Chapter 1: Catholic Social Justice: An Overview

Getting Started
Introduce the concept of Catholic Social Teaching to the teens by summarizing, in your own words, the material found on page 31 of the Teacher’s Manual, “Introducing the Chapter.” Optionally, you may also have teens read the summary of principles of Catholic social teaching on pages 14–17 of the Student Text. Then have them read the following story.

The Story
Casa Juan Diego is a Catholic Worker community in Houston, Texas, where unpaid volunteers provide hospitality for immigrants, refugees, and others in need of help.

CASA JUAN DIEGO, HOUSE OF MIRACLES
By Martha Mary
I sat in the comedor of Casa Juan Diego and heard a story of a woman who, upon arrival, had been referred to a local hospital. She had massive burns on her leg from the exhaust pipe of a truck. She had ridden several days and nights in order to get to Houston. She had traveled from El Salvador. . ..


Discussion
Lead the teens in a discussion of the following questions:
1. What is this story about? How did you react to it?
2. Catholic social teaching says that the dignity of human beings comes from the fact that they are created in the image of God. In what ways are the individuals in this story “images of God”?
   For example, in the warm welcome and assistance provided by the volunteers at Casa Juan Diego and in the pride the guests take in their work at the house.
3. What principles of Catholic social teaching were violated in this story?
   For example, the principle of human dignity was violated through the domestic and sexual abuse of the author’s husband; the principle of participation was violated in the disruption of the family and the lack of options the author had for reestablishing herself in society; the principle of human rights, especially the right to shelter, was violated in the woman’s homelessness.
4. What principles of Catholic social teaching were practiced in this story?
   For example, the dignity of work was practiced in the meaningful work performed by the house’s guests; the preferential option for the poor was practiced in the hospitality provided to the guests; solidarity was evident in the woman’s realization that she and the other guests were “all God’s children.”
5. What role does faith play in this story?
   Faith motivated the people who served at Casa Juan Diego and sustained the author by enabling her to see her situation in a hopeful light.
   (How might this story be different if the author or the volunteers did not have faith?)
6. Imagine the next chapter in this story. What do you think happened to the author and her daughter next? How might her story have been different if it had not been for the volunteers at Casa Juan Diego?

Take Action
Envisioning a world of justice
• Work with the group to complete the following project. You will need several large sheets of paper or newsprint and drawing materials (markers, crayons, colored pencils, etc.).
• Divide the teens into groups of about five people.
• Tell the teens that they are to work together to illustrate what they think their city or town would look like.
if the community fully practiced the principles of Catholic social teaching. What would be different? For example, teens might draw a map of their “new” community showing the addition of environmental initiatives (alternative energy sources, bike paths, etc.), places for teens to safely hang out, health clinics for the poor, and so on. Or their illustration might show scenes of interracial gatherings, people visiting the elderly, and so on.

• When all the illustrations are complete (allow 20–40 minutes), have each group present their vision of a community based on the principles of Catholic social teaching.
• Facilitate deeper reflection by asking questions about how their vision might actually be accomplished.

Additional Activities
• Have teens complete the “Using Your Gifts for Others” inventory on page 21 of the Student Text.
• Conduct the “Injustice in the News” activity on page 9 of the Student Text.

Additional Resources
For additional books, videos, and websites related to this topic, see pages 31–33 of the Teacher’s Manual.