

THE CHURCH TEACHES...

BASIC THEMES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

INTRODUCTION

Our faith calls us to work for justice; to serve those in need; to pursue peace; and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all our sisters and brothers. This is the call of Jesus, the challenge of the prophets, and the living tradition of our Church.

Across this country and around the world, the Church's social ministry is a story of growing vitality and strength, of remarkable compassion, courage, and creativity. It is the everyday reality of providing homeless and hungry people with decent shelter and needed help, of giving pregnant women and their unborn children life giving alternatives, of offering refugees welcome, and so much more. It is believers advocating in the public arena for human life wherever it is the rated, for the rights of workers and for economic justice, for peace and freedom around the world, and for "liberty and justice for all" here at home. Helping poor and communities here and in lands far away is empowering. It is the everyday commitment of countless people, parishes and programs, local networks and national structures – a tradition of caring service, affective advocacy and creative action

Catholic social teaching is a call to conscience, compassion, and creative action in a world confronting the terrible tragedy of widespread abortion the haunting reality of hunger and homelessness, and the evil of continuing prejudice and poverty. Our teaching lifts up the moral and human dimensions of major public issues, examining "the signs of the times" through the values of the Scriptures, the teaching of the Church, and the experience of the People of God.

A. THE LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

In the Catholic social vision, the human person is central, the clearest reflection of God among us. Each person possesses a basic dignity which comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment, not from race or gender, age or economic status. The test of every institution or policy is whether it enhances or threatens human life and human dignity. We believe people are more important than things.

B. THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Rights and Responsibilities refer to the right to freedom of conscience and religious liberty, to raise a family, to immigrate, to live free from unfair discrimination and to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family. People have fundamental right to life and to those things which make life truly human – food, clothing, housing, health care, education, security, social services and employment. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families and the larger society, to respect the rights of others and to work for the common good.

C. THE CALL TO FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND PARTICIPATION

The human person is not only sacred, but social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. No community is more central than the family; it needs to be supported, not undermined. It is the basic cell of society and the state has an obligation to support the family. The family is where we learn and act on our values. What happens in the family is at the basis of a truly human social life. We also have the rights and responsibility to participate in and contribute to the broader communities in society. A central test of political, legal and economic institutions is what they do to people, what they do for people and how people participate in them.

D. THE DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

Work is more than a way to make a living; it is an expression of our dignity and a form of continuing participation in God's creation. People have the right to decent and productive work, to decent and fair wages, to private property and economic initiative. Workers have the strong support of the Church in forming and joining union and workers associations of their choosing in the exercise of their dignity and rights. In Catholic teaching, the economy exists to serve people, not the other way around.

E. THE OPTION FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

Poor and vulnerable people have a special place in Catholic social teaching. A basic moral test of a society is how its most vulnerable members are faring. This is not a new insight; it is the lesson of the parable of the last Judgment (Matthew 25). Our tradition calls us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of all our sisters and brothers, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response. We must seek creative ways to expand the emphasis of our nations' founders on individual rights and freedom by extending democratic ideals to economic life and thus insure that the basic requirements of life with dignity are accessible to all.

F. SOLIDARITY

We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. In a linked and limited world, our responsibilities to one another cross national and other boundaries. Violent conflict and the denial of dignity and the rights of people anywhere on the globe diminish each of us. This emerging theme of solidarity, so strongly articulated by Pope John Paul II, expresses the core of the Church's concern for world peace, global development, environment and international human rights. It is the contemporary expression of the traditional Catholic image of the "Mystical Body." "Loving our neighbor" has global dimensions in an interdependent world.

G. THE CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

The universe is created by God, and loaned to humans for their prudent use. People are to be good stewards of creation, mindful of future generations.