

Theme 2

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

USCCB > Beliefs And Teachings > What We Believe > Catholic Social Teaching

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. 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.

Scripture

[Genesis 2:18](#)

It is not good for man to be alone.

[Genesis 4:8-15](#)

I am my brother's and sister's keeper.

[Leviticus 25:23-43](#)

What you own belongs to the Lord and is given for the good of all.

[Jeremiah 7:5-7](#)

If you act justly with one another, God will dwell in the land.

[Micah 6:6-8](#)

Act justly, love kindness, walk humbly with God.

[John 15:12-17](#)

This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.

[Acts 2:43-47](#)

Life among the believers.

[Romans 12:4-8](#)

We are one body, individually members one of another.

[Hebrews 10:24-25](#)

Rouse one another to love and good works.

[James 2:14-17](#)

Our faith is dead if we ignore others in need.

[1 Peter 4:8-11](#)

Serve one another with the gifts you have received.

[1 John 3:16-18](#)

We ought to lay down our lives for one another.

[1 John 4:19-21](#)

Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters.

Tradition

Family

Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, 1986 United States Catholic Bishops, #93

Economic and social policies as well as organization of the work world should be continually evaluated in light of their impact on the strength and stability of family life. The long-range future of this nation is intimately linked with the well-being of families, for the family is the most basic form of human community. Efficiency and competition in the marketplace must be moderated by greater concern for the way work schedules and compensation support or threaten the bonds between spouses and between parents and children.

Centesimus Annus, Encyclical Letter, John Paul II, 1991, #39

The first and fundamental structure for a "human ecology" is the family . . . founded on marriage, in which the mutual gift of self as husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny.

Community/Participation

Gaudium et Spes, Encyclical Letter, Paul VI, 1965, #12

But God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning "male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.

Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, 1986 United States Catholic Bishops, #297.

The nation's founders took daring steps to create structures of participation, mutual accountability, and widely distributed power to ensure the political rights and freedoms of all. We believe that similar steps are needed today to expand economic participation, broaden the sharing of economic power, and make economic decisions more accountable to the common good.

Justice in the World, World Synod of Catholic Bishops, 1971, #71.

In order that the right to development may be fulfilled by action: (a) people should not be hindered from attaining development in accordance with their own culture; (b) through mutual cooperation, all peoples should be able to become the principal architects of their own economic and social development.

Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, 1986 United States Catholic Bishops, #124

The primary norm for determining the scope and limits of governmental intervention is the "principle of subsidiarity" cited above. This principle states that, in order to protect basic justice, government should undertake only those initiatives which exceed the capacities of individuals or private groups acting independently. Government should not replace or destroy smaller communities and individual initiative. Rather it should help them contribute more effectively to social well-being and supplement their activity when the demands of justice exceed their capacities. This does not mean, however, that the government that governs least, governs best. Rather it defines good government intervention as that which truly "helps" other social groups contribute to the common good by directing, urging, restraining, and regulating economic activity as "the occasion requires and necessity demands".

Caritas in Veritate, Encyclical Letter, Benedict XVI, 2009, #57

Subsidiarity respects personal dignity by recognizing in the person a subject who is always capable of giving something to others.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: The U.S. Bishops' Reflection on Catholic Teaching and Political Life, 2007, #13

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, 'It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. . . . As far as possible, citizens should take an active part in public life' (nos. 1913-1915).

Discussion Questions

1. Why does the Catholic Church care so much about marriage?
2. Why can't marriage be "redefined" to include two men or two women?
3. Does the Church believe that people who experience same-sex attraction have equal dignity?
4. What does "intrinsic dignity of the human person" mean?
5. Can a fundamentally capitalist economy be compatible with Catholic values and social teaching?
6. What risk is associated with prioritizing economic freedom among all elements of human freedom?
7. Sacred Scripture teaches that man appointed by Him as master of all earthly creatures that he might subdue them and use them to God's glory. "What is 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." What does this imply for the utilization of the Earth's natural resources?
8. The Principle of Subsidiarity defines good government intervention as that which truly "helps" other social groups contribute to the common good by directing, urging, restraining, and regulating economic activity as "the occasion requires and necessity demands." Yet this is to be supplemental to what can be accomplished by individuals and smaller organizations. Discuss some examples of the appropriate scope of our government in light of this Principle.
9. In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, "It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. . . . As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life." What are ways we as private citizens and Catholics can participate in political life? Do we leave our faith outside the voting booth? Should the bishops be weighing in on political issues as the TCCB does with its legislative agenda and the USCCB does with its lobbying efforts?

Prayer In Defense Of Marriage

God our Father, we give you thanks for the gift of marriage: the bond of life and love, and the font of the family.

The love of husband and wife enriches your Church with children, fills the world with a multitude of spiritual fruitfulness and service, and is the sign of the love of your Son, Jesus Christ, for his Church.

The grace of Jesus flowed forth at Cana at the request of the Blessed Mother. May your Son, through the intercession of Mary, pour out upon us a new measure of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit as we join with all people of good will to promote and protect the unique beauty of marriage.

May your Holy Spirit enlighten our society to treasure the heroic love of husband and wife, and guide our leaders to sustain and protect the singular place of mothers and fathers in the lives of their children.

Father, we ask that our prayers be joined to those of the Virgin Mary, that your Word may transform our service so as to safeguard the incomparable splendor of marriage. We ask all these things through Christ our Lord, Amen.