP). This event was recently conducted October 15-17 in Des Moines.

At the time of the invitation, the recipients of this year’s edition of the World Food Prize had not been announced. The Cardinal accepted, in principle, knowing that the World Food Prize was in the forefront of addressing the significant problem of world hunger.

Eventually, those to receive the prize were made known – three prominent scientists who had been instrumental in the development of GMO’s, Genetic Modified Organisms. The winners included individuals who worked in the industry that was the target of criticism by some.

The announcement of the prize winners stirred reaction especially by a local group known as the Occupy World food Prize (OWFP). This group organized a program to coincide with the WFP activity in Des Moines. Following the lead of WFP, this group also invited Cardinal Turkson to speak at their gathering.

To everyone’s surprise, Cardinal Turkson accepted both invitations. It seemed quite unusual since OWFP had taken a negative stance regarding GMO’s, as well as corporations involved in agriculture. Positively they supported the family farm emphasizing organic farming.

Cardinal Turkson came to Des Moines for both events and delivered a consistent message on behalf of the Catholic Church. The Church, he stressed, is supportive of scientific study that advances the cause of human betterment. Enormous progress has been made by the likes of Norman Borlaug in alleviating hunger and human suffering on the face of the globe.

At the same time, scientific development must be conscious of the moral implications of its outcomes. The truth the Cardinal conveyed is that every human act is moral in nature and must be evaluated in light of this reality. Thus, criteria for the implementation of scientific findings need to incorporate prudence as well as an understanding as to how such can affect different categories of recipients especially the poor in developing countries. While profit-taking is legitimate does it not need be adjusted as it seeks to elevate the poor and give them sustained hope?

The Cardinal stressed that he had accepted invitations to both groups to promote dialogue and inclusion seeking to advance the common good. He purposefully refrained from demonizing one group at the expense of the other.

It seems to me that such a stance is aligned with the vision of Pope Francis and the contemporary response expected of a faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus. Oftentimes, two opposing groups so

dig in their heels in promoting their particular cause that truth which normally resides in varying viewpoints, does not emerge to be effective and life-saving. Energy is wasted in stubborn insistence on one's position which, in reality, most likely contains only partial truth.

The *Des Moines Register* editorial staff highlighted the Cardinal's position in its Sunday, October 20<sup>th</sup> edition:

“A rose to Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson of Ghana for striking a delicate balance between the contentious poles of the debate over genetically engineered foods. Cardinal Turkson, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, was in town last week for the World Food Prize events. Besides speaking at the Borlaug Dialogue, he met with Iowa farmers and activists who oppose genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and what they see as increasing corporate domination of agriculture. Although he shares concerns of those activists, he politely declined to be recruited by one side of the debate or the other. “I'll refrain from demonizing anyone,” he told the activists. “Not one group, not another group. I'll rather seek to fashion openings which would allow us to talk, negotiate, convince.” That spirit of dialogue was precisely the aim of the late Norman Borlaug, who launched the Green Revolution and the World Food Prize.”

Surprisingly, at the conclusion of his presentations to each of the OWFP and WFP audiences Cardinal Turkson received standing ovations. May we respond to His Eminence's courage and gift by being advocates of the age-old dictum of Aristotle: “In Medio stat virtus.” “In the middle stands virtue.”

### **A Blessed Thanksgiving**

Very best wishes are extended to all in the Diocese of Des Moines for a Blessed and Happy Thanksgiving.

As families and individuals, we recount the continuing accompaniment in our lives of a generous and sustaining God, who introduces fresh favors to us with the coming of each day.

As a diocesan community we have certainly shared in the Lord's goodness. In particular we rejoice at the ordination of three new priests and a continuing corps of twenty seminarians. From the material side, we are grateful for the generosity of ever so many in enabling the “sharing God's Gifts” capital campaign to be thus far highly successful. May our appreciation for all God's gifts inspire commitment on our part as missionary disciples, agents of Gospel Good News in our times.