The promotion of human dignity is a central tenet of Catholic Social Teaching, so it was fitting that Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican's Secretary of State, spoke to the Millennium Summit to promote the adoption of the Millennium Goals:

It is unacceptable that a large part of the world's population still lives in conditions of misery which are an offense against human dignity. Catholic Bishops' development organizations in Europe and North America have agreed to promote information and encourage support of the Millennium Goals (see their common logo, right). We ask you to join in faith and hope, to learn more about the needs of the global community, to share what you learn, to encourage individuals and groups to speak to their elected representatives about the Millennium Goals, and to weave the Millennium Goals Prayer into your liturgies, meetings, classes, communications, etc.
CURRENT PROGRESS Towards the MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

At the current pace, 55 countries, with 23 percent of the world’s people, are on track to achieve as many as three-quarters of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). 33 countries, with 26 percent of the world’s people, are failing on more than half of the targets. See the UN website, www.un.org/millenniumgoals/, for detailed annual reports on the progress of 190 countries towards the Millennium Goals.

Signs of Hope:
Education:
51 countries, with 40 percent of the world’s people, are on track to achieving universal primary education by 2015 or have done so already.

Hunger:
Some 57 countries, with half of the world’s people, have halved the share of people living in hunger or are on track to do so by 2015.

Challenges:
Education:
24 countries are slipping back or far behind on the educational target, and 93 countries, with nearly 40 percent of the world’s people do not have data to make a judgment. Globally, one in every six children of primary school age is not in school.

Hunger:
During the 1990s, the number of people living in hunger fell by just six million a year. If it continues at such a snail’s pace, it will take more than 130 years to rid the world of hunger.

Poverty Reduction
Lack of data makes it hard to assess progress in halving poverty, but slow growth in many areas suggest that many will struggle to achieve the goal. The picture is especially bleak in sub-Saharan Africa; as many as 23 of the region’s 45 countries are failing on more than half the targets, and another 11, such as Angola and Somalia, do not have data and are probably even further behind.

To reach the Millennium Goals, increasing aid from the wealthy nations, who are currently giving around 0.25 percent of their Gross National Product (GNP) in aid, is vital. Rough estimates suggest that double this amount will be needed to meet the goals, well below the agreed on 0.7 percent of GNP. (The U.S. donates only 0.1% of its GNP.) Developing countries need to be able to implement trade and financial policies designed in participatory and accountable processes. These countries also need more just trade rules: market access and fair prices for their crops and goods are essential.

Progress must be made on a much broader front. Otherwise the ringing words of the Millennium [Goals] Declaration will only serve as grim reminders of the human needs neglected and promises unmet.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

Prayer for the Millennium Goals

In a world where so many go hungry,
Let us make the fruits of Creation available for all.
In a world where one billion of our brothers and sisters do not have safe drinking water,
Let us help the waters run clear.
In a world where so many children die so young,
Let us help the children die so young.
In a world where so many mothers die in childbirth,
And so many families are ravaged by disease,
Let us bring health and healing.
In a world where women carry such heavy burdens,
Let us recognize and restore the rights of all.
Let us join together, with a new sense of global community,
A new awareness of our need for one another.
And for this fragile planet,
To meet the clear challenges of the Millennium Goals,
To bring hope as substantial as bread,
To make human dignity as visible as wheat in the fields.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

◆ How do the UN Millennium Goals promote the values of Catholic Social Teaching?
◆ What is the value of setting definite goals under a clear schedule (i.e., give one billion people access to clean drinking water by 2015) rather than general open-ended goals (i.e."to reduce poverty")?
◆ Why would helping women in developing countries contribute to their families’ and communities’ quality of life?
◆ Why is primary education, especially for girls, seen as important as food and drinking water by the majority of world governments?
◆ Why has it been so difficult to ensure equitable and environmentally safe growth and development?
◆ Why are joint global efforts difficult and, at the same time, necessary, in this time in the history of the planet?
◆ How can we encourage more attention to the Millennium Goals and the political and economic actions needed to attain them?