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## Catholic Social Teaching: Part 2

**BY CYNTHIA ENGHAUSER, CAMPUS MINISTER**

*This pamphlet is the second of two on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.*

*For the first one, please see a Catholic Student Center staff member.*

*And, as always, please don't hesitate to talk to any staff member if you have deeper questions about the content of this (or any pamphlet).*

*Our hope is that they are the first word in a deepening conversation on the fundamentals of our shared faith.*

**W**hat we would like to do is change the world--make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, the poor, of the destitute--the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor, in other words--we can, to a certain extent, change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world. We repeat, there is nothing we can do but love, and, dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as our friend."

- Dorothy Day

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## The Seven Key Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

As the documentary heritage shared in the first pamphlet showed, the Church has a rich history of promoting the common good through our faith. The documents in the first pamphlet highlight our historical commitment to the lived moral life and social justice. The seven key themes are an example of how we might bridge our history with the future issues and way of living that being the Catholic Church in the 21st century demands. These seven themes were outlined by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops.

### 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. Everything that follows in terms of the teachings of social justice of the Church rests on this. If you remember nothing else from this pamphlet, let it be the line above!

This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. The value of human life is being threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. The intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong. Catholic teaching also calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding increasingly effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means.

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.



Most often, the first thought about the Church's social teaching on human life is its stance on abortion. The protection of life in relation to abortion is certainly an important part of the Church's teaching on dignity of life, however, it would be a misnomer to think that the conversation begins and ends there. All of the issues above combine to create a complex and challenging moral vision for the Catholic Church in the 21st century.

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. Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. 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.

### Call to Family, Community, and Participation

Families and CST/social justice are not often mentioned in the same breath. As Catholic Moral Theologian Julie Hanlon Rubio mentions; practices of justice can "forge deep connections within the family and help families live out their calling to be in solidarity with others and participate in social change... It is through these everyday moral choices that most Christians can live out their faith -- and contribute to progress in the world."

While the connection between families and CST is not a common one, it is a vital one. Family is often our primary or initial experience of community. This most primary example is an important connection. Often we think of living out CST as something extra-ordinary, but in fact, it is often the culmination of practices and decisions we make each day. Decisions and ways of living that occur in the ordinary, everyday life of family.

### 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 and responsibilities are met. 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.

As stated above, *each* human being has a right to life and the basics required for sustaining human decency (think the basic living necessities). As we well know, the basic rights are not being met for every person around the world. When our own fundamental rights to the dignity of life are being met, it is incumbent upon us to promote, advocate, and work towards the achievement of those rights for others.

## 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.



### 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 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 the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

### Questions for reflection:

*How do you see these 7 themes already present in your life, in your actions?*

*Which of these themes can challenge you to grow more deeply in your relationship with God through others?*

## 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. The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.



### 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.

### Where can I learn more about Catholic Social Teaching?

- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has wonderful resources from scripture and Church teaching at the following website:

<http://usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm>

- Family Ethics by Julie Hanlon Rubio
- Doing the Truth in Love by Michael Himes

For further recommendations on any of the 7 key themes contact a staff member, there are many, many wonderful resources. The recommendations listed only begin to scratch the surface.



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