

Catholic Social Teachings

THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY



4th Principle of Catholic Social Teaching

“A higher level of government — or organization — should not perform any function or duty that can be handled more effectively at a lower level by people who are closer to the problem and have a better understanding of the issue.”

Scriptural Reference

“Is it lawful for us to pay tribute to Caesar or not? Recognizing their craftiness Jesus said to them, ‘Show me a denarius; whose image and name does it bear?’ They replied, ‘Caesar’s.’ So he said to them, ‘Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God’” (Luke 20: 22-25).

Homily Hints

Subsidiarity is the participation of the people directly affected by a problem in the solution-making process. Only when a higher authority is required for the common good should there be intervention. The state should not intervene unless necessary within its sphere to secure justice, safeguard and guarantee rights, promote peace, defend the weak, and ensure the common good.

Decisions should be made at the lowest level possible in order to respect freedom, initiative and appropriate roles.

“The world’s peoples want to be artisans of their own destiny.” *Pope Francis*

“The principle of subsidiarity holds that ‘a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.’” *St. John Paul II*

“It is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. ... The supreme authority of the State ought, therefore, to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance, which would otherwise dissipate its efforts greatly.”

Pope Pius XI

Prayer Intentions

For those who govern, that they respect individual freedom and the freedom of intermediate communities.

—*Let us pray to the Lord...*

For all people:

That we are given the freedom to develop our abilities while taking responsibility for ensuring the common good.

—*Let us pray to the Lord...*

For all people:

That we guarantee the right of everyone’s contribution, and by empowering others, create a society open to participation of all.

—*Let us pray to the Lord...*



Photo by Samuel Zeller unsplash

Works of Mercy

The mission of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy is to “serve, accompany and defend.” Hospitality in itself isn’t enough. Giving a sandwich to someone who is hungry should open the door to a moment of encounter. Let us heed the call to accompany those who are vulnerable and suffering, *as they learn to stand on their own two feet.*

Accompany

The Gabriel Project is a parish-based ministry providing support to mothers and fathers in crisis pregnancy situations and in need of assistance. A parish provides practical love and support, and helps locate needed resources from within its community. The programs are parish based to encourage solidarity, subsidiary, and collaborative Ministry among parishioners. **Sacred Heart (Newport)** is piloting the Gabriel Project in the Archdiocese of Portland.

Learn

One criterion for a grant from the **Catholic Campaign for Human Development** is that people living in poverty must have the dominant voice in the organization. At least 50 percent of the members of the governing board of the applicant organization should be comprised of individuals who are involuntarily low-income. Organizations must demonstrate significant commitment towards developing, effective democratic structures and processes to ensure that low-income beneficiaries or members are central in decision-making. This is empowerment.

Bulletin Reflection

The Principle of Subsidiarity is one of the four permanent principles of the Church’s social doctrine: Government should help smaller communities and individual initiative contribute more effectively to social well-being and supplement their activity when the demands of justice exceed their capacities. This does not mean, however, that the government that governs least, governs best.

Prayer: Our Liberty Is Bound Together

If you have come here to help me,
you are wasting your time.

But if you have come because
your liberation is bound up with mine,
then let us work together.

Amen

Lilla Watson

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**The Principle
of Solidarity**