

# *Catholic Social Teaching: Key Themes*

## ***Life and Dignity of the Human Person***

In a world warped by materialism and declining respect for human life, 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. Our belief in the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and assisted suicide. The value of human life is being threatened by increasing use of the death penalty. The dignity of life is undermined when the creation of human life is reduced to the manufacture of a product, as in human cloning or proposals for genetic engineering to create "perfect" human beings.

## ***Call to Family, Community, and Participation***

In a global culture driven by excessive individualism, our tradition proclaims that 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. The family is the central social institution that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. While our society often exalts individualism, the Catholic tradition teaches that human beings grow and achieve fulfillment in community. 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. Our Church teaches that the role of government and other institutions is to protect human life and human dignity and promote the common good.

## ***Rights and Responsibilities***

In a world where some speak mostly of "rights" and others mostly of "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***

In a world characterized by growing prosperity for some and pervasive poverty for others, Catholic teaching proclaims that 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***

In a marketplace where too often the quarterly bottom line takes precedence over the rights of workers, we believe that 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 organize and join unions, to private property, and to economic initiative. Respecting these rights promotes an economy that protects human life, defends human rights, and advances the well-being of all.

### ***Solidarity***

Our culture is tempted to turn inward, becoming indifferent and sometimes isolationist in the face of international responsibilities. Catholic social teaching proclaims that we are our brothers and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that "loving our neighbor" has global dimensions in an interdependent world. This virtue is described by John Paul II as "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" ( *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38).

### ***Care for God's Creation***

On a planet conflicted over environmental issues, the Catholic tradition insists that 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.

USCCB: resources on Catholic Social Teaching for *Catholic Social Workers' National Association (CSWNA)*

## **FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENTS**

### **Papal and Vatican Documents**

[Rerum Novarum](#). . . (On the Condition of Labor)—Pope Leo XIII, 1891

[Quadragesimo Anno](#). . . (After Forty Years)—Pope Pius XI, 1931

[Mater et Magistra](#). . . (Christianity and Social Progress)—Pope John XXIII, 1961

[Pacem in Terris](#). . . (Peace on Earth)—Pope John XXIII, 1963

[Gaudium et Spes](#). . . (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)—Second Vatican Council, 1965

[Dignitatis Humanae](#). . . (Declaration on Religious Freedom)—Second Vatican Council, 1965

[Populorum Progressio](#). . . (On the Development of Peoples)—Pope Paul VI, 1967

**Octogesima Adveniens.** . . . (A Call to Action)—Pope Paul VI, 1971

**Evangelii Nuntiandi.** . . . (Evangelization in the Modern World)—Paul VI, 1975

**Laborem Exercens.** . . . (On Human Work)—Pope John Paul II, 1981

**Sollicitudo Rei Socialis.** . . . (On Social Concern)—Pope John Paul II, 1987

**The Church and Racism: Towards a more fraternal society.** . . . —Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 1989

**Centesimus Annus.** . . . (The Hundredth Year)—Pope John Paul II, 1991

**Veritatis splendor.** . . . (The Splendor of Truth)—Pope John Paul II, 1993

**Evangelium Vitae.** . . . (The Gospel of Life)—Pope John Paul II, 1995

**Dignitas Personae.** . . . (The Dignity of a Person)—Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1998

**Ecclesia in America.** . . . (The Church in America)—Pope John Paul II, 1999

**Fides et Ratio.** . . . (Faith and Reason)—Pope John Paul II, 1998

**Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life.** . . . - Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2002

**Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.** . . . —Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004

**Deus Caritas Est.** . . . (God Is Love)—Pope Benedict XVI, 2005

**Sacramentum Caritatis.** . . . (The Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission)—Pope Benedict XVI, 2007 (especially paragraphs 47, 49, 82-84, and 88-92)

**Caritas in Veritate.** . . . (Charity in Truth)—Pope Benedict XVI, 2009

**Evangelii Gaudium.** . . . (The Joy of the Gospel)—Pope Francis, 2013

**Laudato Si'.** . . . (On Care for Our Common Home)—Pope Francis, 2015