

**Thanksgiving Proclamation**  
**Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago**  
**November 23, 1995**

This day of national observance is a time when Americans pause to recognize the many blessings which being a citizen of these United States confers upon them. It is a time when many of us focus our attention on the needs of the poor and the suffering. It is a time when our thoughts turn to sharing.

Sharing takes many forms. Most often we think of the voluntary charity so many in our metropolitan area engage in. This charity is a sign of a spirit of concern which helps thousands of people each year. Thanksgiving is a time also to be thankful for the many individuals and corporations who reach out to those in need. Chicagoland has much to be proud of in this regard.

But sharing involves more than charity. As proud as we are of the great generosity of the people of Chicagoland to organized charity, we are conscious of another reality, another need, this Thanksgiving which calls out to us for action.

Illinois is among the top ten states in overall wealth, Yet it ranks in the bottom five percent in educational funding. For all the rhetoric around this issue, still the children of Illinois are in need. Two issues stand out in what legitimately may be called a crisis. First, the overall funding to education is not high enough. Surely the children of our state deserve better than the bottom five percent! Second, the distribution of those funds is not equitable. Because of the way in which educational funding is accomplished in Illinois there are wide disparities in distribution among districts.

As religious leaders speaking from the teaching of the Judeo-Christian tradition, we regard wealth as a Divine blessing which bears fruit through sharing with the poor. The Book of Deuteronomy says:

If in any of the towns in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, there is a fellow Israelite in need, then do not be selfish and refuse to help him. ... There will always be some Israelites who are poor and in need, and so I command you to be generous to them.  
(Deut. 15:7-8,11)

We must acknowledge that Illinois has failed to live up to its responsibility to educate the children of this state. This failure must be accepted by all citizens. It is dishonest to say that we believe the education of children is a high priority if we are unwilling to personally pay for it. Nor can we say that only one segment of our population has this responsibility. Intergenerational equity demands that all of us take responsibility for the generations to come. Perhaps we must deny ourselves some consumption or gratification now in order to secure a future for posterity. Surely the next generation is valuable enough for this.

Certainly, there are more problems in the educational system than money alone. Wider social problems have called on the schools to perform roles they were never meant to play. More and more the school is becoming an alternative for the family in teaching basic socialization. While these and other wider problem continue to plague the schools, still the two basic financial problems remain. More overall funding is needed and a more just allocation of those funds are problems which must be addressed now.

The faith groups we represent are present in all of the 103 counties in Illinois. On this Thanksgiving Day, we address this exhortation to our own members. Look at the needs of the schools, not only in your own district, but broadly throughout the area. Look at the children. And as you look, ask yourselves whether or not they deserve for Illinois to stay in the bottom five percent of educational funding. We believe that a strong, public education system is a benefit to us all. We invite our members to seriously take the exhortation in Deuteronomy to heart and to encourage it on through the legislative process. We also invite all people of good will, who care about the future of Illinois' children to join us in whatever way possible.

For the Council,

The Rev. Sherman G. Hicks  
President