

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

Work, at its best, is a meaningful expression of a person's gifts and talents. Scripture tells us work has been an important human endeavor since the beginning of creation (see Gn 2:15). We should build society so that every person has the opportunity to discern his or her gifts and to apply them in meaningful work.

While work is a way in which people are able to use their gifts to improve the world, it is also how most people support their families. Every person has the right to humane treatment in the workplace, including just pay, reasonable working hours, and time to care for sick family members.

Take action: Supporting better working conditions is a key step in making sure everyone has adequate food and safe shelter.



Solidarity

Our faith teaches us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (see Mt 5:13–16). How we live has a direct effect on how others experience Christ. We are called to be examples of Christ to the world, modeling his love, mercy, and compassion to all.

Solidarity means taking care of one another — family, friends, and strangers alike (although as mentioned, everything begins with the family). It may be difficult to see how our actions — right where we are — can affect the world. But this approach can lead us to accompanying our brothers and sisters on their life journeys to help create communities in which all are respected, protected, and treated with fairness.

This requires us to do more than works of charity when addressing the needs of those who are poor and vulnerable. We must also address any policies that create an imbalance of equality. In this way, we



help build the kingdom of God, a place of peace and justice, here on earth, and provide witness of Christ's love to others.

Take action: Talk with family and friends about what action best shows Christ's love to those most in need.



Care for Creation

All creation is beautiful in the eyes of God, who made it our responsibility to take care of creation (see Gn 1:27–31). Earth

needs care, and there are things we can do to help care for creation. Being aware of our own habits concerning use of energy and then working to be more efficient is a great way to preserve creation for everybody. All can do something, and even small efforts build up society in cooperation with God to form a more just world.



Take action: Pick up trash in your neighborhood, plant flowers in your yard, or hang a birdfeeder in a tree. All can beautify and preserve creation.



Conclusion

Each of the seven themes of Catholic social teaching have grown out of God's teaching in the Bible and have been developed by the Church over time to help us better live Christ's commands. Meditating on these themes and acting on them, even in small ways, can help society in a much broader way.

With each way you choose to live Catholic social teaching, pray for the people you encounter, that they may know and experience Christ by these examples of loving others.

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What Is  
CATHOLIC  
Social  
Teaching?

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**W**hen asked to name the most important commandment in all of the law, Jesus responded: love God, and love others (see Mt 22:36–40). In these simple commands lies the heart of our baptismal call.

Catholic social teaching is one of the tools given by the Church to guide us in living this call. Founded in Scripture and developed further through a series of papal documents, the social teaching of the Church provides direction for how we are to live with our neighbor.

By starting with the most basic unit of humanity — the family — and embracing Jesus’ teaching, we can live out Catholic social teaching in the way that he taught us. This then can lead to working with the community, which is a collection of families, then society at large, which is a collection of those communities.

The Church’s social teaching can be divided into seven themes: life and dignity of the human person; call to family, community, and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable; the dignity of work and the rights of workers; solidarity; and care for God’s creation.

Living according to the principles of Catholic social teaching allows us to respond to Jesus’ command to love others, to recognize God’s presence in each person (see Eph 4:6), and to grow in relationship with them and with Christ.

### Life and Dignity of the Human Person

All of Catholic social teaching is based on this central theme. Scripture tells us that we are made in God’s own image (see Gn 1:27). All human life is an outpouring of God’s love, and a part of God’s divine plan. Therefore, all people have the right to life, from conception to natural death. A life willed and created by God is sacred and entitled to a full existence.

As a child of God, each person also has intrinsic dignity. As a reflection of God’s own being, all people have a right to realize this dignity in their daily existence, including through access to clean water and food, health care, education, and a safe living environment.

**Take action:** In your own parish community, reaching out, even just having a conversation with those who are lonely, displays respect for the dignity of each person.



### Call to Family, Community, and Participation

Because of the primacy of the family in God’s eyes, people should be encouraged to build families, and society should promote family living. Stable societies arise from stable families, in which people can learn about healthy community living. People have the right to meaningful participation in society through voting, participation in cultural and communal events, and representation in society, which help preserve their dignity.

“To promote the participation of the greatest number in the life of a society, the creation of voluntary associations and institutions ... ‘relate to economic and social goals, to cultural and recreation activities, to sport, to various professions, and to political affairs’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1882). Society should be ordered in a way that allows people to participate in important events — as well as having time for rest —



within their various communities, with special concern for the poor and vulnerable.

**Take action:** See if there are any organizations in your parish in which you could provide support through volunteering.



### Rights and Responsibilities

All people are entitled to certain rights and have certain responsibilities because they are made in God’s image. Everyone within a community has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, and the responsibility to care for the common good of the community. For society to be healthy, people need to be aware of both their rights and their responsibilities.

Examples of rights include food, shelter, and health care. Responsibilities include paying taxes, voting, and respecting public property. The *Catechism* praises “those nations whose systems permit the largest possible number of citizens to take part in public life in a climate of genuine freedom”



(1915). The use of rights and responsibilities must be both meaningful and reciprocal in order for society to be well balanced.

**Take action:** Participating in ministries that feed the hungry or shelter the homeless might be difficult, but such ministries promote the dignity of all and improve society.



### Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

Jesus’ ministry indicates the intense concern he had for the poor and vulnerable. Their trials often moved him to pity — for example, his care for a crowd that hadn’t eaten in three days (see Mt 15:32), a leper who asked to be cured (Mk 1:40–41), a widow who had just lost her son (Lk 7:12–13). Christ’s deep and profound response to the experiences of those on the fringes of society is one we are commanded to imitate; indeed, our response to those who are “least among us” is the basis on which we will be judged (Mt 25:45).

Our faith is one of action. “If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?” (Jas 2:15–16).

Christ was not a bystander. Likewise, we are compelled by our faith to engage in solutions that address the needs of the helpless and outcast in our communities.

**Take action:** Many parishes have food collections, clothing drives, or other ways to serve the poor. What can you do to help?



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