



## An Interfaith Effort to Fight Global Poverty

**A Moral Issue:** Religious leaders including San Francisco Archbishop George Niederauer (inset, left) called for the United States to increase aid to poor countries at a Feb. 20 forum at USF.

**B**ay Area faith communities, including the San Francisco Archdiocese, came together Feb. 20 on the USF campus to raise a collective call for the United States to step up its aid to the world's poor.

Dozens of religious leaders from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Wiccan faiths, as well as area nonprofits, attended an interfaith forum sponsored by USF's Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought aimed at ending global poverty. In attendance were USF President Stephen A. Privett, S.J., the Most Rev. George Niederauer, archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco, and Bishop Marc Andrus of the Episcopal Diocese of California, among many others.

By drawing on prominent faith leaders, the event's organizers set their sights on rallying support from disparate religious communities to educate the public, draw media attention, and pressure lawmakers into standing behind the 2002 Monterey Consensus signed by President George W. Bush. The Consensus urges all developed nations to allocate the equivalent of .7 percent of their GDP annually to fight extreme poverty around the world by 2015. Currently the United States spends about \$35.8 billion annually, or 0.2 percent of GDP, below what other developed nations spend per capita.

By comparison, the United States spends \$1.5 billion daily on the military, more than 30 times what is spent to help poor countries each month, according to a video shown at the forum that featured economist Jeffrey Sachs.

The World Bank estimates that 1.1 billion people live in extreme poverty worldwide, surviving on less

than a \$1 per day. Another 1.5 billion live on less than \$2 per day.

"The current dominant moral issue of our time is poverty," Fr. Privett said. "Wealth is being concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. The gap between the wealthy and the poor is widening."

Fr. Privett, Archbishop Niederauer, and Bishop Andrus plan to travel to Washington D.C. later this year to urge Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., to support Senate Bill 2433, which would require the president to develop and implement a strategy to achieve the U.N. Millennium Development Goal of reducing by one-half the proportion of people worldwide living on less than \$1 per day. Leahy is chairman of the Subcommittee for State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs.

With the backing of Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., (who has written to Leahy for his support), Fr. Privett, Archbishop Niederauer, and Bishop Andrus, want the United States to increase the amount of aid it sets aside to fight poverty by 5 percent annually through 2015, still far short of the overall 0.7 percent called for under the Monterey Consensus.

The Feb. 20 interfaith forum expands on the national Point 7 Now conference put on for the past two years by USF's Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought and the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Point 7 Now was established as an effort to mobilize American Catholics to work toward ending global poverty by targeting the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, and the need for fair trade, debt forgiveness, and increased aid to poor countries. [USF](#)