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Option For the Poor

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25: 40) This line from the Gospel of Matthew sums up the fourth theme of Catholic Social Teaching; Option for the Poor and Vulnerable. The basic moral test of any nation or community is how they treat the most vulnerable members in society. Canon Law states, “The Christian faithful are obliged to promote social justice and, mindful of the precept of the Lord, to assist the poor from their own resources.” Our sisters who are retired, or who live in our care centers, are among those who take to heart the instruction to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

Sisters from Our Lady of Lourdes Care Center in New Jersey put together gift bags for the residents of St. Ignatius Nursing Home as well as collect supplies for immigrant detainees who are housed at two nearby detention facilities. The sisters give from their financial resources to aid victims of natural disasters and contribute to any collection to help the needy around them. Meanwhile, the sisters in the Blessed Mary Angela Care Center in Buffalo recycle pop cans and donate the money to the Sister Josette Food Pantry at Villa Maria College. The employees at the care center in Buffalo also provide food for this pantry. The administrator at the care center, Mr. Bart Siener, volunteers twice a month after work at another food pantry while several of the nurses assist with out-reach programs in their parishes.

In Connecticut, the sisters collected money, held bingos, and donated their monthly allotment to sponsor the high school education for two Kenyan teenage girls. Once a month the sisters prepare a Sunday meal for Loaves and Fishes, the local soup kitchen, and rotate to greet the guests and serve the food. Sisters who are unable to serve meals at the soup kitchen gather two days before the meal to peel all the vegetables! Sisters who crochet or knit make hats and mittens, which are distributed to the guests who come for the meal. During a recent devastating storm in the area, the sisters housed people who needed accommodations, heat, a warm shower and a hot meal.



Sister M. Joseph Kowalska, Mississauga (CA) continues to use her training as a teacher by tutoring a former student, now a priest, with oral drills to improve his communication skills that are needed for elementary and high school retreat audiences. Sister also teaches English to a father and son team from Venezuela. Sister Joseph stated, “My ‘poor’ need better communication in English simply to keep the jobs they manage to get. It protects their dignity, and whittles down bigotry and racism, when they can make themselves understood.”

Sister Mary Alphonsa Kunicka, also from Canada, stressed the importance of “ongoing bonding” with her sisters so that “all feel respected and acknowledged” while Sister Mary Alice Kwiecien helps her elderly sisters through counseling in order to help them live in greater peace during the painful periods of their lives. Sister Alice also serves people confined to hospitals and other medical centers.

Our retired sisters have also been involved in advocating for the most vulnerable in our world by signing petitions and letters to legislators, and at times, even calling legislators’ offices to be certain that their Felician voice is heard. In a global society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our Catholic Social tradition compels us to do all we can for the least of our brothers and sisters.



The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

One theme of Catholic Social Teaching that threads many Papal encyclicals is the dignity of work. For Catholics, work is considered a way to continue to participate in God’s creation. For this article, I asked several sisters throughout the congregation to give examples of how we as Felician Sisters act to uphold the dignity and rights of employees in our Felician ministries.



“Striving to see the face of God in each person, both our sisters and all our employees,” is how Sister Lynn Marie Zawacka, the former local minister of Our Lady of Lourdes Care Center in New Jersey, summed it up. Sister Lynn continued, “Whether the worker is an administrator, a nurse, a housekeeper or a culinary aide, each is supported with affability, kindness and respect. On occasion help is given to families in need.” Sister Mary Melchiora Klosek echoed these sentiments stating that in Krakow: “We strive to be open and sincere in dealing with our employees, to meet their problems, even personal ones. We care about a healthy and friendly relationship between the sisters and employees, and employees with each other.”

A consideration noted by Sister Mary Anita Rygula from Przemyśl is that the “work schedule during the holiday season is to be determined in such a way - to give employees the opportunity to spend time with the family.” Meanwhile, Sister Carole Mary Capoun stated that she often shares flowers and vegetables from her small garden with employees at Mother of Good Counsel Convent in Chicago

Sister Mary Johnice Rządiewicz stated that at the Response to Love Center, in Buffalo NY, where she is the Director, the sisters, staff, volunteers, and clients continually challenge themselves to do better than the day before. Each day they are invited to ask themselves the following questions: “Are we willing to learn new things, inviting change? Are we generous in giving of ourselves?”

Jericho House in Canada is committed to empowerment of all who minister there through peer facilitated experiences and events. According to the Sister Mary Jacqueline Keefe, co-director of the center, “the staff is part of the decision making and the ministry of hospitality and welcome. Jericho House supports and promotes the rights of all workers and people for dignity, health and their families.”

Perhaps, Sister Mary Leona Kutsko from Brazil summarized the responses from all of our sisters when she wrote that the over 400 people employed within ministries and at the Provincial House are “collaborators of our Felician-Franciscan Mission.”

An important aspect of worker dignity that we often do not think about is in the supply chains for the products we use every day—who and what is involved in providing the products that we purchase or use. As

consumers, we all unconsciously benefit from human trafficking and slavery, but recent legislation passed in California will serve to help us be more aware of injustices in supply chains. The Supply Chain Transparency Act, which went into effect in January 2012, requires any corporation with \$100 million or more in sales in California, or doing business in the state, to disclose what they are doing to combat forced labor and human trafficking in their supply chains. The State of California has the twelfth largest economy in the world, so this legislation will have far reaching effects.

Our sisters have been taking some steps to decrease their use of products that are known to involve traf-



ficking or child labor in their production process. Sister Lynn Marie Zawacka states, “When I am aware of slave labor or trafficking, I try to avoid products that support or encourage these horrible practices. I try to purchase products that respect workers’ rights and dignity, e.g. the Eco-Palms for Palm Sunday, Fair Trade chocolate, crafts from poor Central

American countries.” Jericho House buys food grown locally and only uses Fair Trade coffee. According to Sister Mary Jacqueline Keefe, the training of teachers at Jericho House includes education on Fair Trade. Educational material regarding Fair Trade products are accessible to all who visit Jericho House.

Throughout all our Felician ministries, Felician Sisters make efforts to respect the rights of workers and promote an economy that protects human life, defends human rights and advances the well-being of all.

- S. Maryann Agnes Mueller-

Key Themes OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops has identified these seven key themes of Catholic Social Teaching.

SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE PERSON

The foundational principle of all Catholic social teachings is the sanctity of human life. Catholics believe in an inherent dignity of the human person starting from conception through to natural death. They believe that human life must be valued infinitely above material possessions. Believing all people are made in the image and likeness of God, Catholic doctrine teaches to treat all human beings with dignity.



CALL TO FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND PARTICIPATION

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. Full human development takes place in relationship with others. The family —based on marriage (between a man and a woman)—is the first and fundamental unit of society. Together families form communities, communities a state and together all across the world each human is part of the human family. All people have the right and duty to organize themselves politically, economically and socially, seeking the common good of all.



RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Every person has a fundamental right to life and to the necessities of life; to employment, health care, education. The right to exercise religious freedom publicly and privately by individuals and institutions along with freedom of conscience need to be constantly defended.

Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society. Rights should be understood and exercised in a moral framework rooted in the dignity of the human person.



PREFERENTIAL Option for the poor and vulnerable

Jesus taught that on the Day of Judgment God will ask what each of us did to help the poor and needy: "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40) This is reflected in the Church's canon law, which states, "The Christian faithful are also obliged to promote social justice and, mindful of the precept of the Lord, to assist the poor from their own resources." (CIC, canon 222 §2) Through our words, prayers and deeds we must show solidarity with, and compassion for, the poor. When instituting public policy we must always keep the "preferential option for the poor" at the forefront of our minds.

This preferential option for the poor and vulnerable includes all who are marginalized in our nation and beyond—unborn children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and terminally ill, and victims of injustice and oppression.

Dignity of work

Society must pursue economic justice and the economy must serve people, not the other way around. Employers contribute to the common good through the services or products they provide and by creating jobs that uphold the dignity and rights of workers. Workers have a right to work, to earn a living wage, and to form trade unions to protect their interests. All workers have a right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, and to safe working conditions.

Workers also have responsibilities—to provide a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, to treat employers and co-workers with respect, and to carry out their work in ways that contribute to the common good. Workers must "fully and faithfully" perform the work they have agreed to do.



Solidarity

"Solidarity is undoubtedly a Christian virtue. It seeks to go beyond itself to total gratuity, forgiveness, and reconciliation. It leads to a new vision of the unity of humankind, a reflection of God's triune intimate life...." All the peoples of the world belong to one human family. We must be our brother's keeper, though we may be separated by distance, language or culture. Jesus teaches that we must each love our neighbors as ourselves and in the parable of the Good Samaritan we see that our

compassion should extend to all people. Solidarity includes the Scriptural call to welcome the stranger among us—including immigrants seeking work, a safe home, education for their children, and a decent life for their families.

CARE FOR God's CREATION

A Biblical vision of justice is much more comprehensive than civil equity; it encompasses right relationships between all members of God's creation. The "goods of the earth" are gifts from God, and they are intended by God for the benefit of everyone. Man was given dominion over all creation as sustainer rather than as exploiter, and is commanded to be a good steward of the gifts God has given him. We cannot use and abuse the natural resources God has given us with a destructive consumer mentality. Catholic Social Teaching recognizes that the poor are the most vulnerable to environmental impact and endure disproportional hardship when natural areas are exploited or damaged.



'[S]olidarity'...refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few...[and that] the social function of property and the universal destination of goods are realities which come before private property."

Pope Francis Evangelii Gaudium

As Felician Sisters, we are challenged to live a radical Gospel life and to love all of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Our Gospel call and our love demand that we promote peace in our global society despite economic injustice, secularism and apathy. Sister Mary Angelee Kowalik, San Antonio (TX), recently wrote a poem that speaks of many of the social ills of our time. Only if we remain grounded in prayer and the Eucharist will we be able to incarnate our faith in every aspect of our lives.

We, in America, are proud of our freedom,
we claim to be a just and free people,
but are we?

How can we stand by
and allow some of our children
to go to bed hungry and sick,
on pallets warmed only by
bodies pressed together?
How can we allow the
rewarding of our athletes,
with billions of dollars in contracts
and allow those athletes to ravage
our young women?
How can we stand by and watch
bankers and others rake in millions,
reward themselves for good work,
and allow them to foreclose
on peoples' homes.
Social justice...I think not!
How can we allow our legislators
to vote themselves substantial
raises each year,
while freezing the salaries of their
Constituents?



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How can we stand by
and raise eyes blinded by complacency,
while our children are bullied in school?
How can we claim social justice,
and pay hard workers only a pittance
for the hard labor
we would not do?
We are a nation of immigrants,
yet deny immigration to others..
We claim racial equality
and absence of racial prejudice,
while a dark child is killed
in the name of protection!
The claim is..."War is good for the economy"
So why are we in such economic straits?
A patient God looks down on us...
and waits....and waits....and waits,
Waits until we come to our senses
and return to our beliefs in a
Supreme Being.
Pray, that it may be soon.
May we, as Catholics, truly engage
in the social justice proclaimed
by the *Humane Vitae* message!

*Life together in human society
will be enriched with fraternal
charity and made more stable
with true peace when God's
design which He conceived
for the world is faithfully
followed.*

Humanae Vitae, 30

- SM Angelee Kowalik-



Care For Creation

Our earth is approximately four billion years old. The emergence of life on earth required approximately 3.9 billion years. All life, all creation is interconnected. For example, there is life on earth in part because water and air are inextricably linked to each other. Clouds form from condensation over the oceans. These clouds move over land and eventually pour rain upon the land below. Rivers, traversing land, eventually drain the water back into the ocean.

Life on earth depends on a fragile balance and every creature contributes to this balance. The subtle harmony of life on earth can be easily destroyed. All creation is both a miracle and a mystery. Human beings enjoy and partake of the rich diversity of earth. Human beings have roamed the earth for less than 200 thousand years, yet they have changed the face of earth. The relationship between human beings and the planet they live on was harmonious for thousands of years. However, during our lifetimes people have forgotten the respect that is due not only to the Creator but also to His creation.

The effect of human activity on creation is alarming. Every year, 13 million hectares of forests disappear. Species are disappearing one thousand times faster than the natural rate. The arctic ice is 40% thinner than 40 years ago. However, the leaders of our nations do not seem to take notice. Globally, twelve times more money is spent on arms than on aid to developing countries. This lack of aid contributes to the death of approximately five thousand people each day due to contamination of drinking water. The people who live in developing countries suffer most from the destruction of creation even though they contribute the least to it. Humanity has almost no time left to reverse this trend. Life on earth as we know it will end if we do not take measures to protect God's creation. (Home SOS Earth, 2009)

If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation, the former Holy Father Benedict XVI wrote in his Message for the World Day of Peace in 2010. Respect for creation is of utmost concern, because as Pope Emeritus Benedict states, "...creation is the beginning and the foundation of all God's works..." and "...its preservation has now become essential for the peaceful coexistence of humankind. Man's inhuman-

ity to man has given rise to numerous threats to peace ... no less troubling are the threats arising from the neglect – if not downright misuse – of the earth and the natural goods that God has given us." For this reason, it is imperative that all people renew and strengthen "that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying".



Recognizing that the environmental crisis is a manifestation of a deeper moral crisis, the Church stresses a need for conversion that will lead to a stance of environmental responsibility among the faithful. The Church gives us a model in St. Francis of Assisi, the Patron of Ecology. Our Franciscan heritage has a lot to contribute to the conversation today regarding environmental justice and sustainability. ("Ecology" of St. Francis of Assisi by Br. Innocent Kielbasiewicz OFM)

Everyone would rather be surrounded by beautiful nature than by polluted toxic smog. In my free time during the summer holidays, I try to use every moment to explore beautiful places in my country, particularly mountain areas, as well as quiet, peaceful nature reserves, heritage parks, etc. The experience of being close to nature gives me strength to live everyday life cheerfully. Preserving the silence in the mountains or in the forest is one of the ways of showing respect for nature. With gratitude, we also find within ourselves the silence that makes us respectful for the Creator and all creation.

It is very important for each of us to be involved in the protection of our environment. In many of our local convents, sisters pay careful attention of our consumption so that there is little waste. The sisters make an effort to recycle, to collect plastic waste, glass, paper and cardboard separately. They

make daily efforts to save water. They use energy saving light bulbs. Sisters who work as catechists and educators join in cleaning up trash in neighborhoods (eg. on Earth Day). The Sisters, accompanied by children and young people, take bags, set off to any place in the city or village near the school or facility, and clean that area. We feel that the earth can breathe better, the earth gives us a smile of relief, and the earth thanks us for keeping it clean.

When I first came to live in Krakow, I was troubled that recycling did not appear to be taking place. However, with one phone call we learned of the procedure to follow to recycle. The Municipal Cleaning Company in Krakow provides us with a "yellow bag" to collect the dry and "clean" garbage such as glass, plastic, paper, foil, and paper. We make efforts to leave as little garbage as possible in a second basket, where we throw away the non-recyclable garbage. Krakow is a city that has taken many actions toward sustainability, especially regarding waste disposal. Containers for recyclable garbage are found not only in offices but also in the corridors and hallways. Each container is labeled so that garbage is separated into plastic, glass and paper. There are also separate places that collect batteries. By separating garbage, we reduce the load of the waste dumps; more of the garbage gets recycled and, most importantly, we are taking action to preserve God's

creation!

Heavy industrial waste, waste from factories, large companies, as well as chemicals emitted into the atmosphere are still a big problem in Poland. The forests are dying, while rivers, lakes and the sea are being polluted. We need to educate ourselves and those around us that we "are cutting the branch on which we are sitting!"

Progress is becoming an instrument of death. Today's ecological crisis is a crisis of our culture. Humanity seems to lose more and more a sense of God's presence in the natural world. We can all help to solve this problem. Keep in mind that it is WE who will "write" a continuation of the history of our land. During a recent Earth Day celebration in Poland, the following ideas were promoted: the need for climate protection, prevention of the greenhouse effect and increase of the use of renewable energy sources.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth, who feeds us and rules us, and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs. (...) Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks, and serve him with great humility. (The Canticle of the Sun by St. Francis of Assisi)

- SM Izajasza Rojek -



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Quarterly Prayer Intentions



To pray for and to bring to our awareness the sufferings of those who are being abused through the practice of human trafficking.

1. For the Church, its leaders and all of God's people that they may be strengthened to continue in the struggle to alleviate the trafficking of women and children.
2. For all nations to work together to end human rights' abuses, especially the trafficking of women and children.
3. For those who suffer the atrocities of human trafficking, that they may find healing and new life through the grace of God and the care of others.
4. For those responsible for the trafficking of human beings, that they may be touched by God's grace to seek the path of justice and to respect the dignity of human life.
5. For those who give tirelessly of their time, talents and resources to provide information to the world about human abuses, assistance to those abused and inspiration to those seeking justice.

To pray for and to bring to our awareness the sufferings of those who are addicted to alcohol and drugs, and the consequences of these behaviors.

1. For those who are addicted to substances or behaviors that are harmful and destructive to themselves and to those who are part of their lives.
2. For the families of people who are addicted that they may have the strength and faith to intervene and break the cycle of addiction that is destroying their loved ones.
3. For support groups, health professionals, caregivers and treatment center staffs who are there to help heal those who are addicted.
4. For those working to end the trafficking of illegal substances that destroy individuals, break up families and are the cause of violence and crime.
5. For mothers who are addicted to alcohol and drugs and for their infants who are addicted at birth.
6. For those in recovery from substance abuse that they have the courage and faith to remain steadfast in their resolve.

To pray for and to bring to our awareness the sufferings of the elderly and the lack of adequate healthcare.

1. For church leaders that they may be aware of the struggles and needs of the elderly and work to encourage all members to honor and respect the wisdom of the elders, as they work or a just, peaceful and caring existence for all.
2. For government leaders and all those who have the political and financial power to provide for the healthcare needs of all, especially the elderly.
3. For all of us that we may follow in the footsteps of Blessed Mary Angela and be strengthened as witnesses of God in our mission to the sick, the elderly and those who live alone.
4. For the elderly and all those who yearn for health that they may receive proper healthcare and that their needs may be met with dignity and respect after the example of the Good Samaritan.
5. For all those who will meet their Lord today, that they may die with dignity, knowing that they are loved, cherished and respected.



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Abbreviations

Rome, Italy – RO
Kraków, Poland – KR
North America – NA
Przemyśl, Poland – PR
Warszawa, Poland – WA
Curitiba PR, Brazil – BR
Embu, Kenya – KE