

# Key Concepts Underlying Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic social justice teachings are based on some key concepts. By applying these concepts to different social issues, the Church makes judgments about the correct direction to follow. In this lesson we look briefly at the following four key concepts, which are summarized from pages 267–272 of *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth, Third Edition*.

## 1. The Common Good

When conditions exist in society that allow all people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their human and spiritual fulfillment more fully and more easily, the common good is achieved. It is important that we understand what the common good really means; it isn't just doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people. The decision's impact on each and every person must be taken into account.

## 2. Responsibility of the Political Authority

Although some people may be cynical about politics and government, the Church teaches that political authority (also called the state) has an important role: to defend and promote the common good of civil society. Policy makers at all levels of government should ensure that each person has access to the resources needed to lead a truly human life: "food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on"<sup>1</sup> (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, 1908). These needs are often referred to as basic human rights.

## 3. Human Dignity

All people—the affluent banker, the homeless woman on the street, the undocumented immigrant—are created in God's image and share the same human dignity. God calls us to consider each and every human being as "another self" (*CCC*, 1944).

## 4. Human Solidarity

Solidarity means that we are united in friendship and charity toward our brothers and sisters in society. We are one. It is like being connected by invisible threads to every other person in the world. When one of us is suffering, that suffering is transferred down that invisible thread to all of us. As a starting point, solidarity means distributing the world's resources so that each of us gets our fair share and so that no one is suffering because of physical need.

### Endnote Cited in a Quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition*

1. Cf. *Gaudium et spes* 26 § 2.

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