

Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

To help keep us grounded in serving others during this time of pandemic and social unrest, and to prepare us for the election in November, the Social Action Commission has assembled some reflection points on the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching. We'll include a theme or two each week for the next few weeks. Additional questions and information can be found on the parish website: <https://sfacc.org/social-action-commission/>

These teachings come from a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of the modern world – something that is certainly timely! The teachings are great for personal reflection and for family discussion.

More information about the seven themes of Catholic social teaching can be found on the website for United States Conference of Catholic Bishops by entering:

[USCCB.ORG > ISSUES & ACTION > TOPICS > Catholic Social Teachings > Resources on Catholic Social Teaching > Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teachings](#)

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion, euthanasia, and violence. The value of human life is being threatened by use of the death penalty. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

Food for Thought

- Do I respect the life and dignity of every human person from conception through natural death?
- Do I recognize the face of Christ reflected in all others around me, regardless of their race, gender, class, age, or abilities?
- Have I ever been in a situation where the dignity of another person was threatened?
- Am I committed to both protecting every human life and working to ensure that every human being is able to live in dignity?
- How do I think/feel about capital punishment? Abortion? Racism?
- How do I show value for the life and dignity of every person, especially those who are suffering?

2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society – in economics and politics, in law and policy – directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The family is the central social institution that must be supported and strengthened. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Food for Thought

- What positive choices do I make to strengthen the institution of the family? The church? The community?
- Are my beliefs, attitudes, and choices such that they strengthen or undermine the institution of the family?
- Am I aware of problems facing my local community and involved in efforts to find solutions? Do I stay informed and make my voice heard when needed?
- Do I support the efforts of others to work for change in their neighborhoods and communities? Do my attitudes and interactions empower or disempower others?
- How do I usually respond to people who disagree with me? What about those who are different than I am, or those who have different values than I do?

3. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt. 25:31- 46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

Food for Thought

- Who do I know who might be considered poor or vulnerable? How do I support them?
- Am I disproportionately concerned for my own good at the expense of others?
- Do I engage in service and advocacy work that protects the dignity of others?
- What responsibility do I have to help the poor and those who are vulnerable?
- How do I try to better understand the lives of the poor and the obstacles they face?
- When have I felt inspired to help the poor and vulnerable?

4. Rights and Responsibilities

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

Food for Thought

- Do I recognize and respect the economic, social, political, and cultural rights of others?
- Do I live in excess?
- Do I take seriously my responsibility to ensure that the rights of people in need are realized?
- Do I urge those in power to implement programs and policies that give priority to the human dignity and rights of all, especially the vulnerable?
- When have I felt disrespected or vulnerable? How did it feel? How did I respond?
- Could I do something to assure others are treated with dignity?

5. Solidarity

We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that "if you want peace, work for justice." Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict. The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers.

Food for Thought

- In what groups do I feel most comfortable? Where do I feel uncomfortable? How can I interact in these groups?
- Does the way I spend my time reflect a genuine concern for others?
- Is solidarity incorporated into my prayer and spirituality?
- Do I lift up vulnerable people throughout my community and the world in my prayer, or is it reserved for only my personal concerns?
- Am I attentive only to my local neighbors, or also those across the country and globe?
- Do I see all members of the human family as my brothers and sisters?
- How do I promote justice and peace?
- How can I educate myself on local and global justice issues?
- What gifts do I have to work for justice and peace, and how can I use these gifts?

6. Care for God's Creation

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

Food for Thought

- Do I live out my responsibility to care for God's creation?
- Do I see my care for creation as connected to my concern for poor persons who are most at risk from environmental problems?
- Do I litter? Live wastefully? Use energy too freely? Are there ways I could reduce consumption in my life?
- Are there ways I could change my daily practices and those of my family, school, workplace, or community to better conserve the earth's resources for future generations?
- Do I consider where my food comes from? Who grows it? What type of transportation or packaging it requires?
- Do I recycle?
- Do I have gifts I can share with the parish's environmental and sustainability work?
- Where is my favorite place in nature to visit?

7. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of 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 the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

Food for Thought

- As a worker, do I give my employer a fair day's work for my wages? As an owner, do I treat workers fairly?
- Do I treat all workers with whom I interact with respect, no matter their position or class?
- Do I support the rights of all workers to adequate wages, health insurance, vacation, and sick leave?
- Do I affirm the right to form or join unions or worker associations?
- Do my purchasing choices take into account the hands involved in the production of what I buy? When possible, do I buy products produced by workers whose rights and dignity were respected?
- What obligations do I believe companies have to invest in and protect the jobs of their employees?
- What obligations do I believe employees have toward their employer?
- Have I ever worked in a place where I felt disrespected or not valued? How did I respond?