

Catholic Social Teaching

“I invite you to carefully study the social doctrine of the Church...so that you will be able to offer your contribution to the building up of the ‘civilization of love.’” With these words to the pilgrims gathered at World Youth Day in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI called attention to an often-overlooked gift of our Catholic tradition, Catholic Social Teaching. Catholic Social Teaching is an essential element of our baptismal mandate. It encompasses the core themes and response to challenges that have faced people throughout the years; however, it is at the same time dynamic, because it develops and changes over time in order to speak with relevance to the “Signs of the Times.” Catholic Social Teaching helps to foster a living faith that leads to loving action. The foundation of Catholic Social Teaching is the life of Jesus Christ and the Church’s response to events in history.

Jesus introduced his mission by His proclamation of Isaiah 61. “The spirit of Lord Yahweh is on me for Yahweh has anointed me. He has sent me to bring Good News to the afflicted, to soothe the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, to release those in prison.” Jesus sees himself with a mission of social responsibility. This mission is noted throughout the New Testament, especially in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, where Jesus makes clear his identification with the poor.

The latest contribution to the Church documents that are accepted as forming Catholic Social Teaching is *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth*), written by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009. This document, which deals with the ethics of contemporary economics, offers reflection upon the current global economic concerns.

The Modern era of Catholic Social Teaching began in 1891 in response to the Industrial Revolution when Pope Leo issued *Rerum Novarum* (*Of New Things*.) This was an open letter distributed to all Catholic bishops, which addressed the condition of the working classes. The Pope addressed the growing disparity of wealth in many areas of the

CONTENT

- 01 Catholic Social Teaching
- 04 Key Themes of Catholic Social Teaching
- 06 To Make a Difference
- 07 Our Response to Love
- 09 Let the Little Ones Come to Me
- 10 Quarterly Prayer Intentions

Come, you
who are blessed by my Father.
Inherit the kingdom
prepared for you
from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry
and you gave me food,

I was thirsty
and you gave me drink,
a stranger and you welcomed me,
naked and you clothed me,
ill and you cared for me,
in prison and you visited me....

Amen, I say to you, whatever you
did for one of these least brothers of
mine, you did for me.

Matthew 25:34-36

world, which was stirring up revolution and hatred toward the wealthier in society. The encyclical laid out fundamental principles for the relationship between employers and laborers and encouraged the wealthy to set up private organizations to assist workers and their families in times of need. It also makes mention of the “preferential option for the poor” for the first time. The seven principles of Catholic social doctrine, listed in the box on pages 4 and 5, were laid out in this encyclical. These principles are as applicable today as they were over a hundred years ago. *Rerum Novarum* became the standard that popes have looked back to ever since.

Let the working man and the employer make free agreements, and in particular let them agree freely as to the wages; nevertheless, there underlies a dictate of natural justice more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man and man, namely, that wages ought not to be insufficient to support a frugal and well-behaved wage-earner. If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accepts harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford him no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice.

RERUM NOVARUM, 45

In 1931, Pope Pius XI commemorated the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* by releasing *Quadragesimo Anno* (*After Forty Years.*) This was a time of worldwide economic depression and the encyclical responded to this historical event by addressing the issue of social injustice. In the encyclical, Pope Pius also reaffirmed the right and the duty of the Church to address social issues.

The next papal document that contributed to the development of Catholic Social Teaching was *Mater et Magistra* (*Mother and Teacher*) issued in 1961, by Pope John XXIII in response to the rise of communism, the developments in science and technology, and the

greater disparity between rich and poor nations. The encyclical criticizes ideologies that promise to create heaven on earth while disregarding religion, recognizes



that improvements in science and technology can improve the human condition while they may also limit human freedoms. Pope John stressed that it is the responsibility of wealthy nations to help poorer ones.

Pope John followed up with the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (*Peace on Earth*) in 1963, which was issued several months before his death and in the middle of the Vatican Council. This was the first encyclical addressed to “all men of good will” and not just to Catholics. The encyclical outlines conditions for lasting peace, the rights of individuals, and the relationships between individuals and states, to respond to the historical events of the time, which included the Cold War, the building of the Berlin Wall, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The encyclical also addressed the right of individuals to medical care.

Pope Paul VI promulgated *Populorum Progressio* (*On the Development of Peoples*) in 1967. This encyclical deals with a variety of principles of Catholic social teaching: the right to a just wage, the right to security of employment, the right to fair and reasonable working conditions, and the right to join a union. To

commemorate the 20th anniversary of *Populorum Progression* Pope John Paul II issued *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (*The Social Concern of the Church*) while Pope Benedict, in his 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, again addressed many of the themes discussed in *Populorum Progression*.

Drawing on his experience of manual labor and suffering under Nazism and Communism, and at a time when the Solidarity movement was directly challenging communism in Poland, Pope John Paul II released *Laborem Exercens* (*On Human Work*) in 1981. This encyclical was also issued in honor of the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. Critical of both capitalism and Marxism, this document refines the teachings on the rights and dignity of workers. In response to the worldwide economic crisis in the late 1980s, which affected the lives of people in both developing and more affluent countries, Pope John Paul II issued *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* which updated the teaching on international development by *Populorum Progression*. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* spoke to the

principles of Solidarity and Rights and Responsibilities. “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....” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 47)

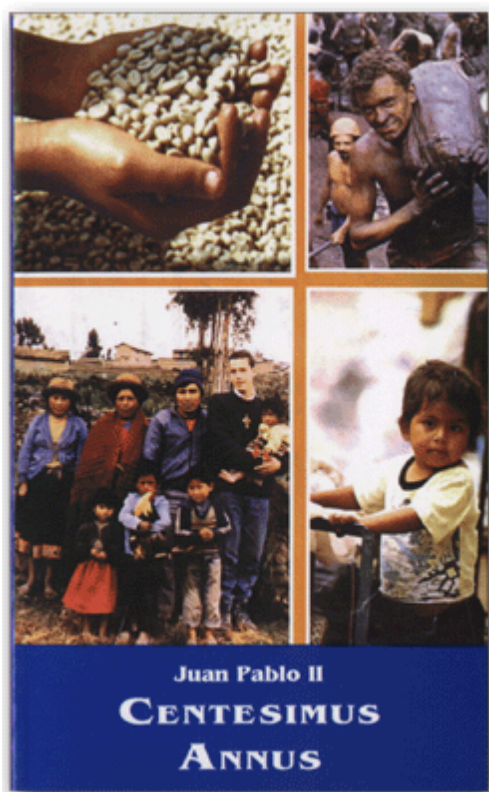
At the beginning of the decade that saw the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War, Pope John Paul II published *Centesimus Annus* (*One Hundred Years*), to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. The document puts forth the relationship of Catholic Social Teaching to events that occurred in the past 100 years especially in relation to events in Eastern Europe.

Pope John Paul II further developed the first theme of Catholic Social Teaching in *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*) in 1995. Abortion, the death penalty, and euthanasia were all growing in public acceptance globally. The Pope affirmed the gift of human life and the need of all citizens to protect human life.

Pope Benedict’s first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (*God is Love*) issued in 2005 was initiated by Pope John Paul II before his death and comprises the second part of the document which continues the Church’s tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. In the part of the encyclical written by Pope Benedict, the Pope teaches that “love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel”. (*Deus Caritas Est*, 22) He emphasizes that this preferential option for the poor and vulnerable includes all who are marginalized worldwide—unborn children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and terminally ill, and victims of injustice and oppression.

The remainder of this newsletter will feature articles on how our Felician Congregation is living out the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and this theme will be continued in our next newsletter.

- Sr. 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.



To Make a Difference

I began my public support of Pro-life issues in 1997 when I was Campus Minister at Immaculate Conception High School in Lodi, New Jersey. I was approached by Christine Flaherty of LIFENET, a pro-life educational organization in New Jersey, to participate in the March for Life at Washington, D.C., which is held each year on January 22, the date the United States Supreme Court ruled to legalize abortion in the United States. To this day, the high school participates in the March on Washington.

I have gone to the Pro-Life Prayer Presence at an Abortion Mill in New Jersey. Last year we witnessed a young girl come out of the clinic because she changed her mind. I would like to think that our prayers made a difference.

I currently minister at the Reception Desk at Felician

College in Lodi, New Jersey. My days are filled with many an interesting conversation. About 13 years ago, Immaculate Conception Convent in New Jersey began to toll our Carillon Bells at 3 p.m. on Fridays to call people's attention to the death penalty. In 2007, after many years of writing letters to our legislators, the death penalty was abolished in New Jersey. We continue to toll the bells as a remembrance of all those still on death row in the United States. Many times when the bells are tolling, students will ask me why they are tolling so somberly. When I tell them the reason, they will often pause silently to listen to the bells. It evokes many conversations around the precious Gift of Life. The first theme of Catholic Social Teaching, that all life is sacred and that each human being should be treated with dignity, is foundational of all our Catholic teachings. Our Felician Congregation is a fierce advocate for ensuring that all human beings, from conception to natural death, are able to live with dignity.

- S Maria Magdalena Vallellanes -



S Maria Magdalena Vallellanes at a Rally for Life.

Our Response to Love

New colors are being woven onto our loom: strong and resilient strands, in yellow, brown and black. No longer exclusively Polish, our neighborhood has become home to many of our city's Asian, Hispanic, Muslim and Black brothers and sisters, weaving new textures into our tapestry through their diverse cultures. However, parts of this tapestry of our lives together are, indeed, threadbare and frayed. Scarred by the economic recession and the closings of major steel plants in the city of Buffalo, much of our blue-collar community remains unemployed and deeply disadvantaged.

The Response to Love Center in Buffalo, New York, was born on June 26, 1985, just twenty-four hours after the parish school was closed. Under the leadership of Sr. M. Johnice Rzakiewicz, in an incredibly short time the

school building was transformed into a community outreach center, a family center, a center of love and acceptance for all who enter. Here, our Thrift Shop clothes the naked; our Kitchen feeds the hungry; our GED and Computer Training Programs teach the under-educated how to support themselves and their families; English as a Second Language for our diversifying community has just started; our Pantry stretches our families' thin budgets; Sisters Care Center is a Health Monitoring and Educational outreach helping keep people healthy.

Here, too, we unburden troubled minds. At the

Response to Love Center, we bring the peace that only Christ can give to those in need as we counsel the alcoholic, the drug addict, the runaway, the single parent, the battered wife, the divorced person and the elderly shut-in. Through contacts made with various governmental agencies we also become advocates of youths and persons caught up in the court and prison systems, or of persons needing housing placement.

Mindful of our ministry we share our lives. Most important, we share our prayer and retreats. We find that in community, we come together again, each formed by our diverse origins, and at the same time unified by the central mysteries we celebrate.



SM Johnice Rzakiewicz, Director for the Response to Love Center, with children.

It is in this sharing that we find a tangible demonstration of the counsels of Vatican II, which direct us to work together to relieve the afflictions of our times. We must widen our horizons and affirm that all peoples of the

earth with their various religions form one human community. The Church respects the spiritual, moral and cultural values of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. We are one.

Here, our doors are open to whatever need, however large or small. Our people know that when we hear a knock at the door, we are going to be on the other side to open that door.

And, so, our community continues to knock. We are, more now than ever before, a faith family, a neighborhood family, a community family. We thought at one time that our neighborhood was hopeless and

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING
2. Call to Family, Community and Participation

dying. However, in recent years we can see and feel our people — Catholic and non-Catholic, Pole, Black, Asian, Muslim and Hispanic — all coming together, once again ready to take on the “good fight.” We care about one another. We are willing to invest ourselves in this community in concern for one another. We love.

All who minister at The Response to Love Center embody the second theme of Catholic Social Teaching. We consider each person not only sacred, but also social, and we know that how we treat each person directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. 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. Through work and prayer, through listening to the voice of God Who directs us, and by responding to Love and with Love, we are stepping out in faith. Surely, we are experiencing a new birth!

- Sister Johnice Rzadkiewicz -

Love of God
and
love of neighbour
have become one:
in the least of the brethren
we find Jesus himself,
and in Jesus
we find God.

DEUS CARITAS EST, 15



SM Rose Szymanski, Intake Coordinator for the Response to Love Center, with children.

Let the Little Ones Come to Me

Children – God’s expression of purity, integrity and future potential. On the other hand, children are also very vulnerable. That is why it is so important that, as young as possible, they be directed to a way of life that teaches them of their rights and responsibilities and their moral and religious obligations.



Outside area and playground

Observing the many happy children in our two Felician-sponsored schools in Brazil, we know all too well that there are many other children who have not experienced the joy of attending school in their early years. Mothers must either go to work and leave the children alone during work hours, or not go to work so that they can be at home with the children, thereby sacrificing their means of family support.

There was no doubt that our attentiveness to this existing condition was a grace of God evoking in us the desire to respond with some action. The moment we felt that we were somewhat financially ready to respond to this grace, we sought a place appropriate to meet the demands of



The Chapel

such a situation. After much research, we finally decided upon the location of a “favela” not too distant from our Felician School in Niteroi, a place also approved by the Secretary of Education in Niteroi. The many little children of this poverty-stricken area had absolutely no educational assistance.

Even though this project consumed almost all our financial resources, we bought a home in that section, had it remodeled to adapt to the requirements of a small school, and hired the necessary school personnel – Principal, Coordinator and Teachers, all of whom will be orientated by the Sisters.

On November 1, 2011, the 61st anniversary of the Brazilian Felician Foundation, the new school was inaugurated and blessed by Dom Alano Maria Pena, OP, Archbishop of Niteroi, with the attendance of the Provincial Minister, Irmã Maria Aparecida Pinto, her Council and other



Blessing of the School

Felician Sisters, the new staff, teachers from our Felician-sponsored school in Niteroi and the Secretary of Education.

Registration was open for children of 4 to 5 years of age, and on November 23, 2011, classes began with a registration of 100 children, with a constant flow of new applicants. The school has a capacity for 200 children - morning and afternoon sessions of 100 each. In the spirit of our beloved mother Blessed Mary Angela, we praise God for this ministry to God’s precious Little Ones!

- Sister Mary Leona Kutsko -

Quarterly Prayer Intentions



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.

To pray for and to bring to our awareness the gift of creation.

1. For our Church and Governments that they recognize the sacredness of all creation and give leadership for the way to sustainable development and affordable clean water.
2. For all God's people that we become more aware of the sacred in our world so that we respect, restore and renew the gifts of creation.
3. For wisdom to protect human health and the quality of life especially the living and working environments of the poor from pollution and environmental degradation.
4. For strengthening those values that place the needs of people and the environment above profit making.
5. For all of us that we ask for guidance in restoring the face of the earth, show us the way to care for the earth not just for today but also for ages to come.



JUSTICE & PEACE

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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