

# THE ESSENTIALS OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

*The Catholic Church has a long and richly developed tradition of teaching about social justice. The U.S. bishops, in an effort to summarize that tradition, have identified seven main principles, which we've outlined and adapted here for use with CFCA's Exploring the Dream discussion series.*

## **The Life and Dignity of the Human Person**

It all begins with what you believe about human life and dignity. The Catholic Church believes that a person's dignity doesn't come from things like wealth, power or fame — things that can be taken away — but from the fact that each of us was created in the image and likeness of God. In other words, our dignity is hard-wired into us! Every human being is equally precious in God's eyes, which is why every human life is sacred. And that is what Catholic social teaching is all about — respect for the sacredness of life.

## **Call to Family, Community and Participation**

The desire for community is part of our nature as human beings. Family is our first and most important community because that is where we learn how to relate to others. Other groups we might belong to — school, friends, clubs, etc. — are also good, but there is one “club” that everybody has membership in — society. Whether our local society or the global one, everybody has both the right and the responsibility to work for the common good. Simply put, the Catholic Church believes that all people should participate when it comes to making decisions that affect their lives.

## **Rights and Responsibilities**

There are some rights that everybody has just because they are human. For example, everybody is entitled to food, shelter, freedom of religion and freedom from harm by others. There are other rights that depend on the society in which a person lives. But along with every right comes a responsibility to use that right wisely and unselfishly. It is only when we respect each other's rights — while accepting our own responsibilities as members of society — that we can truly live together in peace.

## **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

If you want to know the moral health of a society, all you have to do is look at how their poorest and most defenseless members are treated. The reality in most societies — including our global one — is that it is really hard for the poor to rise out of poverty. That is why the Catholic Church believes that the poor and the powerless everywhere deserve extra help. Whether choosing elected officials or a new pair of shoes, it is always important to ask, “How will my decision affect the poorest and most vulnerable among us?”

## **Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers**

It was never God’s plan that people work just to survive. A person’s job should also give them a chance for a better life. But for work to be life-giving, both workers and bosses need to play their part responsibly. Workers have the right to a fair wage, to voice their concerns and to join with others when negotiating with employers. On the flip-side, employers have the responsibility to pay workers fairly, to listen to their concerns, and to make sure that working conditions are safe and dignified. Once again, it’s all about respect.

## **Solidarity**

Solidarity is another way of saying we are all in this together. As one human family, our choices affect each other, sometimes in ways we never realize. Solidarity moves us to pay closer attention to what happens throughout the world — instead of just our own backyards — and to consider the impact our actions have on those events. Solidarity is where awareness — of ourselves, our choices and the realities of other people — spills over into action that makes a real difference for the better.

## **Care for God’s Creation**

We end where we began, with respect for life — but this time we are talking about not only human life but all life on Earth as well as Earth itself. God has entrusted this planet to our care. We are responsible for how we use the gifts of creation. As we are becoming increasingly aware, all life is impacted by the choices we make as individuals, organizations and nations. Proper use of the Earth’s natural resources will allow us to preserve and pass on to future generations the beautiful, nurturing world as our Creator intended.