



Catholic Vision for U.S. Humanitarian and Development Assistance

The Catholic Church's approach to humanitarian and development aid is deeply rooted in its global mission and core values, as well as its vast experience through organizations like Catholic Relief Services (CRS). CRS, the international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the U.S., assists hundreds of millions of people annually across 121 countries.

The Catholic Church has long recognized that helping those in need, regardless of nationality or faith, is a moral imperative. Humanitarian and development aid are an integral part of the Church's commitment to human life and dignity. As the Church pursues a more peaceful world through dialogue and diplomacy, lifesaving and life-affirming assistance act as necessary complements that allow for sustainable solutions to take root.

A comprehensive pro-life, Catholic vision for U.S. humanitarian and development assistance recognizes that the U.S. government, alongside the Church, shares a responsibility to advance the common good. As taught in *Deus caritas est* (2005), the pursuit of a just social order “must be a fundamental norm of the State.” *Gaudium et spes* (1965) elaborates on the global nature of this responsibility, noting that wealthier nations have a duty to assist poorer countries. Given that government institutions and the Church are jointly called to create a more just world, a Catholic approach to U.S. international assistance invokes both parties as essential partners in the promotion of human life.

The Church's social teaching “rests on the threefold cornerstone of human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity” (*Ecclesia in America*, 1999). These principles—common to many religious traditions—should guide all U.S. international assistance efforts. Best practices in international assistance demonstrate solidarity and subsidiarity by prioritizing cultural understanding and collaboration with local organizations.

We recommend the following to put these principles into practice and maximize the efficacy of U.S. international assistance:

Promote human dignity with a holistic approach to aid, development, and peace.

Catholic teaching affirms the **inherent dignity** of every person and calls on us to ensure that all can reach their full potential. Humanitarian and development assistance are collective responsibilities that must be addressed holistically to achieve a more peaceful world.

- Reinforce emergency response capacities while also investing in initiatives that assist communities to secure long-term improvements in food security, water security, literacy, and care for creation.
- Build on the legacy of successful global health programs like PEPFAR and fund strong, consistent, life-affirming responses to global health challenges to strengthen health systems.

- Address the international debt crisis - which seriously constrains development in many countries - in part by providing robust U.S. contributions to the World Bank International Development Association.

Center solidarity by rooting U.S. assistance in authentic partnerships.

Catholic teaching reminds developed nations of the responsibility to engage in **authentic partnerships** that empower our neighbors in developing countries. Strengthening these partnerships is essential for achieving large-scale, sustainable change that effectively addresses global needs.

- Integrate U.S. development and humanitarian initiatives into local systems, promoting genuine collaboration across civil society with faith-based partners, governments, and public and private sectors. Whenever possible, avoid creating parallel systems in countries.
- Support host countries' efforts to strengthen their private sectors and government institutions by funding mechanisms such as the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation and the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

Advance subsidiarity by empowering local leaders for sustainable change.

The principle of subsidiarity ensures a balanced relationship between government and civil society, requiring governments to support—not replace—families, communities, and local organizations in solving challenges. It also holds that those closest to a challenge best understand how to address it. International assistance should reinforce subsidiarity, transparency, and accountability through the **localization of aid**.

- Ensure that local faith-based organizations, civil society groups, businesses, and government institutions play a central role in response efforts.
- Strengthen local capacity to address challenges by investing in efforts that equip faith partners and community-based organizations with the tools to drive their own development. Strengthening local partners fosters mutual respect, reduces dependency, and ensures that assistance promotes economic justice and human dignity.

Conclusion

Humanitarian and development assistance is a tool that promotes peace, justice, security, human dignity, and economic prosperity. The United States has a moral and humanitarian responsibility to reform its aid policies to more effectively support those in need. We offer our government leaders a Catholic vision for U.S. humanitarian and development assistance in the spirit of longstanding dialogue on matters of justice.

As Pope Leo XIV has reminded us, the Church

cannot fail to make its voice heard in the face of the many imbalances and injustices... Every effort should be made to overcome the global inequalities – between opulence and destitution – that are carving deep divides between continents, countries and even within individual societies. (16 May 2025)



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