

*Catholic Social Teaching
Module*



CENTER FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION & FORMATION

SAINT THOMAS SEMINARY - ARCHDIOCESE of HARTFORD

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*Leadership Formation for
Teachers, Catechists, and Parish Ministers*

Guide to the Catholic Social Teaching Learning Module

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Catholic Social Teaching Quiz

Test your knowledge of the Catholic Church's social teachings by completing the following ten multiple choice questions. Circle one or more of the responses for each statement that you believe reflect Catholic teaching. If you believe all of the responses are true, select "all of the above."

1. The Church's teaching on human life and dignity leads the Church to...

- a. Oppose abortion as a preeminent threat to human life
- b. Oppose assisted suicide
- c. Oppose the use of the death penalty
- d. Work to end world hunger
- e. All of the above

2. Human dignity is best promoted when...

- a. Each person looks out for his or her own interests
- b. We keep the government out of people's lives
- c. The poor are forced to improve their own lives
- d. People work for the common good
- e. All of the above

3. The central social institution in a society is...

- a. The individual
- b. Marriage and the family
- c. The government
- d. The Church
- e. All of the above

4. People have a right to...

- a. Life
- b. Food and clothing
- c. Housing and health care
- d. Employment
- e. All of the above

5. A basic moral test of society is...

- a. How well the middle class is doing
- b. Whether all people have a chance to get rich
- c. How well the poor and the vulnerable are faring
- d. The survival of the fittest
- e. All of the above

6. Workers have a right to...

- a. Productive work
- b. Decent and fair wages
- c. Choose to organize and join unions
- d. Own private property
- e. All of the above

7. A just wage is...

- a. The rate of pay that market conditions set
- b. What an employer can afford to pay and stay in business
- c. Enough for a family to meet its basic living expenses
- d. What an employee agrees to accept
- e. All of the above

8. Solidarity requires that...

- a. We care about others no matter where they live or how different they appear
- b. Charity begins at home
- c. All persons need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps
- d. All people need to have equal incomes
- e. All of the above

9. The Catholic view of the environment is that...

- a. The natural world needs to be dominated
- b. We must choose between jobs and the environment
- c. Mistreating the natural world hurts humanity, too
- d. Poor communities have few environmental problems
- e. All of the above

10. The Church's social teaching calls Catholics to...

- a. Help the poor and vulnerable by contacting legislators
- b. Help the poor and vulnerable by getting involved in a charity
- c. Support groups that empower low-income people
- d. Make a difference in the world by using our gifts
- e. All of the above

(The quiz is from *In the Footsteps of Jesus: Resource Manual on Catholic Social Teaching*. USCCB, 2004.)

Answers

Check your responses using the answer guide below. All answers are based on official Catholic social teaching.

1. E The Church consistently defends human life.
- 2 D The common good is the sum total of social conditions that enable people as individuals and groups to reach their human potential.
- 3 B Marriage is the foundation and the family is the basic cell of society. Other institutions are supposed to support, not undermine, families. Government is charged with promoting the common good to create conditions in which human dignity and families can flourish.
- 4 E The foundational right to life includes a right to all those things necessary to sustain a dignified life. With these rights come responsibilities to one's family, one's community, and the common good.
- 5 C The poor and vulnerable have a special claim on society because their needs are greatest and their human rights are most at risk
- 6 E Work is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. Workers have fundamental rights.
- 7 C The church supports a family wage.
- 8 A Solidarity expresses the interdependence of the human family, God's family, it requires just policies, locally, nationally, and internationally.
- 9 C The fate of humanity is bound up with the fate of God's creation.
- 10 E All Catholics are called to use their gifts to meet the needs of the poor and the vulnerable in charity and to transform unjust social structures in justice.

Each of questions on the quiz correlate with the seven theme of Catholic social teachings.

- Question 1 – Life and dignity of the human person
- Question 2 – Call to family, community, participation
- Question 3 – Call to family, community, participation
- Question 4 – Rights and responsibilities
- Question 5 – Option for and with the poor and vulnerable
- Question 6 – Dignity of work and rights of workers

Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

(U.S. Catholic Bishops)

The Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. The depth and richness of this tradition can be understood best through a direct reading of these documents. In these brief reflections, we highlight several of the key themes that are at the heart of our Catholic social tradition.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. The value of human life is being threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. Catholic teaching also calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding increasingly effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society in economics and politics, in law and policy directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Rights and Responsibilities

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities--to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected--the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

Solidarity

We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that "if you want peace, work for justice."¹ The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

Care for God's Creation

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

(Source: <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching>)

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Now that we understand what Catholic social teaching (CST) is and where it came from, we can explain why the Church considers it so important. Many wonder: “Why should we look to the Catholic Church as we deliberate present-day ethical challenges? What does it have to offer?” The answer is that CST offers a series of moral principles developed directly from Scripture and the teachings of the early Church fathers that provide a foundation for making moral decisions in the public realm. Stated differently, the principles of CST offer a moral guide for how to live the Christian faith in the world. It is important to clarify, however, that these principles are not laws or commandments that dictate exactly what one should or should not do in a particular situation. Instead the principles offer a framework for moral decision-making regarding how to live as individuals within society, and how to formulate public policy. Let us explore these principles in more detail.¹

Human Dignity

The first principle of CST is human dignity. The Catholic Church teaches that because all people are created in the image and likeness of God, and because God became human through the person of Jesus Christ, each individual maintains an inherent dignity and an infinite worth. Human dignity upholds the sacredness of human life at all stages, from conception until the moment of natural death. Although the media tends to focus on those Church teachings that involve the beginning of life (abortion) and end of life (euthanasia), we must remember that the Church upholds the principle that human life is sacred at all moments. . . . Practically speaking, human dignity means that all people must be afforded basic human rights and must always be treated with respect. It means that the human person must be viewed as an integrated whole—body, mind, and soul—and each individual must be afforded the opportunity to develop these aspects to his or her fullest ability. Finally, human dignity means that others must not be viewed as objects. One cannot exploit others, treat them as a means to one’s own end, or ignore the consequences of one’s actions on them. When faced with a decision that will affect others, one must always ask, “Do my decisions respect others as persons in themselves?”

Community

The next two principles are closely interrelated. The principle of community teaches that we humans are one family and that we need one another. Physically, we are interdependent as far as meeting our basic material needs, and socially we develop and fulfill ourselves only in relationship with one another. Thus the principle underscores the fact that we are not the isolated individualists that our culture tells us we are. The principle of community has a theological basis as well. Jesus taught his followers to love God with their whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love their neighbors as themselves (see Mark 12:30–31). God offers the perfect model of this teaching through the Trinity. Christians profess belief in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the “community” that exists within God models how Christians are called to live in communion with one another.²



Common Good

The principle of community leads directly to the principle of the common good. This principle teaches that because all people live, work, and fulfill themselves in community with one another, they must look not only to fulfill their individual good but to build a society that benefits all people. The Second Vatican Council defines the *common good* as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their fulfillment.”³ Stated differently, the common good is a social order where all individuals have the opportunity to meet their basic needs, interact with others, and ultimately fulfill themselves as human persons. More recently, Pope Benedict XVI echoed this teaching when he stated the following:

[The common good] is the good of “all of us,” made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it.⁴

It is important to note that the common good is not, as some have charged, another term for *socialism*. The principle simply means that society has the moral obligation to provide the conditions through which its members can develop themselves to their fullest potential. By developing themselves to their fullest potential, individuals contribute to the overall good of society. Consequently, CST maintains that the common good is not opposed to the individual good. The two are, in fact, complementary.

Participation

Building directly off the principles of community and the common good are the principles of participation and subsidiarity. The principle of participation states that at all levels of society people have the right to participate in the decision-making process concerning issues that affect them directly. An excellent example of this is the Revolutionary War slogan, “No taxation without representation,” which points to the injustice of forcing people to obey laws they had no voice in enacting. Participation is vitally important because it is the community’s primary means of self-determination. By participating in political and other processes, the community decides for itself who will govern, how it will provide necessary services, and how its resources will be allocated. Self-determination is most often exercised through voting.

Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity states that as much as possible, public policy decisions should be made on the local level. The basis of this principle is that the people who have the best knowledge of what needs to be done in a particular location are those who actually live there. For example, in order to address the issue of rising crime rates in Cincinnati, the policy makers should be people who actually reside in Cincinnati. National or international bodies should not interfere with a local situation if the local community can handle it on its own. Higher authorities can step in if the local community cannot adequately address the situation, but these higher authorities cannot change or nullify the decisions of a local community without a compelling reason.⁵



Preferential Option for the Poor

The sixth principle of CST is preferential option for the poor. The rationale for this principle is that as Jesus championed the cause of the poor (both materially and spiritually), so also his followers are called to do the same. The Second Vatican Council made this point clear in the opening line of its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965):

The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.⁶

This insight developed into a fuller recognition of the Church's vocation to stand with the poor, as well as its duty to evaluate economic, political, and social activity from the perspective of society's most vulnerable. The U.S. bishops underscored this insight twenty years later in *Economic Justice for All* by claiming that the poor "have the single most urgent economic claim on a nation." They further argued that economic policy decisions must be judged on what they do "for the poor, to the poor, and what they enable the poor to do for themselves." For the bishops, the "fundamental moral criterion" of any economic policy is that it be done "at the service of all people, especially the poor."⁷

Stewardship

The seventh CST principle is stewardship. As we saw with the early Church fathers, the Catholic Church has traditionally upheld the right of individuals to own property. Reasons for this include that private property serves as a means to meet basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) and that people are more diligent with their own property than with property commonly held. However, the Church also teaches that one must view property as a means to self-fulfillment, not as an end in itself. That is, one must not allow the pursuit of material wealth to become the primary driving force of one's life. Money is important, but only to the extent that it provides the means to live a genuinely fulfilling life. People are not to orient their lives toward "gaining more."

This understanding of private property gives rise to the principle of stewardship. Many people equate stewardship with caretaking, but it means much more than that. Caretaking means watching over something for another during the other's absence. Stewardship is much more involved because it means accepting full responsibility for that which is in your care. If a situation arises where an important decision has to be made, the steward has full responsibility to act and, in turn, will be held accountable for the decision that he or she makes. This understanding of stewardship has profound implications for how one lives. As Christianity views the earth and everything in it as gifts from God, it maintains that one has a moral obligation to use these gifts responsibly. One way to do this is by donating property for the benefit of others during times of great need. We saw an excellent example of this in the hours following the 9-11 attacks as store owners in lower Manhattan gave away food and drink to those who needed them. Seeing others in need, all Christians are called to do the same.

Stewardship also has important environmental implications. Genesis, chapter 1, asserts that God has given humanity dominion over the earth. God has made people stewards of the created order and has given them the privilege of using the world's resources to improve human life. However, along with this privilege comes responsibility. The Church teaches that people are called to recognize the created order as a good in itself and then act accordingly. This means that they must use resources prudently



by cutting waste and overconsumption and that they must not harm the environment unnecessarily through pollution or other means.

Solidarity

Finally, the principles of human dignity, community, common good, participation, subsidiarity, option for the poor, and stewardship all culminate in the principle of solidarity. What exactly is solidarity? In the aftermath of a natural disaster, we see on television images of people who are suffering, and our immediate response is one of compassion. As implied by its etymology, *com-passion* entails a response of “feeling with” the other and a spontaneous desire to let the other know that he or she is not alone. Now certainly solidarity involves compassion, but it is much more than that. Solidarity involves the conscious decision to form community with the one for whom we have compassion, the one who is suffering. Solidarity takes place when we recognize another’s need and then commit ourselves to action with the intent of either making some positive change in the suffering person’s life, or assuring that this person’s situation will improve in the long run. Solidarity also involves a sense of mutuality, a two-way relationship with both sides giving and receiving. Those who offer assistance begin to realize that their giving actually fosters their own growth. Those who receive assistance discover that their plight can serve to open people’s eyes to the suffering of so many others around the world.⁸

The crucial point to keep in mind is that solidarity means being in relationship with others. It does not mean feeling sorry for the other or acting charitably out of a sense of pity. Solidarity entails the recognition that we are one human family. It means that we are responsible for the well-being of others and we cannot turn our backs on one another or become isolationists in the face of global difficulties. The late Pope Saint John Paul II expressed these exact points in his own definition of solidarity:

[Solidarity] then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, *it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.*⁹

Endnotes

1. These principles, as well as a comprehensive explanation of the Church’s social teachings, can be found in the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004).
2. See Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), numbers 53–54.
3. Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David O’Brien and Thomas Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), number 26.1.
4. Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth*, number 7.
5. Pope Benedict XVI discusses the importance of subsidiarity with the global economic order in *Charity in Truth*, number 57.
6. Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, number 1.
7. USCCB, *Economic Justice for All: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997), numbers 24, 86, 88.
8. Marie Giblin, “What Catholics Should Know about Solidarity,” *Catholic Update* (June 2007): 1–4.
9. Saint John Paul II, *On Social Concern*, in *Catholic Social Thought*, number 38.

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Applying the Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

Sr. Joan Hart, SSND, has been involved in justice and peace education for the past 30 years and served on the NCCB/USCC Task Force on Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Education from 1996–98.

By Sr. Joan Hart SSND

Introduction: “From Principles to Action”

The aim of Catholic social teaching is to shine the light of the Gospel on contemporary events and issues so that disciples of Jesus can look through a new, unclouded lens at the world around them and be inspired to action in keeping with this clearer vision.

Action will not always be easy; many of these issues are controversial. It will involve an honest personal assessment of our own attitudes and values if we are to locate any blockages that keep us from embracing the social teachings of our church and acting upon them.

Some will discover that, while it is relatively easy to give intellectual assent to the theory, putting it into practice in our lives can be a long-term challenge. This is, in part, because we are inescapably marked by the culture in which we live, and the social teaching will often call us to a counter-cultural stance. But who ever said that the following of Jesus would be easy? Let us begin . . .

1

Human Dignity

Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* describes the Church's role in the world of today as being the **sign and the safeguard of the dignity of the human person**. In a sense, there was nothing new about this. Going

back in the tradition as far as

Genesis, we read that all humans are made “in the image and likeness of God.” No exceptions! Then the Prophets pointed to some of the implications of this. We are to have special concern for defending the human dignity of the most vulnerable—the widows, the orphans, the aliens. Then, in the Gospels, Jesus gave us the great commandment of love, love of God and of our neighbor. Down through the centuries, saints have given us examples of acting as defenders of human dignity, sometimes at the cost of their lives.

But Vatican II was immersed in a world that often showed scant regard for the sacredness of the human person. It

was also contending with the remnants of a spirituality of withdrawal from the world, a reluctance to become tainted by “worldliness.” For many, the new call to engagement and participation came as a surprise. For some it was welcome; for others, a sign of contradiction.

Human dignity is the linchpin of the social teaching; all the other themes flow from it. It is crucial that we examine how deeply that teaching is operative in our lives. In a reflective setting, ask yourself the following questions:

- How strong is your belief in your own human dignity?
- When you interact with family members and friends, can you honor and reverence the human dignity of each one?
- On the national and international levels, can you continue to believe in the human dignity of each person? In all nations?

Remember that this doesn't say you must like everyone, just be open to treat them with the regard their human dignity merits. If you have found certain obstacles, take time to ponder and pray about overcoming them.

Whole industries such as alarm systems, security guards, temperature and humidity controls, etc. have grown up in recent times around protecting what is precious. How has the human community chosen to protect the treasure of human dignity? When 18th century revolutionaries in France called for recognition of their rights, the

Church was at first wary, fearing that, if these rights were recognized, the individual would have free scope for action and would lose a sense of moral obligation. But the cry for rights could not be silenced, and in 1948 it was at last codified in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, agreed to by member

nations at that time. It was seen that human dignity needed basic protection as set down in this document of the fledgling United Nations. Have these rights been universally respected? Certainly not. Has progress been made in guaranteeing these rights? Yes it has! In his 1963 encyclical *Peace on Earth*, Pope John XXIII embraced human rights and added the much-needed dimension of responsibilities which help to balance and complement human rights. From that point on, the Church has sought to be a visible and vocal defender of human rights, as a critical element in the defense and safeguarding of human dignity. There are those who see this as inimical to the role of the Church. They believe that the Church should stay in the sanctuary and not meddle in politics. Yet the message of *A Call to Action*, written by Pope Paul VI in 1971 on the 80th anniversary of the first social encyclical (1891) is clear: individuals and local Churches are urged to apply Gospel principles to contemporary situations and take appropriate political action. Make a list of human rights and compare your list to the United Nations Universal Declaration. Then list responsibilities that go with these rights and compare your list to those listed in the encyclical *Peace on Earth*, paragraphs 28–35.

- What violations of human rights can you find in today's newspaper?
- Have you ever experienced a denial of your human rights? If so, how did it affect your sense of human dignity?
- In your private and public prayer, will you remember to pray for the rights and dignity of all people?

2 Human Rights

"In our vision of the common good, a crucial moral test is how the weakest are faring. We give special priority to the poor and vulnerable since those with the greatest needs and burdens have first claim on our common efforts. In protecting the lives and promoting the dignity of the poor and vulnerable, we strengthen all of society." (*A Call to the Common Good for the Common Good*, 1993)

The call to a preferential option for the poor reaches back to the prophets. Isaiah spoke of God's wishing us to share bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless, clothe the naked. (58:6–7) Jeremiah urged us to "do no wrong or oppress the resident alien, the orphan or the widow" (22:3–4). Saint Ambrose continued this theme when he wrote, "You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich."

The Latin American Catholic bishops, meeting at Medellin, Colombia in 1968, helped us to focus anew on this call. During the meeting the bishops said that "the church—the people of God—will lend its support to the downtrodden of every social class so that they might come to know their rights and how to make use of them." (20). A year before, in Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *On The Development of Peoples*, the call had taken on greater urgency: "No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need when others lack necessities" (23).

The United States Catholic bishops took up the call in their document, *Economic Justice for All*, when they said, "As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental 'option for the poor'—to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess lifestyles, policies and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor" (16).

In spite of all these words, the gap between rich and poor in our world only widens.

- When you encounter a poor person, how do you reverence his/her human dignity?
- How do you help guarantee his/her human rights?
- What are you doing to change the structures that oppress the poor?

3 Option for the Poor

When a newborn infant is presented for Baptism by parents and godparents, the water, words, oil, white garment and candle flame surround the new birth of a child of God. Held high for all to see, the infant is welcomed, often with applause, into the Christian community. As the child grows, the wider community invites this developing person to participation within the Church. There can be no doubt;

the child is not alone, but called from Baptism onward to be part of a community and to participate in that community. The baptized person is not an onlooker or a spectator; he or she is linked to others in the family, parish, workplace, neighborhood, and global community. Those who think

that the baptized merely "Pay, pray, and obey" are mistaken; those who think that church attendance is just an individual "feel good" experience are mistaken. The call to follow Jesus is much more challenging and more rewarding; it is inextricably bound to the community at every step of the way. The call is to nothing less than the transformation of society. On the 80th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, the first social encyclical, Pope Paul VI wrote, "It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustices and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier sense of personal responsibility and by effective action." (48.1) In the same year, a Roman synod, writing on *Justice in the World*, said, "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation." (6)

- Does your experience of Church challenge you to engage actively in the community and to participate fully in society? If so, how? and if not, what can you do about it?
- How do you exercise your role as participant in the world of politics?
- What are you doing to liberate others from oppressive situations?

4 Community and Participation

In our lifetime, we have been awed by the moon's "bird's-eye view" of our planet, a small, blue, fragile sphere, spinning in space. National boundaries separating "your land" from "our land" are not visible. Cultural, religious, language differences do not appear. What does strike the earthbound beholder is the smallness and the unity of this earth home, surrounded as it is by measureless space. One can easily conclude from this contemplation of earth that we must learn to live together in peace, or perish in the dark vastness around us. The word "solidarity" was cleansed of its Communist overtones in 1987 by Pope John Paul II's insistent use of it in his encyclical, *On Social Concern*. True, we have always known that our baptism called us into the Mystical Body of Christ, a worldwide family deserving of our love and concern. But solidarity as described by the Pope adds an even stronger dimension. "Solidarity," he says, "is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all." (38.4) Clearly, it is not enough to be well disposed toward the six billion inhabitants of earth; our commitment to them must be "firm and persevering." Is this a "hard sell?" To be sure! "You're either with us or against us," our leaders proclaim. Jobs, health care, and education seem to take precedence over any international concerns. Yet what happens to people in remote corners of the earth is also bound to affect us, just as our indifference affects them. Is this a new burden the Church has invented? Far from it. Rather, think of it as a noble calling that will help give meaning to your life and will contribute to the legacy you will leave to the human family. For, as Pope John Paul II concludes, "The fruit of solidarity is peace." (39.8)

5 Solidarity

- Ponder in your heart: At the time of the latest natural disaster in a far-off region of the world, what did you do to help these suffering brothers and sisters?
- As you spin a globe or page through a world Atlas, are there areas where your heart closes off because you cannot love the people there? What can you do about it?
- Begin in the circle of your family and work outward into ever-growing circles. Where is your sense of solidarity strong and where is it weak?

Unemployed recent college graduates and recently laid off workers in their 50s have this in common: a deep-seated awareness of what they have to offer the

human community which seems for the moment not to want or need their contribution. Even when a financial crisis does not threaten immediately, there is a potentially debilitating feeling of exclusion. We need work, and for more than the pay check, important as that is. In the late 19th century when the industrial revolution had led to extremes of worker exploitation,

Rerum Novarum, the first of the "social encyclicals" identified and defended the rights of workers: the right to work, the right to a just wage, the right to organize into worker associations, the right to engage in collective bargaining, and the right to a safe work environment. It has taken a long time for these rights to become realities and they are constantly being threatened by new abuses toward the work force. Recently, millions of jobs in the U.S. have been lost when companies exported those jobs to poorer countries with a much smaller pay scale. When activists in the U.S. protest, the companies may simply move their operations to other countries where respect for human rights is less of an issue. Globalization may well be inevitable, but when workers are made to feel expendable the human cost of economic competition is far too high. The tragic story of a Delaware unemployed teamster who accepted a job in Iraq as a civilian truck driver in order to support his family ended in his death at the hands of insurgents. This is replicated throughout the world as workers seek to place their abilities at the service of humankind and thereby support their families. On the brighter side, there are a few stories of workers in other countries striking in global solidarity with striking workers elsewhere. Church leaders have maintained over the years that workers who give their employer an honest week's work should be paid a living wage that will enable them to support their family without having to seek a second or third job. The current minimum wage in the U.S. is far from a living wage. The struggle for worker justice continues?

- What stories of mistreatment of workers can you tell?
- What have you done recently to help workers? (e.g., not crossing a picket line, observing a product boycott, writing to legislators, etc.)
- Describe your experience of justifiable pride in a job well done. Beyond remuneration, what did it do for your sense of making a contribution to the community?

6 The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is usually credited for providing the inspiration behind the modern environmental movement. Indeed, industrialization and human disregard had for too long damaged this fragile sphere we call home. Carson's book helped show how seriously earth has been degraded by human actions (or inaction). Yet, we need to trace the story all the way back to the two accounts of creation in Genesis.

The first, in Genesis 1:26 and 28, we read, "Fill the whole earth and subdue it; have dominion over all the living things that move on the earth." It is easy to see how this call to establish dominion has been wrongly used to justify industrial exploitation and the squandering of earth's precious resources. It would seem that, in order to be "like God" the human would have to "subdue" creation.

But in the second account of creation in Genesis 2, the emphasis shifts in the words "it is not good for the human being to be alone." Humans are meant to be in relationship to one another. We are stewards of this earth-garden given to us by the Creator, but we are also called to a mutuality with other humans and with non-human creation. Here, being "like God" calls us into relationships which mirror, however faintly, the inner life of the Trinity.

The response to this new environmental awareness runs the gamut from anti-littering and conscientious recycling to more radical life style changes. It has given rise to lawsuits against polluting corporations, to concern for endangered species, even to fierce battles between those who favor the dominion camp and the relationship proponents. Yet it is increasingly clear that we cannot continue to abuse the earth, closing our eyes to the harm being done to all its inhabitants, as well as to future generations.

- What steps have you taken already to care for creation?
- What more can you resolve to do?
- Have you written to decision-makers, both legislative and corporate, to express your concerns and convictions about the environment?
- How can you spread the word to others about the critical needs for our planet?

7 Care for the Earth, God's Creation

Analyzing Social Issues using Catholic Social Teaching

One way to apply Catholic social teaching to life is to analyze a social issue facing society today using the seven principles of CST. Select a social issue that is important to you: name and describe it and then analyze it using the seven principles.

Social Issue

Name and describe the social issue you want to analyze:

Analyze the Issue

Evaluate your social issue using the seven principles to determine “what’s at stake” from the perspective of Catholic social teaching. How does Catholic social teaching bring clarity to the morality of the issue, to the injustice, to the impact on the lives of people, to the world, etc.? Use the following questions to guide your analyze.

- 1. The life and dignity of the human person.** Is human life respected at every stage? Is there a regard for the innate dignity of each person?
- 2. Participation.** Are all people able to participate fully? Are people marginalized in this situation? To what extent is there a pursuit of the common good?
- 3. Rights and responsibilities.** Are everyone’s rights respected? Does a sense of responsibility accompany the rights that people have?

4. **The option for the poor and vulnerable.** Are the needs of the poor and most vulnerable put first? How are poor and vulnerable people treated?

5. **The dignity of work and the rights of workers.** Does the work promote the dignity of workers? Does the work provide for families? Are the rights of employers being employees respected?

6. **Solidarity.** Is there a commitment to the common good? Are people cooperating to bring about goodness for everyone?

7. **Care for God's creation.** Are people protecting the health of the plant and of the creatures and people that live there? Are people considering the interdependence of creation in their choices?

Reflect

- What new insights about the social issue did you discover by applying the seven principles?
- What new insights about the seven principles did you discover through this process?
- How did this activity demonstrate the applicability of Catholic social teaching to real world issues?

The ART of Catholic Social Teaching

Act – Reflect – Transform

The goal of the ART process is to infuse the values and work of the building God's Reign of justice and peace into our lives and world.

Act

Act in charity to meet immediate and urgent needs. Act to alleviate the symptoms of social problems, such as feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, resettle refugees, protect victims of domestic violence, collect recyclables. Perform the Corporal Works of Mercy: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the imprisoned, visit the sick, bury the dead.

Charity...

- Focuses on the needs of individuals, families, and creation
- Looks at individual situations of need
- Meets immediate and urgent needs
- Addresses painful individual symptoms of social problems

Reflect

Reflect on the root causes and Catholic social teaching.

- Ask Why? Why are people hungry, homeless, uprooted, battered or discriminated against? Why is our ecosystem deteriorating?

- Listen to those who are most directly affected: the poor and the marginalized.

- Ask deeper questions that challenge the status quo.
- Explore the underlying causes poverty, violence, homelessness, racism, ecological devastation, and other issues.
- What does Scripture and Catholic social teaching say about these social issues and their causes?

Transform

Transform in justice the root social causes and social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice. Social transformation is a different kind of action. Transformation gets at root causes; it does not stop at alleviating symptoms. We can transform our communities and our world through advocating for just laws and public policies, working with organized low-income people, patronizing or boycotting businesses based on social values, living simply and ecologically, investing in socially responsible ways, creating new social structures (e.g., low-income housing).

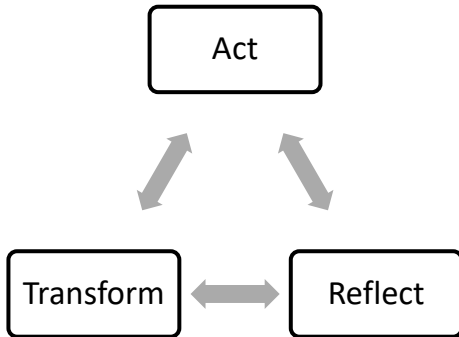
Justice...

- Focuses on the rights of individuals, families, and creation
- Analyzes social situations or social structures
- Works for long-term social change
- Addresses the underlying social causes of problems
- Relies on just laws and fair social structures

(From: *Leader's Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*. USCCB, 2000)

Using the ART of Catholic Social Teaching

Social Issue:



ACT	REFLECT	TRANSFORM
... to meet immediate and urgent needs (charity)	... on root causes and Catholic social teaching	... the root social causes (justice)

The Two Feet of Love *in Action*

“The conscience is called by this social teaching to recognize and fulfill the obligations of **justice** and **charity** in society.”

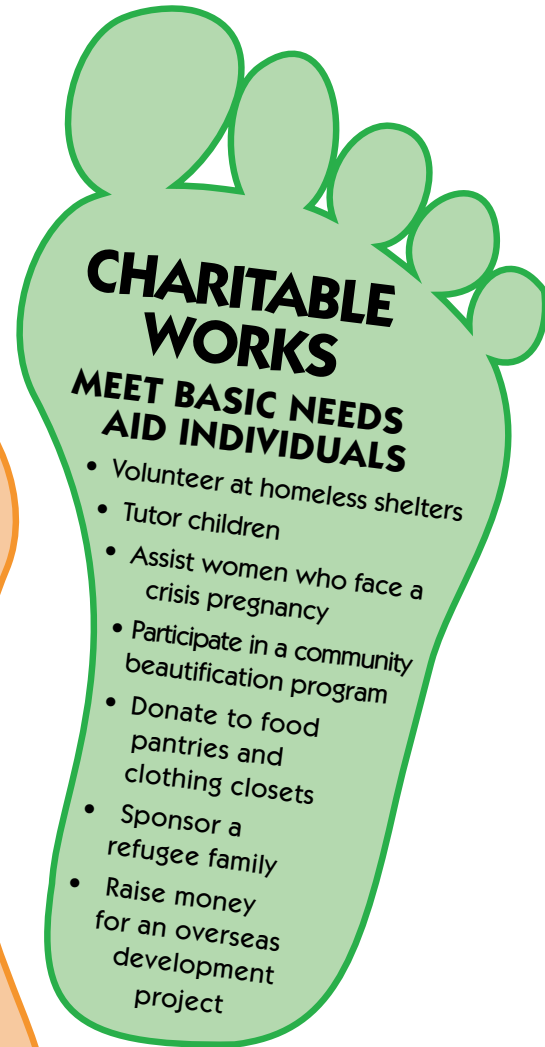
—Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 83

“**Social justice**. . . concerns the social, political, and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions.”

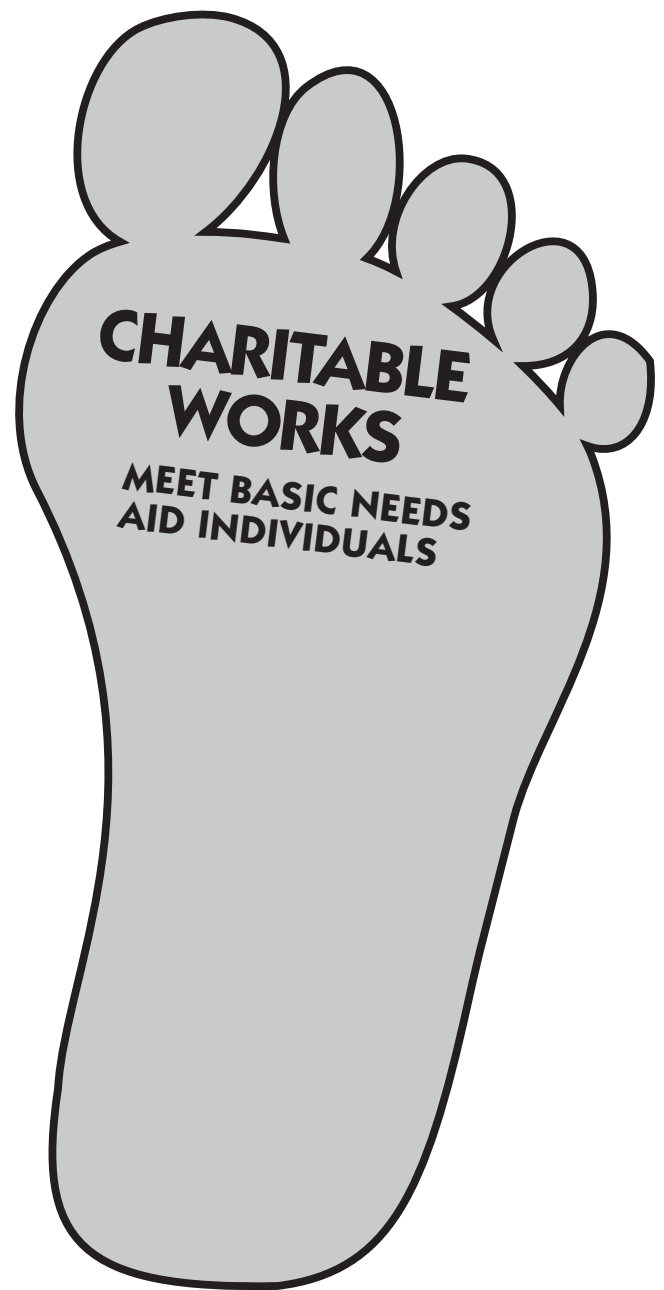
—Compendium, no. 201

“The Church cannot neglect the service of **charity** any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word. . . . Those who are able to make offerings in accordance with their means. . . to support orphans, widows, the sick, and those who for other reasons find themselves in need, such as prisoners and foreigners.”

—Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 22



The Two Feet of Love *in Action*



A Pledge to Serve, Act with Justice, and Work for Peace

Take time this week to determine how you can act more justly, serve more generously, and build peace. Reflect on the following reading from the Book of Micah and then personalize the Pledge to Act that reflects your commitment. Identify at least one way you can do each action on the pledge.

*This is what God asks of you, and only this:
That you act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)*

1. Pray regularly for greater justice and peace.
My Commitment
2. Learn more about Catholic social teaching and its call to protect human life, stand with the poor, and care for creation.
My Commitment
3. Reach across boundaries of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, and disabling conditions.
My Commitment
4. Live justly in family life, school, work, the marketplace, and the political arena.
My Commitment
5. Serve those who are poor and vulnerable, sharing more time and talent.
My Commitment
6. Give more generously to those in need at home and abroad.
My Commitment
7. Advocate public policies that protect human life, promoting human dignity, preserve God's creation, and build peace.
My Commitment
8. Encourage others to work for great charity, justice, and peace.
My Commitment

The Bible and Catholic Social Teaching

For each theme read a few of the passages cited.
Consider how the scriptural passage reflects the theme.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

- Genesis 1:26-27 (created in the image of God)
- Deuteronomy 30:19 (choose life)
- Psalm 8:5-7 (humans made little less than a god)
- John 12:32 (Christ will draw all to himself)

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

- Genesis 17:7-8 (God covenants with a people)
- Exodus 6:6-8 (God's covenant frees a people)
- Leviticus 19:9-15, 35-37; Deuteronomy 14:22-29, 15:1-18, 24:10-22 (some of covenant's social laws)
- Jeremiah 32: 38-40 (God's covenant with a people and their children)
- Mark 1:14-15 (the reign of God, a social image)
- Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Hebrews 8:7-12 (Christ's new covenant)

Human Rights and Responsibilities

- Deuteronomy 5:17, 30:19 (right to life)
- Sirach 34:22 (rights of workers)
- Psalm 146:5-8 (freedom from oppression)
- Isaiah 10:1-2 (against unjust laws)

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

- Exodus 22:20-22; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 24:17-18 (laws protecting aliens, widows, orphans)
- Exodus 22:24-26; Leviticus 25:23-28; Deuteronomy 15:1-11, 23:20, 24:6 and 10-13 (laws protecting debtors)
- Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 26:12-13 (laws protecting the poor)
- Matthew 25:31-46 (judgment of the nations)
- Luke 4:15-6-21 (Jesus' mission to the poor/outcast)
- Luke 14:12-14 (reach out to the poor/vulnerable)

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

- Genesis 2:2-3 (God labors and rests)
- Genesis 2:15 (humans cultivate the earth)
- Exodus 20:9-11, 23:12, 34:21; Leviticus 23:3; Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (Sabbath gave laborers rest)
- Leviticus 19:13, Deuteronomy 24:14-15; Sirach 34:22; Jeremiah 22:13; James 5:4 (wage justice)
- Isaiah 58:3 (do not drive laborers)
- Mark 6:3 (Jesus worked as a carpenter)
- Mark 2:27 (Sabbath is for benefit of people)
- Matthew 10:9-10; Luke 10:7; 1 Timothy 5:17-18 (laborers deserve they pay)

Solidarity

- Genesis 22:17-18; Psalm 22:28-29 (save all nations)
- Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3; (peace of all nations)
- Romans 10:12 (no national distinctions in God)
- Galatians 3:28 (all one in Christ)

Care for God's Creation

- Genesis 1:31 (goodness of creation)
- Genesis 2:15 (stewardship of earth)
- Daniel 3:74-81 (all the earth blesses God)
- Hosea 4:1-3 (humans wound the earth)
- Romans 8:18-25 (all creation awaits redemption)

(From: *Leader's Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*. USCCB, 2000)

THE SCRIPTURES AND CONCERN FOR JUSTICE

The Scriptures display a strong concern for justice in the world. Keep this list of justice-centered biblical passages for use in preparing class prayers and liturgies, as a resource for assignments, and for your own reflection and prayer.

The Old Testament

Genesis 1:1–31. God creates the world; humans are called to be stewards of the earth.

Exodus 3:1–20. God is a liberator; Moses is sent to free the People of God from oppression.

Exodus 22:21–27. Justice is required toward strangers, orphans, widows, and neighbors.

Exodus 23:6–8. Legal systems must be fair.

Leviticus 19:9–18. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Leviticus 19:32–36. Respect foreigners and the elderly; be honest in business.

Leviticus 25:8–17. God wants the jubilee year and economic restoration.

Leviticus 25:23–28. The land is the Lord's; humans are guests.

Leviticus 25:35–38. Give support to poor people.

Deuteronomy 15:1–15. God gives laws on cancellation of debts and release of slaves; let there be no poor people among you.

Deuteronomy 24:17–22. Have just relations with strangers, orphans, and widows.

Deuteronomy 26:12–13. Paying tithes shows concern for people who are poor.

Deuteronomy, chapter 30. Choosing the Lord means choosing life.

Psalms 9:7–12, 18. God is a just ruler.

Psalms 25:6–18. God hears and protects the just people.

Psalms 65:9–13. God cares for creation.

Psalms 72. God liberates oppressed people; in God's day, justice thrives.

Psalms 82. God calls for fair judgment.

Psalms 103. God works for justice for oppressed people.

Psalms 146:1–10. God upholds oppressed people, bringing justice and liberty.

Proverbs 19:17. Helping poor people is helping God.

Proverbs 21:13. Do not ignore the cry of poor people.

Proverbs 31:8–9. Speak out for those who have no voice.

Isaiah 11:1–9. God's servant brings justice.

Isaiah 32:16–20. The effect of justice will be peace.

Isaiah 42:1–7. God calls us for the victory of justice.

Isaiah 58:1–12. God desires conversion of heart, not vain worship.

Isaiah 61:1–3. The Messiah's mission of justice is prophesied.

Jeremiah 7:1–11. The Temple is not a place for doers of evil.

Jeremiah 22:13–17. To know the Lord is to act justly.

Ezekiel, chapter 34. Leaders and authorities have obligations.

Amos 5:10–15. Do what is right; establish justice.

Amos 5:21–24. Worship must express real conversion and renewal.

Amos 8:4–7. Those who have power oppress the needy people.

Micah 4:1–4. In God's Reign of peace, swords will be beaten into plowshares.

Micah 6:8. Act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly.

Zechariah 7:9–10. Show one another kindness and mercy.

The New Testament

Matthew 5:1–12. Jesus preaches the Beatitudes.

Matthew 5:13–16. You are the light of the world.

Matthew 5:38–48. You must love your enemies.

Matthew 6:1–4. Do not seek praise for your generosity.

Matthew 6:19–21. Your real treasure is in your heart.

Matthew 6:24–34. Seek first the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 11:2–6. The Messiah is recognized by acts of justice.

Matthew 25:31–46. What we do for our neighbors we do for Christ.

Mark 9:35; 10:42–45. To be first, become a servant for all.

Mark 10:17–31. The rich young man cannot give up his wealth.

Mark 12:41–44. The widow's offering is greater than that of the rich man.

Luke 1:46–55. Mary praises God, who exalts the poor and lowers the rich.

Luke 3:10–18. John the Baptist calls for sharing and honesty.

Luke 4:16–30. Jesus announces his mission of liberation.

Luke 14:7–14. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

Luke 15:1–7. Jesus responds to those who are angry because he welcomes outcasts.

Luke 16:19–31. Jesus tells the story of Lazarus and the rich man.

Luke 19:7–9. Zacchaeus meets Jesus and is converted.

John 13:1–17. Jesus washes the feet of the disciples.

Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–35. The early Christian communities shared everything; no one was in need.

Acts 6:1–6. Deacons were appointed to serve.

Acts 10:34–35. God shows no partiality.

Romans 12:3–21. All are one in Christ; our behavior should demonstrate this oneness.

Romans 14:17–19. The Kingdom of God consists of justice, peace, and joy.

1 Corinthians 12:12–27. In the Christian community, if one suffers, all suffer; if one benefits, all benefit.

1 Corinthians, chapter 13. Love is the lifestyle of a Christian.

2 Corinthians 8:1–15. Share with needy people; Christ became poor so we could be enriched.

2 Corinthians 9:1–15. Give with gladness.

Galatians 3:28. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 6:2. Bear one another's burdens.

Galatians 6:9–10. Never grow weary of doing good.

Philippians 2:1–11. Be a servant, like Christ.

Colossians 3:9–17. Clothe yourself in a new self, made in the image of God.

1 Timothy 6:17–19. Rich people should not be proud.

Hebrews 13:1–3. Welcome strangers and remember those who are in prison.

James 1:22–27. Be doers of the word, not just hearers.

James 2:14–17. Faith must be accompanied by action.

James 5:1–6. Unjust riches cause misery.

1 Peter 4:7–11. Let your gifts serve others.

1 John 4:7–21. We cannot love God without loving our neighbor.

Revelation 21:1–6. In the new heaven and the new earth, death no longer has dominion.