

Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

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 is the foundation of all social teaching principles. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. The value of human life is being threatened by embryonic stem cell research, unregulated sperm and egg donation, the deconstruction of the natural family, which perpetuates family separation and fragmentation, and the use of the death penalty.

Additionally, 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 and their basic well-being 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.

2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation: The person is not only sacred but social. How we organize our society, in economics and politics, and in law and public policy, directly affects human dignity and our individual capacities to grow and flourish in our communities.

Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. In the family, moral values are taught, and the spiritual heritage of a religious community and the cultural legacy of the nation are transmitted. In the family, we learn social responsibility, solidarity, and realize our God-given potential and dignity as women and men.

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, vulnerable and the weakest among us.

3. Rights and Responsibilities: The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if basic 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, especially our children, and to the larger society.

4. Option for People Who are 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 first the needs of the most vulnerable, including children, the poor and the marginalized.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. Care for God's Creation: We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth 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.