



# Overview of Catholic Social Teaching

In the Sacrament of Baptism, we are urged to keep the light of Christ alive in our hearts for the rest of our lives. We are called to holiness. Though this may seem like a tall order, when we live lives that focus on loving God, ourselves, others, and creation itself, we move in the direction of lifelong holiness.

The Catholic Church has a rich history of social teaching that helps us live positive, meaningful, and holy lives through an understanding of our relationship and responsibility to others. This teaching has guided the lives of Christians since the beginning of the Church. Modern Catholic social teaching has been addressed and explained in Church documents since the 1800s. **Catholic social teaching promotes our Catholic identity and helps ensure that we treat those around us and our environment with dignity and respect.** It gives us the guidance to live our faith and navigate our modern world.

Some of the key themes of Catholic social teaching have been highlighted as general themes or principles. These principles challenge us globally—to view the world as one family and to work for justice and peace. They also challenge us locally. We are called to apply these principles daily in our encounters with people, in forming our opinions regarding current events, and in our willingness to give our time and money to those in need.

**THE FOLLOWING ARE SEVEN  
OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF  
CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING:**



**1 LIFE AND DIGNITY  
OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

This first principle is the foundation for the others. We cannot practice the other principles without fully embracing this one. This principle seems simple, but it is extremely complex. It states that **every life is sacred, and every person has dignity**. The challenge to this principle is to comprehend that there are not degrees of sacredness and degrees of dignity. No one life is more valuable than another; every life is significant. An incarcerated person has just as much dignity as a priest or a bishop. An elderly person's life is just as sacred as an infant's. Every person is a child of God, and every person is precious.



**2 CALL TO FAMILY,  
COMMUNITY, AND  
PARTICIPATION**

Catholics are communal, and this principle reminds us that we cannot live in isolation. The first and most important community is family; we are called to strengthen and protect families. **By participating in our communities, we can work on social issues** and ensure that laws and policies benefit the common good.



**3 RIGHTS AND  
RESPONSIBILITIES**

We must work to have all human rights protected. **Every person has rights, such as the right to life, food, shelter, and work**. Everyone has economic, political, and cultural rights. Along with these rights comes the responsibility to help others in our society and to protect and safeguard the rights of others.



#### 4 OPTION FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

Jesus focused on those in most need—the disabled, the diseased, and the outcast. His concern for their welfare was a sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God among us. This principle encourages us to look for those who might need our help. The Catholic Church teaches that **by celebrating the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity, we commit ourselves to concern for those who are poor and in need.**



#### 5 THE DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

**All occupations are valuable and should be respected.** Workers have a right to fair wages and to safe working conditions. Workers have a right to join unions. This principle especially speaks to our responsibility as consumers. Who makes the products we purchase? Where are they produced? What are the working conditions of those who produce them? Expanding our knowledge as responsible consumers means that we can use our consumer power to better the lives of workers around the globe.



#### 6 SOLIDARITY

As one family, we have a commitment to one another. Regardless of culture, race, or social status, we are called to be nonjudgmental in our support for one another. This principle reminds us that we are not to participate in groups that set one side against another. We should work to eliminate the “we-they” mentality in our speech and other social communication. Under this principle, **we commit ourselves to seek common solutions to common problems in an atmosphere of respectful dialogue.** Working for peace in a world that is often filled with violence and conflict is at the core of this principle.



## 7 CARE OF GOD'S CREATION

The Catholic Church deems care for the Earth and all of God's creation essential to our faith. **The responsibility of taking care of the Earth's resources needs to be taken seriously and thoughtfully.** Each day we are faced with choices, large and small, that help sustain our environment or contribute to the abuse of the tremendous gift of God's creation.



One person can dramatically affect the lives of others. Catholic social teaching reminds us that we are called to embrace everyone: the poor, the immigrant, the incarcerated, the unborn, our nosy neighbor, the coworker that irritates us, and those whose opinions differ from our own. **We are called to treat everyone lovingly, as God loves us.** We are also called to use the resources in our environment with careful consideration.

The goal of Catholic social teaching has been articulated in the Church since the beginning: "Love one another" (John 15:17). The principles of Catholic social teaching articulate this love in a precise and measurable way. Together they serve as an "examination of conscience" for the Church today, and they can serve as a beacon of hope for all of human society. In our world today, the principles of Catholic social teaching outline our path toward building a just society and a life of holiness.

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