

Catholic Perspectives

How we live together affects the dignity of each person and ultimately the functioning of society. A Catholic perspective is embedded across all learning areas and considers the following concepts

- Human dignity
- The common good and community
- Promotion of peace/diversity/choices
- Participation/genuine belonging
- Global solidarity

Human Dignity: The foundation of all Catholic Social Teaching is the inherent dignity of every human person because everyone is created in God's image and likeness and therefore, valuable and worthy of respect. The Church calls for Integral Human Development, which concerns the wellbeing of each person in every facet of life including economic, political, social, ecological, and spiritual. The dignity of the individual demands justice: people should not make economic, social or environmental choices which cause disparities between people. The dignity of the person does not come from the work they do but from the people they are: each person is imprinted with God's image. When we deal with each other, we should do so with a sense of awe that arises from the presence of something holy and sacred. Subhuman living conditions, unlawful imprisonment, slavery, human trafficking, and poor working conditions poison human society and destroy human dignity. Human personhood must be respected with a reverence that is religious. Scripture: Genesis 1:26-31; Deuteronomy 10:17-19; Luke 10:25-37; Romans 12:9-18; 1 Corinthians 3:16

The Common Good and Community: As human beings we are both sacred and social people. We achieve our fulfilment within community; so how society is organised, its economy, law and policy, directly affect human dignity and how individuals are able to grow and flourish within community. While it is very important to love our neighbour, it also requires us to have a broader view of life and to take responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole of society, to contribute to the common good. Human dignity can only be realised and protected within society. We must love our neighbour, locally and globally, and prioritize the good of the human family over commercial interests. The common good also includes all people, creatures and habitats. Our treatment of the ecosystem has consequences for the well-being of future generations. We live in an interdependent world and we need to measure our own self-interest against the greater common good and contribute equitably to global solutions. The state prospers when there is good moral rule, well-regulated family life, respect for religion and justice, just and fair taxation, and appropriate provision of social services. Every level of society should benefit from the state and the state should work to promote the common good. The state should watch over the community in its parts, but it must also pay particular attention to the weak and the poor. Promoting the common good means promoting the full development of all humanity and encouraging them to take an active part in society. While the Church should never replace the State, she cannot remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. The Church promotes justice through bringing about an openness of mind and will in seeking the common good. In today's world where injustice abounds, a call to global solidarity is logically and inevitable. The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity. Scripture Genesis 4:8-15; Leviticus 25:23-43; Micah 6:6-8; John 15:12-17; 1 John 4:19-21

Promotion of Peace and Disarmament: Catholic social teaching promotes peace as a positive and action-oriented concept. Peace is not just the absence of war. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings. It involves mutual respect between peoples and nations. Peace means living in right relationship with God and with each other. Peace is the fruit of Charity and the consequence of Justice; it is the sign of *caritas* in action. There is no true peace without fairness, truth, justice, and solidarity. To wage war on misery and to struggle against injustice is to promote, along with improved conditions, the human and spiritual progress of all people, and therefore the common good of humanity. Peace cannot be limited to a mere absence of war, the result of an ever-precarious balance of forces. No, peace is something that is built up day after day, in the pursuit of an order intended by God, which implies a more perfect form of justice among all people (On the Development of Peoples, #76).

Diversity: The world is made up of people of diverse cultures and beliefs. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, has many stories of how God intervened in the lives of people when they had to flee their homeland because of oppression and persecution. One of the key tenets of Christianity is the care for the stranger. Jesus, in the New Testament, challenges people to care and love the stranger and to be inclusive of all. "For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). The Letters of Paul also remind people of the absolute equality of all people before God. "There is neither Jew nor Greek... for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). In Christ, the human race is one before God, equal in dignity and rights. The Catholic Church supports the rights of people to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families. Every person has an equal right to receive from the earth what is necessary for life: food, clothing, shelter. Everyone has the right to education, medical care, religion and the expression of one's culture. When a person cannot achieve a meaningful life in his or her own land, that person has the right to move. Because we are one human family a person cannot consider only what is good for his or her own self and family but must action with the good of all people as his or her guiding principle. The multicultural character of society today... encourages the Church to take on new commitments of solidarity, communion and evangelisation. Migration movements, in fact, call us to deepen and strengthen the values needed to guarantee peaceful coexistence between persons and cultures. Achieving mere tolerance that respects diversity and ways of sharing between different backgrounds and cultures is not sufficient. This is precisely where the Church contributes to overcoming frontiers and encouraging the 'moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalisation... towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world'." Pope Francis' message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees: "A Church without frontiers, mother to all" (2014)

Choices: God is free, and humans created in God's image are free. God freely chose to create the universe from nothing. Therefore, God is essentially free, and so human beings made in God's image are likewise gifted with the capacity to make free choices. A Catholic perspective promotes human flourishing in all its dimensions, and the making of moral choices in ways that contribute to, rather than threaten or undermine this flourishing of the whole human person. The concept of identity expresses the human desire to form a coherent sense of self through making free choices about who we want to be and what we want to do in the context of relationships. How we respond to the objective dimensions of our identity arises from our relationships with God and the world, with others, institutions, and history. How we form our own sense of self in the world, and how we shape the way other people see us depend on these factors. Human beings choose between living life to the full or rejecting God's love and God's promise. God gives human beings this choice precisely because God loves them, because God respects their inviolable dignity, and their absolute worth as moral agents, as people who can make moral decisions. In other words, though Christian faith

affirms the worth and dignity of all human beings, and the boundless love of God, it is up to individual human beings, situated as they are in particular historical circumstances, to make choices and to act in ways that realise their dignity and the dignity of others; ways that show the presence of God in the world. Because people are free, rational and relational, human beings can choose to tear down and destroy the beauty and goodness that God has given to them, or they can choose to hear God's call when God asks them to care for the world and deeply love all that is in it. A fundamental choice that all human beings face is the choice to pursue self-aggrandizement at the expense of others, and ultimately at the expense of their relationship with God, or to stand up for love and live life wholeheartedly. (John 10:10) Emotions helps us to identify situations about which we may have to make moral choices about what to do, and in which what we choose to do (or not to do) can be called morally right or morally wrong. Put another way, all emotions help us work out how best to bring about true human flourishing; that is, to participate in the happiness or beatitude that God promises all human beings. (Matthew 5:1-5) By creating us as free beings, God has given us the power to choose the kind of beings we want to be, the causes we want to stand for, the values we want to hold dear. The choices we make in answering these questions will have implications forever, because our spiritual selves will live forever. Fundamentally, we are asked whether we want to stand up for love and live forever in eternal happiness with God (what is traditionally referred to as Heaven), or whether we want to reject love, to reject goodness, to reject community, to reject all that is good and true and beautiful. Sin is not simply about choosing to do something bad or evil. It is always about faulty judgments and subsequent choices about what is good and right. This can happen in two ways. Sometimes it is about choosing to achieve something that we think is good, though in reality, when all is considered, it is actually bad. Sometimes it is about choosing to achieve something that is good but doing so at the expense of what could be better and therefore should take precedence. Conscience, loosely translated, means 'with knowledge'. In other words, when we make moral choices, we make them based on what we know about the goals we want to achieve, the ways or means to achieve them, the circumstances in which we need to achieve them, and the consequences of both the means we choose and the outcomes we achieve. When we have weighed all these things, we make a judgment based on our knowledge of what is the morally right thing to do. We are then obliged to follow our conscience and do the morally right thing, taking responsibility for our decision.

Participation: Human beings are sacred and social creatures. How we live together affects the dignity of the individual and the progress of our society. Everyone has the right to participate in the economic, political and cultural life of society. It is wrong for a person or group to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to participate in society. The principle of human dignity requires that all people be assured of a minimum level of participation in community and that people should not be excluded for any reason. The organisation of society moves from the basic unit of the family to the larger community ensuring that everyone participates. The emphasis on the larger social group counterbalances unregulated individual rights that can turn toward anarchy. Humans gather in groups. Within the Catholic tradition, we are One Body with Christ and as one body we are called to care for all. Catholic Christians are called to participate in society and to ensure that all people and groups are treated well. Participation is closely linked to the themes of community and the common good. A community does not just happen. It is something that people must work together to develop. Everyone should take part in the building up of the community as far as possible. Participating in the building up of community is one of the ways that Catholics live their lives at the service of the dignity of the human person. insert 'It is impossible to promote the dignity of the person without showing concern for the family, groups, associations, local territorial realities; in short, for that aggregate of economic, social, cultural, sports-oriented, recreational, professional and

political expressions to which people spontaneously give life and which make it possible for them to achieve effective social growth'. Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* Scripture Genesis 4:8-15; Leviticus 25:23-43; John 15:12-17; Acts 2:43-47; James 2:14-17

Genuine Belonging: Human beings have a strong need for love and genuine belonging (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1991 p. 94). All of God's creation is good; human beings are good. Human beings' well-being is closely associated with identity and a sense of belonging to a place, country, people and groups. Human beings are relational because God is love. God is relational and inclusive. Strong loving relationships with God and others support human flourishing. When individuals and groups have an authentic sense of belonging, they thrive, as opposed to the substantial diminishment of an individual's or group's well-being when they are excluded, marginalised and devalued. People can feel lost in a community in which they feel they do not belong. In the Catholic Christian tradition, community and care for all within that community are paramount for people to feel they belong and have a very important part to play in the community. Scripture John 10: 11

Global Solidarity and Economic Development: Catholic Social Teaching proclaims that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers! We are one human family and interdependent, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic or religious differences. We must see ourselves in others and collaborate toward solutions. Solidarity is a commitment to strengthen community and promote a just society. We live in an interdependent world; what I do affects others. Authentic economic development must respect and promote the personal, social, economic and political rights of people and nations. It must avoid the extremes of underdevelopment on the one hand and super-development on the other hand. Solidarity is a way of life that recognises that we are all sisters and brothers regardless of race, creed or ethnic background. Solidarity can be seen from two perspectives: first it is an obligation of society and nations, and second it is an obligation of individuals. Solidarity helps us to see the other as our neighbour rather than an instrument to be exploited. Interdependence is also part of solidarity and when we see ourselves in solidarity with the world, we commit ourselves to the common good. We have inherited from past generations, and we have benefited from the work of our contemporaries: for this reason we have obligations towards all, and we cannot refuse to interest ourselves in those who will come after us to enlarge the human family. The reality of human solidarity, which is a benefit for us, also imposes a duty (On the Development of Peoples, #17). Scripture Genesis 12: 1-3; Zechariah 8:16; Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26