

The Church and Justice

For more than a century, drawing on scripture and its rich tradition, the Church has developed a significant body of teaching on social concerns. Catholic Social Teaching emphasises that promoting social justice in our world is an essential element of witnessing to the Gospel and hence the responsibility of all Christians.

‘Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.’

Justice in the World
World Synod of Catholic Bishops, 1971

Some of the fundamental principles and criteria at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching are:

The Dignity of Every Human Person

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. Every person, therefore, has a fundamental dignity with rights and responsibilities.

decisions should be made by larger entities when the rights of people and the common good would be better served. Use of the principle seeks to prevent the concentration of power and resources in the hands of a privileged few.

The Common Good

The human person is inherently social. A person’s rights and responsibilities are realised and fulfilled within community. The basic needs and rights of particular individuals and groups must be met in an equitable way. Governments have a special duty to ensure the common good.

Solidarity

We are members of one human family and share responsibility for the welfare of one another, whatever our gender, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, culture, social position or economic status. We are called to stand with those who face disadvantage, injustice and oppression locally and globally.

The Universal Purpose of All Goods

The Earth and all its resources, including new discoveries, are meant for the well-being of all and must be used wisely for the common good. While individuals have a right to private property, this right is not absolute. The right to private property must always be subordinated to the right of all to the basic needs of life.

Option for the Poor

As Christians, we are challenged to make an option for the poor. We do this by assessing the impact of our lifestyles, public policies and institutions on the poor and marginalised and making changes which promote their dignity. When we place a priority on the needs of the poor, we strengthen the community and promote the common good.

Subsidiarity

In society and its institutions, the best decisions are usually made locally, closest to the people who will be most affected by them. The principle of subsidiarity gives preference to handing decision-making power to local entities, but it sometimes recognises that

Reverence for Creation

What God has created should be treated with respect and reverence. We are called to exercise responsible stewardship which protects the integrity of God’s Creation. This is essential for the well-being of people and the whole of Creation now and in the future.

Prayers to Inspire and Strengthen Us in Our Work for Justice

Father in heaven, form us in the likeness of your Son, and deepen his life within us. Send us as witnesses of gospel joy into a world of fragile peace and broken promises. Touch the hearts of all people with your love that they in turn may love one another.

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Open our eyes to the needs of all; inspire us with words and deeds to comfort those who labour and are burdened; keep our service of others faithful to the example and command of Christ. May your Church be a living witness to truth and freedom, to justice and peace, that all people may be lifted up by the hope of a world made new.

Keep your Church alert in faith to the signs of the times and eager to accept the challenge of the gospel. Open our hearts to the needs of all humanity, so that sharing their grief and anguish, their joy and hope, we may faithfully bring them the good news of salvation and advance together on the way to your kingdom.

Let your Church be a living witness to truth and freedom, to justice and peace, that all people may be lifted up by the hope of a world made new.

From the Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, © 1994, ICEL Inc. All rights reserved.

If you would like to find out more about the Church's Social Teaching or ways you can get involved in the Church's work for justice, contact the Catholic Justice & Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Brisbane on (07) 3336 9173 or e-mail arndtp@bne.catholic.net.au or write to The Catholic Justice & Peace Commission of Brisbane, GPO Box 282, Brisbane Q 4001.

