



Catholic Social Teaching

Ten basic themes of Catholic Teaching on which our Social Justice Commission is based.

The Dignity of the Human Person

- One -

- Every person is sacred, made in the image of God.
- Human life is sacred from conception until natural death.

Community

- Two -

Human beings are by nature social. The individual and society are mutually interdependent. The betterment of the individual depends on society and the improvement of society depends on individuals.

Rights and Duties

- Three -

- Every person has a right to the basic material necessities that are required to live a decent life. These include:
 - Life
 - Food
 - Clothing
 - Shelter
 - Rest
 - Medical care
 - Basic education
 - The right to earn a living

These are indispensable to the protection of human dignity.

Option for the Poor

- Four -

- “As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental "option for the poor" -- to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor.”

National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Economic Justice for All:
Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, Washington, DC: USCC, 1986

- The test of a society, policy, political philosophy, or institution, then, is its treatment of the poor.

Participation

- Five -

All people have a right to a minimum level of participation in the economic, political, and cultural life of society.

Economic Justice

Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers

- Six -

- The economy must serve people, not the other way around.
- People are more important than things; labor is more important than capital.
- All workers have a right to productive work, to decent wages, to safe working conditions; and they have a right to organize and join unions.

“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.”

National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* (Washington, DC: USCC, 1998)

Solidarity

- Seven -

- "We are members of a universal Church that transcends national boundaries and calls us to live in solidarity and justice with the peoples of the world. We are also citizens of a powerful democracy with enormous influence beyond our borders. As Catholics and Americans we are uniquely called to global solidarity."

National Conference of Catholic Bishops,
Called to Global Solidarity, Washington, DC: USCC, 1997, #1

- "There are needs and common goods that cannot be satisfied by the market system. It is the task of the state and of all society to defend them. An idolatry of the market alone cannot do all that should be done."

The Hundredth Year, John Paul II

People have a right to economic initiative and private property, but these rights have limits. No one is allowed to amass excessive wealth when others lack the basic necessities of life.

Stewardship of Creation

- Eight -

- The goods of the earth are gifts.
- We hold them in trust, as stewards.
- “It is to the Creator of the universe, then, that we are accountable for what we do or fail to do to preserve and care for the Earth and all its creatures.... Dwelling in the presence of God, we begin to experience ourselves as part of Creation, as stewards within it, not separate from it.”

US Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*, Catholic Conference, November 14, 1991

Role of Government

- Nine -

- The state serves a positive moral function.
- It is an instrument to promote human dignity, protect human rights, and build the common good.
- It should be as small as possible, but as big as necessary.

Promotion of Peace

- Ten -

Peace is not just the absence of war.

*“If you want peace,
work for justice.”*

Pope Paul VI, 1972, World Day of Peace Message