



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL & COMMUNITY COUNCIL

You can make a difference

All you have to do is take the first step. On this page we summarise the social teachings of the Catholic Church with a story of a man who wishes he could run away from the wrongs he sees around him.

A MAN named John was deeply troubled by what he saw around him. Terrorism, political turmoil and natural disasters that occurred one after another. The rich were getting richer while the poor were finding it harder just to get by. Yet both rich and poor still felt insecure.

John decided to go for a walk and pondered on all these things. He thought to himself: "Something's wrong."

Just then a stranger walked beside him and, noticing the look on his face, asked: "What are you thinking about?"

John replied: "I'm tired of the way things are. People live in fear - we fear for our safety, we fear not having enough and we fear floods and all kinds of natural disasters. We don't trust each other any more and we don't even trust the environment! It has become every man for himself. I wish I could walk away from it all."

The stranger asked: "Why? Don't you believe that things can get better? We are not meant to live in this way." Then, starting with the story of creation and God's love for humankind, the stranger explained the message of hope found in the Christian faith, and especially in the social teachings of the Church.

"It's all a matter of remembering that each one of us is created by God and given an infinite dignity," he said. "Every person matters a lot to God and we're all equal in God's eyes. In fact, we're made in God's image! This is the **dignity of the human person**. We have a spiritual and transcendent aspect to our nature and we need to respect this dignity in ourselves and in others. This means not treating others like objects with no feelings or aspirations or needs."

John stopped for a moment and thought about the many lives destroyed through violence or callousness. He also thought about how the vulnerable were often ignored or used for others' pleasure and gain. "Life has become cheap," he said. "We have lost the wonder of seeing how special each person is."

The stranger continued: "It also seems like people have forgotten that they need each other. The truth is, we are made to be in community. This means much more than merely tolerating each other. It means **solidarity**, which is a way of being with others such that their needs are also our concern. And the attitude of solidarity makes us seek the **common good**."

"The common good?" asked John.

"What's that?"

"Well, I can tell you what it's not," the stranger said. "The common good is not simply what suits the majority, the more powerful or the more assertive. It means seeking what's good for everyone in the community by making the effort to understand the concerns of others and genuinely seeking a solution together. God made us responsible for one another but the trouble is, we're too caught up in what we need for ourselves. So we



Catholic social teachings: The basic principles

1. Principle of the Dignity of the Human Person

Every human person is of infinite dignity. All of society must be directed towards the well-being of the human person.

2. Principle of Association

Human persons are meant to be in community and have a right to freely associate with one another to achieve the common good.

3. Principle of Subsidiarity

No higher-level body should take over what a lower-level body can do for itself, so that people can develop and flourish.

4. Principle of Participation

All human persons have a right and duty to take action in what determines their well-being and future.



5. Principle of the Common Good

We must seek the good of the broader community - that is, each person, every person and the whole person - and not just our own interests.

6. Principle of the Universal Destination of Goods

God intended for all the world's



resources to be enjoyed by everyone, and not just a few. We should have a preferential option for the poor and see to it that the most vulnerable have what they need.

7. Principle of Solidarity

Every human person is connected to every other

person. We are called to stand together as one human family.

8. Principle of the Dignity of Work

The human person's intrinsic dignity imparts a holiness to human work. Moreover, everyone should have working conditions worthy of the children of God.

9. Principle of the Dignity of Creation

Creation is holy because this is the place where we relate to God. We are the earth's stewards, helping to bring it towards God's salvation.

10. Principle of the Promotion of Peace

We have a duty to seek true and lasting peace, which implies right relationships all round - with God, self, others and all creation.

bulldoze our way through and marginalise others. Maybe that's why people don't trust each other any more."

"That's not all," the stranger continued. "God also meant for the resources in creation to be enjoyed by everyone so that we all have what we need. This is the **universal destination of goods**. When it is neglected, we see some people having an over-abundance of good things while others don't even have enough. Furthermore, we need to respect the **dignity of creation** itself because this physical environment is where God made us to live in and journey towards salvation. Creation is meant for our stewardship, not for our exploitation. Just look at the division and disasters that come when we are selfish or exploitative!"

John reflected: "Yes, I guess we have forgotten to see the big picture. How much better life will be when we do! But I think it's not too late. Where can I start?"

The stranger smiled and said: "Well you're headed in the right direction now. You're beginning to see that you personally have a role in building a better society. You now appreciate the idea of **participation** in Catholic social teaching. Closely linked with this is the idea of **free association and subsidiarity**. Remember I said that human beings are social in nature, so they have a right to get together and form associations to strive for the common good. Higher-level bodies and those in authority should help them to flourish and not deprive them of doing what they can do for themselves."

The stranger added: "Do also bear in mind that every effort means a lot to God. Your work is holy because it is carried out by a human being - one who is infinitely special to God. This is the **dignity of work**."

John thought uncomfortably about

the way he had spoken to a waitress the other day when the restaurant didn't have what he wanted. He resolved to see the dignity in every person and try to make a difference.

As if reading his thoughts, the stranger said: "Now you have understood the principle of the **promotion of peace** as well. Peace is not about avoiding troubles. It is about dealing courageously with a situation in order to restore it to one where there's right relationships - with others, self, God and all creation."

John felt his hope restored and started to believe in the goodness of others again. He turned to thank the stranger but the stranger had vanished.

John thought this fellow reminded him of the One who stretched out his arms on a cross wide enough to embrace all humanity. He smiled to himself and walked on resolutely. Somehow, John knew that he would find him.