

## THEME 3 RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities-- to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.



### Scripture

- [Leviticus 25:35](#)

When someone is reduced to poverty, we have an obligation to help.

- [Ruth 2:2-23](#)

Boaz cares for Ruth, a widow and a foreigner, giving her far more than the law requires.

- [Tobit 4:5-11](#)

Give from what you have received and do not turn away from the poor.

- [Proverbs 31:8-9](#)

Open your mouth to speak on behalf of those in need.

- [Isaiah 1:16-17](#)

Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

- [Jeremiah 22: 13-16](#)

A legitimate government upholds the rights of the poor and vulnerable.

- [Jeremiah 29:4-7](#)

Seek the welfare of the city, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

- [Matthew 25: 31-46](#)

Just as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.

- [Luke 16:19-31](#)

The rich man has a responsibility to care for Lazarus.

- [Acts 4:32-35](#)

There was not a needy person among them.

- [2 Corinthians 9:6-15](#)

God's gifts are given to be shared.

- [James 2:14-18](#)  
Faith without works is dead.

### Tradition

The inviolability of the person which is a reflection of the absolute inviolability of God, finds its primary and fundamental expression in the *inviolability of human life*. Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights—for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture— is false and illusory if *the right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination.

#### **On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful ([Christifideles Laici](#), Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, 1988, #38**

We must speak of man's rights. Man has the right to live. He has the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services. In consequence, he has the right to be looked after in the event of ill health; disability stemming from his work; widowhood; old age; enforced unemployment; or whenever through no fault of his own he is deprived of the means of livelihood.

#### ***Peace on Earth ([Pacem in Terris](#), Encyclical of Pope John XXIII, 1963), #11***

In human society one man's natural right gives rise to a corresponding duty in other men; the duty, that is, of recognizing and respecting that right. Every basic human right draws its authoritative force from the natural law, which confers it and attaches to it its respective duty. Hence, to claim one's rights and ignore one's duties, or only half fulfill them, is like building a house with one hand and tearing it down with the other.

#### **Peace on Earth ([Pacem in Terris](#), Encyclical of Pope John XXIII, 1963, #30**

A link has often been noted between claims to a "right to excess", and even to transgression and vice, within affluent societies, and the lack of food, drinkable water, basic instruction and elementary health care in areas of the underdeveloped world and on the outskirts of large metropolitan centers. The link consists in this: individual rights, when detached from a framework of duties which grants them their full meaning, can run wild, leading to an escalation of demands which is effectively unlimited and indiscriminate.

#### ***Charity in Truth, ([Caritas in Veritate](#), Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, #43***

As for the State . . . It has also the duty to protect the rights of all its people, and particularly of its weaker members, the workers, women and children. It can never be right for the State to shirk its obligation of working actively for the betterment of the condition of the workingman.

### Discussion/Assessment (Questions)

***“Integral to the right for life...is the right to basic health care”***

The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops has called upon Governor Greg Abbott and other State leaders to end a political standoff and reconsider the State’s refusal to expand Medicaid coverage for an estimated 1.3 million uninsured Texans.

“.....we remind you that our faith recognizes that life is sacred from conception to natural death. Our commitment to care and compassion for the individual extends along that lifespan. Integral to the right of life for every human is the right to basic health care,” the Bishops stated.

The Bishops’ concern focuses on adult Texans caught in a “Medicaid coverage gap” where they earn too much to be eligible for Medicaid, but unable to secure health insurance on their own or through their employer. Lawmakers have declined to expand Medicaid for these poor, even though the federal government has offered some \$100 billion to subsidize the expansion over the next decade.

“Addressing healthcare needs of Texans by providing the right care at the right time in the right places promotes our belief in respecting and upholding the sacred nature of all human life. Advocating for life means advocating for the basic needs of safe and adequate food, water, security, and medical care. Clearly we cannot let over a million Texans suffer or die unnecessarily because of a standoff between the State and the federal governments. We strongly encourage you not to disregard the opportunity we are given to care and heal millions of God’s children who are in such dire need of medical care.”

**Question: Many people, Catholics and non-Catholics, do not support expanding Medicaid because of an unknown dollar commitment at some point in the future, and because they feel there are other ways to rectify this problem. The Bishops have done extensive research on this; shouldn’t we support them and the Catholic social teaching to have the right of basic health care? If so, how can we do so?**

**Catholic Social Thought teaches that rights are an expression of human dignity. All people have certain rights, one being ‘The Right to Freedom of Religion and Conscience’.**

*"Holy Father, you visited the Little Sisters of the Poor and we were told that you wanted to show your support for them and their case in the courts. And, Holy Father, do you also support those individuals, including government officials, who say they cannot in good conscience, their own personal conscience, abide by some laws or discharge their duties as government officials, for example in issuing marriage licenses to same sex couples? Do you support those kinds of claims of religious liberty?" —Terry Moran, ABC News, asking a question to Pope Francis on the papal airplane during an impromptu airplane press conference, on the evening of Sunday, September 27, just after the Pope left the United States to return to Rome*

**Pope Francis stated,** *"Conscientious objection is a right that is a part of every human right. It is a right. And if a person does not allow others to be a conscientious objector, he denies a right. Conscientious*

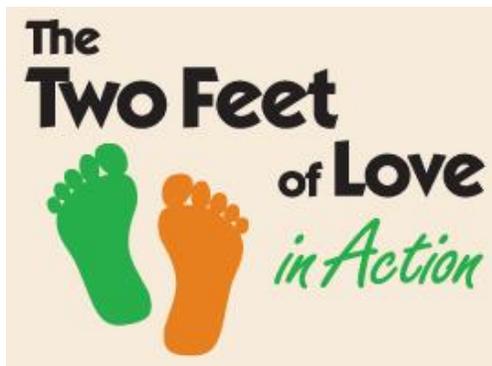
*objection must enter into every juridical structure because it is a right, a human right. Otherwise we would end up in a situation where we select what is a right, saying 'this right that has merit, this one does not.' It (conscientious objection) is a human right." When asked, "Would that include government officials as well?" Pope Francis stated, "It is a human right and if a government official is a human person, he has that right. It is a human right."*

**Question: Many people, Catholics and non-Catholics, feel that elected officials should perform their duties as prescribed. Otherwise, they should step down from their position and let someone else do it to avert disruption of procedures and other problems caused by duties not being performed. What are your feelings? Is it fair to citizens and others in the office?**

[USCCB](#) > [Beliefs and Teachings](#) > [What We Believe](#) > [Catholic Social Teaching](#)

## TWO FEET OF LOVE IN ACTION

Catholic disciples on mission are called to put Two Feet of Love in Action! This foundational tool describes two distinct, but complementary, ways we can put the Gospel in action in response to God's love: *social justice* (addressing systemic, root causes of problems that affect many people) and *charitable works* (short-term, emergency assistance for individuals).



**Social Justice** "concerns the social, political, and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 201). We step with this foot when we work to address the *root causes* of problems facing our communities by advocating for just public policies and helping to change the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice at home and around the world.

**Charitable Works** are our "response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc." (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 31). We step with the Charitable Works foot when we work to aid or assist others both locally and globally to meet their immediate, short-term needs. Examples include engaging in direct service or providing food, clothing, shelter, or monetary assistance to help those in need.

## Review Handout