

Handout 5A Catholic Social Teaching

Catholics have a unique way of seeing the world. It is a vision grounded in the teachings of Jesus, who began his ministry by telling us to love our neighbors as ourselves. That call means not only meeting the immediate needs in our communities but also working to create a more equitable society.

As Catholics, social justice means that all human beings have the right to enjoy the blessings of this world. That also means that each of us has the responsibility to create a society where those blessings are accessible to all.

For more than 100 years, our Church has provided principles for how such a society must be constructed. These principles can be summarized in seven basic teachings that give us a blueprint for structuring our lives and communities to respond to Christ's call to love one another.

1. **Life and Dignity of the Human Person.** All human life is sacred, made in the image and likeness of God. Society and its structures should aim to lift up the human person.
2. **Call to Family, Community, and Participation.** Humans are social and develop in community, starting with family. We should construct our society so all can flourish and participate in the decisions that affect them.
3. **Rights and Responsibilities.** Every human person has basic rights inherent in his or her very nature. We have a responsibility to organize our society so the rights of all can be fulfilled.
4. **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable.** Those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern.
5. **The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers.** Through work, humans participate in God's ongoing process of creation. Work has dignity and the basic rights of workers must be respected.
6. **Solidarity.** We are one human family and are called to work for the common good—so that each individual can flourish and develop materially, spiritually, and in all ways.
7. **Care for God's Creation.** The earth has been entrusted to us, its stewards. All of creation is interdependent and its gifts are for all to share.

Identifying Community Needs

Part I: Catholic Social Teaching

Our Catholic Social Teaching guides people of faith in responding to Christ's call to Christian service and social action, which are requirements of our faith. Answer each of the following questions in your small groups.

- *Life and Dignity of the Human Person*
Who is "Lazarus" in our community? Who are the poor?
- *Call to Family, Community and Participation*
Does everyone have an equal voice in society? What voices have the most difficult time being heard? How do families experience pressure because of economic circumstances?
- *Rights and Responsibilities*
Are there people in our community who are homeless? Without food? Without health care? Without adequate education? Whose responsibility is it to help provide for these needs?
- *Option for the Poor and Vulnerable*
How does our community treat children? The elderly? The mentally, physically, or psychologically challenged? Recent immigrants?
- *Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers*
Are there people in our community who are unemployed? Are there people who aren't earning enough to meet their basic needs even though they have a job?
- *Solidarity*
Does our community help people in other neighborhoods? Surrounding cities? Other parts of the state? Other parts of the country? Other parts of the world?
- *Care for God's Creation*
What actions does our community take to protect and preserve the environment? What more could we be doing?

Part II: Reflection Questions

- Who is Lazarus in your community?
- What is your community's biggest need? Why?