Your Catholic Faith and Social Justice
Catholic social teaching is a body of doctrine that the Church has developed with the Holy Spirit’s guidance to apply the gospel to our life together as one human family.

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching
The main principles of Catholic social teaching are rooted in the “life and dignity of the human person.”

How Christians View the Human Person
Christians look to Jesus as the source and knowledge of what it means to be human.

Our Rights as Humans
There are some rights that are universal, inviolable, and inalienable. The flip side of rights is responsibilities.

More On Human Rights
Examine the issue of pornography in light of the fundamental dignity afforded the human person and personal freedom associated with many rights.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta
Mother Teresa had the utmost respect for the basic human dignity of each person.
O Lord, our Lord,
    how glorious is your name over all the earth!
You have exalted your majesty above the heavens.
When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers,
    the moon and stars which you set in place—
What is man that you should be mindful of him
    or the son of man that you should care for him?
You have made him little less than the angels,
    and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him rule over the works of your hands,
    putting all things under his feet.

—Psalm 8:2; 4–7
YOUR CATHOLIC FAITH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Have you ever been cheated, lied to, or treated unfairly?

Have you ever wondered what kind of person would willfully start a forest fire that results in the loss of human and animal life and millions of acres of land?

What do you think when you see on television the results of a mindless terrorist car bombing that killed scores of innocent people, including children, and maimed dozens of others?

What thoughts go through your mind when you read accounts of how people are denied their basic human rights simply because of the color of their skin?

If any of these questions touch you, then you instinctively have a strong sense of justice, of basic fairness, of fundamental human rights, of the dignity of people.

You belong to a faith community, the Catholic Church, that has a profound message of good news for people and how they should treat one another. We believe in, and share with our world, the gospel of Jesus Christ. This gospel proclaims that human beings are made in God’s image and likeness, conformed to Christ Jesus who is “the image of the invisible God.” Because God makes us in the divine image, we are beings of incomparable worth, endowed with a human soul with its two great powers—intellect and free will. Humans are the only beings that God created for our own sakes, destining us from our very conceptions for eternal happiness.

Human intellect enables us to recognize and understand God’s command to do good and avoid evil. Free will enables us to choose good with the guidance of our conscience and to obey God’s law of love. As we seek truth and goodness, we find our perfection and happiness. In a perfect world our intellects and wills would wholly be attuned to God’s will.

However, as you know, our world is hardly perfect. Original sin has weakened us, inclining us to commit evil by making bad judgments and choosing lesser goods. It is for this reason that many injustices exist in today’s world.

Consider these disturbing facts:

• Malnutrition, defined as the lack of some or all the nutritional elements necessary for human health, is responsible for the death of over five million children per year. Yet, the world produces enough food to feed everyone enough calories to sustain health and life.¹

• Violence against women and girls is the most pervasive violation of human rights in the world today. For example, the vast majority of the more than one million children forced into prostitution each year are female, most of them from Asia.²

• Half the world—nearly three billion people—live on less than two dollars a day.³

• Over 46 million babies have been aborted in the United States of America since Roe v. Wade legalized abortion in 1973.⁴

Despite statistics like these, and hundreds of others like them, we do not give up hope. As Catholics we proclaim that Jesus Christ has freed us from Satan and sin, giving us new life in the Holy Spirit. Baptism, and the other sacraments of initiation—Confirmation and the Eucharist—make us children of God. This adoption into God’s family imparts in us the life of Christ and enables us to live morally. The life of Christ in us by the power of the Holy Spirit enables each of us to be agents of God’s justice in the world. We are called by Jesus Christ to be part of the solution to a world that hungers for justice.

Consider the oft-told story of a sophisticated office worker who ran into an ill-clothed, hungry, and shivering child on a downtown street corner one cold February morning. The man became angry with this scene and said to God, “Why do you allow this to happen? Why don’t you do something about it?”

Later in the day, while the man was still musing over that scene, God did reply, quite clearly: “In fact I did do something. I made you.”

In Catholic Social Teaching: Learning and Living Justice, you will be called to recognize and name some of the injustice in our midst. You will also discover, in light of our Catholic faith and tradition, how to analyze some causes of injustice. Finally, you will learn how we, both as individuals and as a community of faith, should respond to injustice. In brief, this text is a primer on Catholic social justice, an essential and central part of our Catholic faith and life.

What do we mean by Catholic social justice teaching? Simply, the social justice teaching of the Church deals with that body of Church doctrine (teaching) that comes from what God reveals to us about the truth of human dignity, human solidarity, and the moral principles of justice and peace. This doctrine attempts to understand how societies work and

then makes moral judgments about economic and social matters in light of revealed truth and the demands of peace and justice. Modern Catholic social teaching comes to us from a strong tradition of the writings of popes, especially since Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903). It also comes from council documents and the rich and varied statements of national conferences of Catholic bishops.

Catholic social justice finds its roots in the teachings of the Hebrew prophets who proclaimed God’s special love for the poor and called God’s Chosen People to be just, loving, and peace-filled. However, Catholic social justice flows primarily from the life and words of Jesus Christ, who came to proclaim the good news to the poor and to teach his followers how to recognize and respond to the least in our midst. The Lord is also bound to us in the Paschal Mystery—his life, death, and resurrection—and in the holy Eucharist.

Finally, Catholic social justice comes from reflecting on what God
himself has revealed to us. Our God is a Trinity of persons. Therefore, God revealed that he has a communal and social nature. God the Father gives us his Son, Jesus Christ, and bestows on us the Holy Spirit, a gift of love. God is love. Love is relational. Made in God’s image, we are to reflect God’s love. We, and everyone else God created, have incomparable worth and dignity. We are God’s family who live in community. We are to be other Christs in the world, reaching out to others—our brothers and sisters—to build a loving and just world.

Simply put, the teachings of the Church known as Catholic social justice doctrine are a body of doctrine that the Church has developed, with the Holy Spirit’s guidance, to apply the gospel of Jesus Christ to our life together as members of one human family. It has three aspects:

1. It gives us principles for reflection.
2. It provides criteria for judgment.
3. It gives guidelines for action (CCC, 2423).

Why is it important for you to learn these principles, criteria, and guidelines of Catholic social justice? Because you are the Lord’s presence in the world today—his loving hands, compassionate eyes, and voice that speaks out for the weak. He needs you and your wisdom and your youthful idealism to help him establish a just world. At Confirmation, you are called to be a “witness to all the world.” Learning and living the Church’s social teaching is a specific way you can witness to the Christian faith.

Make this prayer your own as you prepare to study the profound teaching of Catholic social justice:

May the Lord Jesus and his Holy Spirit burn within my heart. May I have the eyes to notice those in need. May I develop a keen mind to help understand how to respond to them. And may I have a courageous and compassionate heart to act on their behalf. Amen.

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**What Do You Think?**

We all know that life can be complex. For example, life is not always fair. For no apparent reason, some of us have it better than others. The following statements consider this observation in more detail. Check the column that best reflects your own view: SA=strongly agree; A=agree; DK=I don’t know what to think; D=disagree; SD=strongly disagree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some Statements to Think About</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>DK</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. People with physical disabilities should be given special treatment in schools, stores, lines, parking lots, and the like.</td>
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<td>2. It is wrong for American corporations to outsource jobs to foreign countries to avoid paying high wages and health benefits to their American workers.</td>
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<td>3. Economically poor students who have received a substandard education should be given special consideration when they begin college.</td>
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<td>4. There are winners and losers. Winning is the only thing that counts.</td>
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<td>5. Society is still so tipped in favor of males that women must work much harder than men to get ahead in the professional world.</td>
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<td>6. People can get good, meaningful jobs if they put their minds to it.</td>
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<td>7. There is no reason ever to justify denying a person his or her God-given, “inalienable” rights.</td>
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• Which of these statements are based on fact? Which are mere opinions?
• How are the statements in number 4 generally accepted by society?
• Give an example to support your response to statement 7.
PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

In their 1998 document, Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions—Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, the American bishops highlighted seven principles that serve as the foundation of the Church’s social teaching. Knowing and adopting these principles for our own lives can motivate us to action, help us to make correct choices, and ultimately lead us to be “principled” people in the area of social justice.

The purpose of the Sharing Catholic Social Teaching document is to alert Catholics to the fact that the Church’s teaching on social justice—sometimes ignored—is an essential part of our Catholic faith. We must teach social justice. We must learn about social justice. We must put the principles of social justice into action if we are to be “good” Catholics and faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

To aid memory, the diagram below presents the principles of Catholic social justice in the form of an image—the wheel of justice. Think of the wheel as taking us on a journey. Our ultimate destination is God’s kingdom. Along the way, there are obstacles. These include evils like poverty, prejudice, abortion, war, hunger, and so forth. The wheel of justice comes into play by rolling over these barriers leading us to God’s kingdom. The principles on the wheel need to be applied to smooth out the road, to help us on our common task of working to bring about God’s kingdom.

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching listed seven principles. Our wheel image divides the bishops’ first principle—“life and dignity of the human person”—into two principles: *dignity of the human person* and *respect for life*. The reason for this is to emphasize the inherent dignity of the human person as the foundational principle that leads first and foremost to the respect for human life, but to all the other principles as well. In other words, the hub of the wheel is human dignity—from it all other principles flow. We have dignity because we are made in God’s image and likeness (the triangle in the hub represents the Triune God in whose image we are made). Human dignity means we have worth and value. This is why all the other principles that follow are true.

Our wheel also includes the principle of the *common good*, another principle that flows from and to the dignity of each person.

A brief introduction to each principle follows.
CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

JOURNAL WRITING

Dignity is defined as “the quality of being worthy of respect or esteem; inherent worth.” Write a portrait of the person for whom you have the most respect. Share reasons why you especially esteem this person.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

This foundational principle holds that every person—regardless of gender, race, age, nationality, religion, or economic status—deserves respect. Our dignity does not come from what we have or what we do; it comes from being God’s special creation. As the document puts it, “Every human being is created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ, and therefore is invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family” (Sharing Catholic Social Teaching, p. 1).

THE PRINCIPLE OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN LIFE

Every stage of a human’s life—womb to tomb—is precious and worthy of our respect and protection. Unless human life is treated as sacred and respected as such, we simply cannot have a just society. According to the document: “Every person, from the moment of conception to natural death, has inherent dignity and a right to life consistent with that dignity” (Sharing, pp. 1–2).

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE CALL TO FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND PARTICIPATION

The document lays out this principle: “In a global culture driven by excessive individualism, our tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but social. . . . The family is the central social institution that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. . . . We believe people have a right and duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all” (Sharing, pp. 4–5).

Related to this principle, governments must guarantee and protect human life and dignity and promote the common good and the well-being of all citizens, especially the poor and weak among us.

THE PRINCIPLE OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The essential, fundamental right is the right to life—the right that makes all other rights possible. Every person also has a right to the necessities that make for human decency—faith and family life, food and shelter, education and a job, and health care. Rights have corresponding responsibilities to each other, to our families, and to the larger society. “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” (Sharing, p. 5).
THE PRINCIPLE OF THE COMMON GOOD

The common good includes the social conditions that permit people to reach their full human potential and to realize their human dignity. Three essential elements of the common good are respect for the person, the social well-being and development of the group, and peace and security. In our interdependent world, there is also a universal common good that requires international structures that can promote universal human development (see the Task Force “Summary” in Sharing, p. 25).

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION AND LOVE FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

The most basic human test answers this question: “How are our most vulnerable members doing?” Jesus taught in the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25) that we must put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. Why? Our response to our vocation in Christ and the common good requires that the powerless and the poor must be protected or society will fragment and all will suffer. The poor and vulnerable are our brothers and sisters. They deserve respect, the protection of their rights, the ability to participate and to share in God’s good creation. In other words, they deserve justice.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

The economy must serve the people, not the other way around. Work helps us to make a living and to participate in God’s creation. The dignity of work is safeguarded when workers’ rights are respected. These rights include productive work, decent and fair wages, union participation, private property, and economic initiative. “Respecting these rights promotes an economy that protects human life, defends human rights, and advances the well-being of all” (Sharing, p. 5).

THE PRINCIPLE OF SOLIDARITY

We are members of the same human family. Therefore, the principle of solidarity reminds us “that we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they live. . . . ‘Loving our neighbor’ has global dimensions in an interdependent world” (Sharing, p. 5). Catholic teaching requires us to commit ourselves to the common good—the good of each and every person. Why? As Pope John Paul II wrote, “Because we are all really responsible for all” (On Social Concern, §38). Above all, the virtue of solidarity requires us to work for peace and justice in the world marked by violence and war.

THE PRINCIPLE OF STEWARDSHIP

As the document puts it, “We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation” (Sharing, p. 6). In short, we respect our loving Creator by being good stewards of the earth.

In addition to these nine principles, two others appear frequently in Catholic social justice documents. First, the principle of equality holds that although people have different talents, we are essentially equal because of our fundamental dignity as God’s children made in his image and likeness. Therefore, any form of discrimination or prejudice that contradicts the rights that flow from this equality is unjust.

Second, the principle of subsidiarity deals with “the responsibilities and limits of government, and the essential roles of voluntary organizations” (Sharing, p. 6). It teaches that the lowest level of an organization should handle a function if it is capable of doing so without the higher level intruding. The idea is that individuals or groups are closer to problems that affect them and should be given the first opportunity to solve them without higher levels (e.g., the government) intruding.

In whatever way we organize and name the fundamental principles of Catholic social justice, it is important always to keep in mind the relationship of each principle to human dignity. As the bishops point out:

These principles build on the foundation of Catholic social teaching: the dignity of human life. This central Catholic principle requires that we measure every policy, every institution, and every action by whether it protects human life and enhances human dignity, especially for the poor and vulnerable (Sharing, p. 6).
Abba—An Aramaic term of endearment that means “papa” or “dada.” Jesus taught us that God is a loving and compassionate Father (Abba) whom we can and should approach with faith and trust.

Write your own definition of what it means to be human.

HOW CHRISTIANS VIEW THE HUMAN PERSON

There are many definitions of what it means to be human. Here is a sampling:

**Man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all.**

—Aristotle

**How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world That has such people in’t!**

—William Shakespeare

**You have created us for Yourself, and our heart is not quiet until it rests in You.**

—Saint Augustine of Hippo

**Every man has a wild beast within him.**

—Frederick the Great

**Man’s the bad child of the universe.**

—James Oppenheim

**Man is Heaven’s masterpiece.**

—Francis Quarles

**Man is an exception, whatever else he is. If he is not the image of God, then he is a disease of the dust.**

—G. K. Chesterton

Our view of how humans should act depends on how we see ourselves. If we see ourselves as the “bad child of the universe,” then perhaps we won’t be too concerned about acting maturely and responsibly. On the other hand, if we see ourselves as created in the image of God, then we know we are called to reflect all the marvelous qualities of the Creator.

Christians look to Jesus Christ as the source of true knowledge of who we truly are and who we are called to be. Jesus has revealed us to be magnificent creatures of a loving Abba, a Father who created us out of love for love. This loving Father has proved our worth by sending his Son, the Lord Jesus, to live among us as a friend, instruct us on the meaning of life and love, save us from our sins, and win for us eternal life through his death and resurrection.

This passage from the first creation story reveals several important traits of what it means to be human:

Then God said: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.”

**God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.**

**God blessed them, saying: “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gn 1:26–28).**

IN GOD’S IMAGE AND LIKENESS (CCC, 1700–1715, 1929–1938, 1943–1945)

The Genesis creation account reveals the spectacular truth that each of us is made in God’s image. This bedrock truth is the foundation of Catholic social teaching. It has many implications, including those that follow.

Each human being has tremendous dignity. God’s image is reflected in each person. This fact makes us
worthy of profound respect from the very first moment of our existence.

Each human being is a child of God. If God is our Father, then we are brothers and sisters to one another.

We are special in God’s eyes. As the saying goes, “God does not make junk.” Each of us reflects God’s glory, his goodness, his love. Each of us is fundamentally good and worthwhile. Each of us has special talents and a unique way of reflecting God’s image.

We have rights and responsibilities. A right is a claim we can make on each other and on society for certain basic minimum conditions. The most basic right from which all others flow is the right to life. It is God who gives this right and all others. For every right there is a corresponding responsibility.

We have a spiritual nature. We possess a spiritual and immortal soul that has two powers: an intellect (that allows us to think) and free will (that allows us to choose and to love). This spiritual nature makes us unique among all of God’s creations. Our intellect and free will give us the ability to do right, to discover and choose God’s will for our lives.

God made us for himself. Because God shared his life with us by endowing us with a spiritual soul, he calls us to himself. He wants us to be one with him forever, a life of blissful joy with the Blessed Trinity. We look to Jesus Christ, God’s only Son and our Savior, as the model on how to live loving, holy lives of serving others on our journey to God.

We possess freedom; we must use it responsibly. Free will, “the power, rooted in reason and will. . . . to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility” (CCC, 1731), is a wonderful gift. But this freedom is not absolute. It must be used for good and just causes, otherwise we sin. Also, our free will cannot be exercised in isolation. It must be acted on in relationship with others. With every free choice is a corresponding responsibility.

We are social beings. God did not intend for man or woman to live alone (Gn 2:18). God made us with and for others. God’s very nature is community. God is a Trinity of Persons—a holy family of relationships—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We image God best when we love one another. We grow as humans in a community that loves. In a special way, we must look out for and respond to the needs of our weakest members, we must have a “preferential love for the poor.”

God made us co-creators with him. We find meaning, develop our potential, and glorify God when we cooperate with his plan of creation.

We are not God. The Genesis account makes it clear that God is God and we are not. We are his creatures. We are not the Creator. When humanity forgets this truth, it sins.

We are wounded by sin and inclined to evil and error. Genesis 2:15–3:24 reports the unhappy consequence of Adam and Eve’s original sin of disobedience. Both as individuals and as societies, we often fail to do the good that we intend to do. We are weak and inclined to commit sin. As individuals we commit sin. And our sins sometimes develop into structures of sin that create unjust societies, ones that especially hurt the weak and defenseless. We need a savior to help show us the way to be the children of God we are meant to be.
WHAT JESUS REVEALS ABOUT BEING HUMAN

In the life of man, God’s image shines forth anew and is again revealed in all its fullness at the coming of the Son of God in human flesh. “Christ is the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), he “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature” (Heb 1:3). He is the perfect image of the Father. —The Gospel of Life, §36

For Christians, no picture of the human person is adequate without looking to Jesus Christ. He has much to reveal about who we are and how we should treat each other. Jesus reveals our true identity as God’s children. Among the other truths Jesus taught are the following:

We are saved sinners. God so loves us that he sent his Son to live with us, to teach us, to guide us, to show us how to live, how to be just, how to love (see Jn 3:16). Jesus Christ freely gave up his life so we can have eternal life. His passion, death, and resurrection have liberated us from sin, delivered us from the power of Satan, and bestowed on us a new life in the Holy Spirit. God’s grace given at Baptism makes us adopted members of the divine family. The Father and the Son give us the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. The Holy Spirit guides us to live loving and just lives as God intends. The Lord continues to show his love by coming to us in the Eucharist. We are not alone in our quest to do God’s will for us. God himself is with us.
The Lord asks for one thing in return—that we love. Love is the heart of Christian morality. When we love, we are most human. Love guarantees that we are always just to our brothers and sisters: We treat them with respect. We honor their rights. We see that they get what they deserve as God’s children. Love also means treating the neighbor as another self, even to the point of sacrificing the way Jesus did for us. And love means especially that we respond to those with whom Jesus so strongly identified: the weak in our midst. The friend of Jesus takes very seriously Jesus’ teaching about his standard for judging whether we are worthy to join him in heaven or not:

*And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me’* (Mt 25:40).

“THE GLORY OF GOD IS A HUMAN PERSON FULLY ALIVE.”
—SAINT IRENAEUS (ca.125–202)

Find a picture in a magazine of a person who seems to you to be fully alive. Be prepared to explain to a classmate what quality this “fully alive” person possesses that glorifies God.

**SCRIPTURE LINK**

The Old Testament reveals many attributes of God. Read about these attributes in the passages indicated. Then, answer each question.

**Read Genesis 17:1–9: A God of covenant**
1. What does God promise to Abraham?
2. What does he promise to the people?

**Read Exodus 3:7–14: A compassionate God**
3. What injustice is God responding to?
4. How does he propose to respond to it?
5. What does he reveal about his name?

**Read Exodus 22:20–26: A lover of justice**
6. List three unjust practices forbidden by God.

**Read Isaiah 1:1–20: A just God**
7. Describe the mood of the prophet.
8. Why won’t God hear the prayers of the Israelites?
9. What is the remedy to this hapless situation?

**Read Isaiah 61:1–11: A God of justice and peace**
10. List three things Yahweh’s agent will accomplish.

**PRAYING THE PSALMS**

The Psalms, called the masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament (*CCC*, 2596), are also essential to the prayer life of Christians. They include hymns or prayers of thanksgiving, lamentation, and praise. They express the heartfelt emotions of the psalmist including expressions of grief, fear, repentance, confidence, and humility. They often speak of God’s marvelous deeds in human history.

Prayerfully read Psalm 103, a psalm of praise of God’s goodness. This psalm also reveals that God is a God of justice.

After your prayer, write a verse in the style of Psalm 103 that praises God for some marvelous deed he has accomplished in your life.
OUR RIGHTS AS HUMANS (CCC, 1944–1947)

Related to the principle of human dignity is the principle of rights and responsibilities. A right is a claim we can make on other people and on society so we can live a full, human life. We do not have to earn rights. They are due us because we are made in God’s image and likeness.

There are some rights that are universal, inviolable, and inalienable. Universal means that the rights are for every human being. Inviolable means that these rights are untouchable because they come from God. Inalienable means that these rights are inherent and beyond challenge. No one has authority to take them away because they are due us as children of God.

The flip side of rights is responsibilities. For every right we have, we have the duty to exercise it responsibly. We also have the duty to respect other peoples’ rights.

In the encyclical Peace on Earth (1963), Pope John XXIII enumerated some of the fundamental human rights:

Right to Life “We see that every man has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life; these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and finally the necessary social services. Therefore a human being also has the right to security in cases of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, unemployment, or in any other case in which he is deprived of the means of subsistence through no fault of his own” (§11).

Moral and Cultural Rights “By the natural law every human being has the right to respect for his person, to his good reputation; the right to freedom in searching for truth and in expressing and communicating his opinions, and in pursuit of art, within the limits laid down by the moral order and the common good; and he has the right to be informed truthfully about public events (§12).

“The natural law also gives man the right to share in the benefits of culture, and therefore the right to a basic education” (§13).

Right to Worship God “This too must be listed among the rights of a human being, to honor God according to the sincere dictates of his own conscience, and therefore the right to practice his religion privately and publicly” (§14).

Right to Choose Freely One’s State of Life “Human beings have the right to choose freely the state of life which they prefer, and therefore the right to set up a family, with equal rights and duties for man and woman, and also the right to follow a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life (§15).

“The family, grounded on marriage freely contracted, monogamous and indissoluble, is and must
be considered the first and essential cell of human society. From this it follows that most careful provision must be made for the family both in economic and social matters as well as in those which are of a cultural and moral nature, all of which look to the strengthening of the family and helping it carry out its function (§16).

“Parents, however, have a prior right in the support and education of their children” (§17).

Economic Rights “If we turn our attention to the economic sphere it is clear that man has a right by the natural law not only to an opportunity to work, but also to go about his work without coercion (§18).

“The right to private property, even of productive goods, also derives from the nature of man” (§21).

The Right of Meeting and Association “From the fact that human beings are by nature social, there arises the right of assembly and association” (§23).

The Right to Emigrate and Immigrate “Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own country; and, when there are just reasons for it, the right to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there” (§25).

Political Rights “The dignity of the human person involves the right to take an active part in public affairs and to contribute one’s part to the common good of the citizens” (§26).

As mentioned above, rights do not exist without corresponding responsibilities. For example, the right to life requires the duty to take care of

EXERCISE

Read Blessed Pope John XXIII’s encyclical Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris). You can find it at the Vatican website (www.vatican.va) or other Catholic websites like the Office of Social Justice for the Diocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis (www.osjspm.org) or the Catholic Library at New Advent (www.newadvent.org).

Read sections 11–36 of this encyclical. List five rights discussed in this section of the encyclical. Then make a list of five responsibilities that correspond to each of these rights.

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With a classmate, compose a list of five student rights and their corresponding duties. Then, in a class discussion, share your lists and vote on what the class judges to be the five most important rights. Discuss these questions:

• How are these rights honored at your school?
• How do students routinely live up to their responsibility for each of their rights?
• If there are violations of rights, what can the school community do to remedy the situation?
MORE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

In his important encyclical on social justice, *On the Hundredth Anniversary of “Rerum Novarum”* (1991), commemorating one hundred years of papal social teaching, Pope John Paul II listed the following rights:

Among the most important of these rights, mention must be made of the right to life, an integral part of which is the right of the child to develop in the mother’s womb from the moment of conception; the right to live in a united family and in a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child’s personality; the right to develop one’s intelligence and freedom in seeking and knowing the truth; the right to share in the work which makes wise use of the earth’s material resources, and to derive from that work the means to support oneself and one’s dependents; and the right freely to establish a family, to have and to rear children through the responsible exercise of one’s sexuality. In a certain sense, the source and synthesis of these rights is religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one’s faith and in conformity with one’s transcendent dignity as a person (§47).

Compare this quote with the selections from Pope John XXIII above. Note two points Pope John Paul II stresses as key points of emphasis compared to the earlier document. Why do you think this is?

**Should Pornography Be Allowed? (CCC, 2354)**

Two themes highlighted in this chapter are the fundamental dignity of the human person and personal freedom associated with many rights.

Examine the issue of the legalization of pornography related to these two themes.

**Definition:**

The original meaning of the word pornography is “writing about prostitutes.” Today, we distinguish between “soft-core” and “hard-core” pornography. Soft-core pornography depicts nudity. Hard-core pornography engages in graphic sexual depictions of any kind. An important Church document entitled *Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media: A Pastoral Response* describes pornography this way:

Pornography in the media is understood as a violation, through the use of audio-visual techniques, of the right to privacy of the human body in its male or female nature, a violation which reduces the human person and human body to an anonymous object of misuse for the purpose of gratifying lustful desires (§9).

**Pros:**

Those who support the legalization of pornography stress the right of humans to have freedom of expression in speaking, writing, publishing, painting, photography, film-making, on the Internet, and so forth. They fight any limitation on pornography because they fear it will limit artistic expression and access to truth. Further, they see efforts at censorship in this area as leading to the thwarting of unpopular views that need to be heard in a free society.
Activity 1

Internet pornography is a major social issue today and a gateway for sexual predators to seduce young people. A $57 billion industry worldwide ($12 billion in the United States), 12 percent of the websites on the Internet are pornographic. The average age for the first exposure to Internet pornography is eleven years old; the largest consumers of Internet porn are twelve- to seventeen-year-olds; and 90 percent of eight- to sixteen-year-olds have viewed porn online at one time or another, usually while doing homework.

• Examine your school’s policy on the use of the Internet. Identify what software is used to block undesirable websites. Note the penalties for abusing the school policy.
• Draw up a list of procedures you would use if you were parents who were responsible for monitoring the use of the Internet for your children, both pre-teens and teens.

Activity 2

In the pastoral Reviewing the Mind of the Media, the American bishops urge groups to develop a list of addresses, phone/fax numbers, and e-mail addresses of local media outlets in order to be able to protest offensive material and offer critique. As a class, or in several small groups, identify examples of how the media have offensively depicted the gift of human sexuality or promoted gratuitous violence. Then, contact the media outlet responsible and lodge a complaint.

Also, on a more positive note, identify some praiseworthy productions you have viewed recently and then contact the media outlet to express your gratitude.
compelling example of a person who recognized the basic dignity and goodness of each person was Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Such was her profound respect for others, that in her lifetime people of many faiths recognized her as a living saint.

Mother Teresa was born Agnes Gonxha Bonjuxhhiu on August 26, 1910, in Albania. As a child she felt a desire to work for God. Her spiritual director assured her that she would know God was calling her if she felt joy with the idea of serving him in others. Agnes felt this joy and responded to the call by joining the Sisters of Our Lady of Loretto, a missionary order active in India. Agnes’s training in religious life took place in Ireland where she took the name of Sister Teresa in memory of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. When sent to India, Sister Teresa began her work by caring for the sick and starving and helpless mothers in a hospital run by her order. The endless misery she met in her first assignment greatly touched her.

Before long, Sister Teresa was sent to Calcutta to become a teacher. She became an effective and popular teacher and was eventually named principal of a high school for middle-class girls. However, close to this school was one of the great slums of Calcutta. Sister Teresa could not turn her eyes from the misery she found there. She continued to visit and minister to the poor in the slums and the hospitals, enlisting the help of her students in this precious work.

Eventually, Sister Teresa responded to a vocation within a vocation. God called her to minister to the poorest of the poor. She left her order, received some medical training, and began to work directly with the poor. Her good example drew others, including some of her former students, to help her in her work. By 1950 she had received permission to found a new religious order, the Missionaries of Charity. Besides taking the traditional religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the Missionaries take a fourth vow, service to the poorest of the poor. This marks their way to live and spread Christ’s gospel—working for the salvation and sanctification of the poor.

Mother Teresa’s unselfish work for the forgotten ones in society won her the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. At the time of her death in 1997, the Gallup Poll reported that she was the most admired woman in the world. Her order had grown to serve the poor and suffering in many cities throughout the world: ministering to unwanted, abandoned babies; supporting unwed mothers; caring for dying AIDS patients; feeding the hungry; loving the unlovable. She was beatified on October 19, 2003.

Mother Teresa’s motivation was simple. She taught by example that when we help and love a poor person we are helping and loving Jesus. God is not absent from our lives. He lives in our neighbor, most especially in those we tend to neglect and dislike.

The bottom line for Mother Teresa was that she had the utmost respect for the basic dignity of each person. In her many speeches around the world, she encouraged her listeners to do something beautiful for God. Every person, no matter how small, is a person of great dignity. Every person is Jesus-in-disguise.

Two quotes from Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta for busy teens to think about.

“Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin.”

“There is a terrible hunger for love. We all experience that in our lives—the pain, the loneliness. We must have the courage to recognize it. The poor you may have right in your own family. Find them. Love them.”
These quotes came from the Eternal Word Television Network website, where you can read more about this remarkable person.

- [www.ewtn.com/motherteresa](http://www.ewtn.com/motherteresa)
  
  Another good source for information about Mother Teresa is the official site for the cause of her canonization.

- [www.motherteresacause.info](http://www.motherteresacause.info)

One of the most remarkable speeches ever addressed to officials of the United States government was delivered by Mother Teresa at the National Prayer Breakfast, February 3, 1994, sponsored by the United States Senate and House of Representatives. In this historic address, Mother Teresa spoke out for the dignity of all human life, but especially of the innocent lives of unborn babies. Read this speech at one of these websites:

- [www.ewtn.com/New_library/breakfast.htm](http://www.ewtn.com/New_library/breakfast.htm)
- [www.catholiceducation.org/articles/abortion/ab0039.html](http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/abortion/ab0039.html)

Write in your journal the three most compelling lines that affected you the most. Compare your selections with those of a classmate.

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**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

- Christian social teaching proceeds from the Church’s faith in Christ and has been brought to life by charity. This body of teaching comes from reflecting on God’s revelation of who we are and how we should act towards one another, especially in our social relationships. Guided by the Holy Spirit and passed on by the Church Magisterium, Catholic social teaching offers principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and guidelines for action.

- Social justice is rooted in a correct, divinely revealed vision of the human person. This vision holds that we are made in God’s image and likeness. Hence, we have tremendous dignity, are special in God’s eyes, and are endowed with a spiritual nature that includes the powers to think and to choose. God made us for himself. He made us social beings, to be with and for other people, and co-creators with him in caring for the beautiful natural world. Because we are his children, we have fundamental rights that we do not have to earn, rights that we must use responsibly. Unfortunately, because of original sin, we are flawed creatures who can sin by misusing our freedom.

- Happily, Jesus has redeemed us from sin. He has given us the Holy Spirit, adopting us into the divine family. He calls us his friends and teaches by example how to be just and loving people. In short, the key to just Christian living is to be compassionate as Jesus and his Father are compassionate.

- No one but God bestows rights on us, that is, basic claims that we can make on others and society so we can live a human life. The fundamental right that must be respected is the right to life. Rights, however, must be exercised responsibly. And we have a duty to respect other people’s rights as well.
REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the most pervasive violation of human rights worldwide today?
2. Where can we find Catholic social teaching?
3. What is Catholic social teaching? What are its three aspects?
4. List and briefly discuss nine principles of Catholic social teaching.
5. What does it mean to be made in God’s image and likeness?
6. List two consequences of being made in God’s image.
7. What powers does the human soul possess?
8. What does it mean to call humans “social beings”?
9. Explain how humans are flawed. Give three examples.
10. What does Jesus reveal about our true identity?
11. Explain what it means for you to be a friend of the Lord.
12. How does Jesus want us to manifest justice?
13. What is a right? Why are rights inalienable?
14. List ten human rights and a corresponding duty for each of the rights you list.
15. What is the fundamental human right? Why doesn’t it have to be earned? Explain.
16. Does the media have the “right” to exhibit pornography without any limits? Why or why not?
17. Why does the Christian community consider Mother Teresa of Calcutta a model of justice?

ONLINE

RESEARCHING ON THE INTERNET

There is no doubt, however, that the document [Universal Declaration of Human Rights] represents an important step on the path towards the juridical political organization of all the peoples of the world. For in it, in most solemn form, the dignity of a human person is acknowledged to all human beings; and as a consequence there is proclaimed, as a fundamental right, the right of every man freely to investigate the truth and to follow the norms of moral good and justice, and also the right to life worthy of man’s dignity, while other rights connected with those mentioned are likewise proclaimed.

— Pope John XXIII, Peace on Earth, §144

1. Search for and read the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights:
   • List five rights that you were not aware of before reading the Declaration.
2. Search and look up all of the following websites:
   United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR)
   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
   UNICEF
   United Nations Development Program
   Amnesty International
   The International Committee of the Red Cross
   Human Rights Watch

   Based on information you find on these websites, do the following:
   What would you judge to be the most serious human rights crisis currently facing the world?
Gather five facts about this current crisis. Locate a country where this crisis is taking place and note some basic facts about the demographics of this country.

3. Prepare a short report for your classmates. Locate the “World Service” pulldown from the BBC website (www.bbc.co.uk) and select one of the human rights issues from around the world discussed here. Write a research report on your findings.

PRAYER REFLECTION

Pray these words of Blessed Mother Teresa:

*Dearest Lord, may I see you today and every day in the person of your sick, and, whilst nursing them, minister unto you.*

*Though you hide yourself behind the unattractive disguise of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable, may I still recognize you, and say, “Jesus, my patient, how sweet it is to serve you.”*

*Sweetest Lord, make me appreciative of the dignity of my high vocation, and its many responsibilities. Never permit me to disgrace it by giving way to coldness, unkindness, or impatience. . . .*  

NOTES