

# Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

- [Life and Dignity of the Human Person](#)
- [Call to Family, Community, and Participation](#)
- [Rights and Responsibilities](#)
- [Option for the Poor and Vulnerable](#)
- [The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers](#)
- [Solidarity](#)
- [Care for God's Creation](#)

**1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person:** The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This is the foundation of all social teaching principles. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. The value of human life is being threatened by embryonic stem cell research, unregulated sperm and egg donation, the deconstruction of the natural family, which perpetuates family separation and fragmentation, and the use of the death penalty.

Additionally, the intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong. Catholic teaching also calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding increasingly effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means. We believe that every person is precious, that people and their basic well-being are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

**2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation:** The person is not only sacred but social. How we organize our society, in economics and politics, and in law and public policy, directly affects human dignity and our individual capacities to grow and flourish in our communities.

Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. In the family, moral values are taught, and the spiritual heritage of a religious community and the cultural legacy of the nation are transmitted. In the family, we learn social responsibility, solidarity, and realize our God-given potential and dignity as women and men.

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, vulnerable and the weakest among us.

**3. Rights and Responsibilities:** The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if basic 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, especially our children, and to the larger society.

**4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable:** A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put first the needs of the most vulnerable, including children, the poor and the marginalized.

**5. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers:** The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

**6. Solidarity:** We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers and sisters keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that if you want peace, work for justice.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

**7. Care for God's Creation:** We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

*Reference: Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1998) and Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2003).*

## Faithful Citizenship update

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 4, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

[The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has decided](#) [1] to “re-propose” its document “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” to American Catholics in advance of next year’s national elections, making no changes to the document itself, which passed overwhelmingly in 2007, adding only an “Introductory Note” to the text.

The decision not to change the core document was made by the Administrative Committee of the USCCB after consultation with the plenary meeting in June. It does not require confirmation by the plenary session of the USCCB next month, although bishops could ask for it to be placed on the agenda. The “Introductory Note” was signed by Archbishop Timothy Dolan, President of the USCCB, and all nine chairmen of relevant USCCB Committees, including Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington and Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles.

In recent months, some conservative activists have called on the USCCB to change “Faithful Citizenship.” (More on that below.) But, the bishops rightly concluded that “Faithful Citizenship” is a teaching document and the Church’s teachings do not change. Nonetheless, it is stunning that three years into the presidency of Barack Obama, and despite some of the forebodings many bishops entertained at what the Obama presidency would entail, the bishops did not perceive a need to fundamentally re-appraise their stance. Indeed, this decision is of a piece with their decision not to support efforts to repeal Obama’s signature health care reform law. They may be ambivalent about that law, but they have been clear that they would like to see it fixed not repealed. The bishops are not climbing on board the Tea Party bandwagon anytime soon.

The most obvious feature of “Faithful Citizenship” is the great respect it shows for the intelligence and the autonomy of lay Catholics. The bishops note that they are not telling anyone how to vote: Their job as teachers is to help lay Catholics form their conscience. Conscience is not a pail into which you throw this or that teaching. Conscience is the voice of God speaking within the heart and mind of the believer. The Church’s bishops must help lay Catholics to hear that voice, but they cannot dictate this or that policy position in such a way as to eliminate the need for the individual believer to listen to their own conscience and reach their own conclusions. “All consciences are not the same,” as Judge John Noonan said in his glorious Laetare Address at Notre Dame’s 2009 commencement.

The bishops’ “Introductory note” contains this important passage: “[Faithful Citizenship] does not offer a voters guide, scorecard of issues, or direction on how to vote. It applies Catholic

moral principles to a range of important issues and warns against misguided appeals to ‘conscience’ to ignore fundamental moral claims, to reduce Catholic moral concerns to one or two matters, or to justify choices simply to advance partisan, ideological, or personal interests.” This is masterfully done. On the one hand, they affirm that the rights of conscience do not mean that any Catholic is free to believe whatever they want and invoke religious sanction for their stance. On the other hand, and I suspect this phrase will especially rankle those on the right, the bishops decry any effort to “reduce Catholic moral concerns to one or two matters.”

The bishops highlight six “current and fundamental problems” in the American political landscape: abortion, infringements on religious liberty, the defense of traditional marriage, the economic crisis that has afflicted the poor and the vulnerable most especially, the need for comprehensive immigration reform, and war and military issues. Three from the right and three from the left and, more importantly, all six are drawn from the self-same Catholic commitment to human dignity.

Back in July, [Deal Hudson and Matt Brown of Catholic Advocate wrote](#) [2]:

We’re told that no substantial edits are being made to the 2008 version of the document, so that we can expect the 2012 version to be roughly the same as its predecessor. If so, this is a problem and needs to be remedied. The 2008 version of “Faithful Citizenship” contains several passages (Sections 34-37) that are capable of overly broad interpretation. Groups like Catholics United and Catholic Democrats cherry-picked the following passage from Section 35 for prominent display on their web sites and in their printed materials. “There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate’s unacceptable position may decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil.” [emphasis added].

Of course, Hudson and Bowman want Catholics to think that you can only vote for pro-life candidates. Hudson and Bowman are sincere in their pro-life commitment. I do not know Bowman but I consider Hudson a friend and can, without fear of contradiction, assert that he is also a sincere Republican. But, he misunderstands the moral considerations with which a voter enters the voting booth. An election is never a referendum on abortion. A voter must consider the likelihood of a pro-life candidate being able to actually achieve anything for the pro-life cause. Seeing as the GOP has controlled the White House for 24 of the 38 years since *Roe v. Wade*, a voter might reasonably conclude that another four years will not achieve much. Indeed, the pro-life movement is still waiting for a sitting GOP president to bestir himself to walk the few hundred yards from his office to the annual Right-to-Life March, instead of calling in by phone, a practice that conflates the metaphor of “lip service” with the reality of GOP political use of the pro-life cause.

The bishops’ document and the new Introductory Note do not suggest that Catholics can, in good conscience, fail to consider a politician’s stance on abortion. But, no Catholic voter can also fail to consider a candidate’s position on immigration. And, the bishops, or at any rate most bishops, thankfully, do not engage in the shell game that Hudson et al., favor. They often say, “What

other grave moral concern outweighs abortion?" The obvious answer is that there is none. But, in the voting booth, we are not comparing abortion with immigration, we are not weighing the moral weight of one issue against another. We are choosing candidates who may or may not have a reasonable position, and a reasonable path to affecting political change, on any given issue. Prudential judgment is required to assess the likelihood of a given candidate's ability to enact his position. And, a politician must exercise prudential judgment in deciding what approach is most likely to achieve a desired moral outcome.

There is one other truly, and perpetually, stunning fact about Catholic involvement in political life, one that is too infrequently mentioned. When a Presbyterian or a Methodist runs for office, no ink is spilt analyzing how that candidate's faith will affect his politics. But, when a Catholic runs for office, all hell breaks loose. This is a testimony to the vibrancy of the Catholic Church. Even the mainstream media, which so often ignores or misunderstands the Church, grasp the fact that Catholicism makes a difference in the lives of its members.

In "Faithful Citizenship" and in their new Introductory Note, the bishops recognize that our Catholic faith must not only make a difference in the lives of candidates, but in the lives of voters too. There is no cut-and-dried formula for getting from the empty tomb of Jesus Christ to the decision which lever to pull in the voting booth. Conscience must play a part. The bishops have done a great service not only to the Church but to the Republic in suggesting that each and every voter must seriously form their conscience and consult that conscience when they vote. And they have correctly measured their own role in the formation of that conscience. The bishops' job is not to tell people how to vote. It is to tell them how to form their conscience. Kudos to Archbishop Dolan and the other nine committee chairmen who signed the Introductory Note for recognizing the gravity as well as the complexity of citizenship in our day.

# *Social Justice Themes In The Bible*

## **Stage I - CHARITY**

### **Genesis 14:20 – The Concept of Tithing**

“Then Abram (Abraham) gave him (Melchizedek) a tenth of everything.”

### **Tobit 4:7-11 – Giving Alms**

“Give alms from your possession. Do not turn your face away from any of the poor, and God’s face will not be turned away from you.”

### **Sirach 4:1-10 – Showing charity toward the poor**

“From the needy turn not your eyes, give no man reason to curse you.”

### **Sirach 29:11 – The Proper Attitude Toward Riches**

“Keeping watch over riches wastes the flesh, and the care of wealth drives away rest.”

### **Sirach 35:9-10 – Giving to the Lord according to your means**

“Give to the Most High as He has given to you, generously, according to your means. For the Lord is one who always repays, and he will give back to you seven-fold.”

### **Amos 6:1-6 – Woe to the oppressive rich**

“Woe to the complacent in Zion, to the overconfident on the mount of Samaria.”

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## **Matthew 6:19-21 – Your Treasure in Heaven**

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroys, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroy, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”

## **Matthew 6:24 – God and Money**

“No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You can not serve both God and money.”

## **Luke 12:13-21 – One’s worth is not determined by what one owns**

“Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions.”

## **Luke 12:33-34 – Dependence on God**

“Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach or moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”

## **Luke 18:18-25 – The Rich Young Man**

“There is still one thing left for you: sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.”

## **Luke 19:1-10 – Zaccheus and his moment of conversion**

“Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I shall repay it four times over.”

## **Luke 21:1-4 – The poor widow’s contribution**

“I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest; for those others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.”

## **1 Timothy 6:7-10 – Love of money is the root of all evil**

“For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains.”

Hebrews 13:5

Matt 4:23

## **Stage II - SERVICE**

### **Exodus 23:9 – Mercy and kindness toward aliens**

“You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.”

Psalm 72

### **Psalm 82:3-4 – Rescue the lowly and the poor**

“Defend the lowly and fatherless; render justice to the needy and afflicted and needy. Rescue the lowly and poor; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

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### **Matthew 7:12 – The Golden Rule**

“Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets.”

### **Matthew 25:31-46 – The Judgment of the Nations**

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.”

“Amen I say to you, whatever you did for these least brothers (and sisters) of mine you did for me.”

### **Luke 16:19-31 – The Rich Man and Lazarus**

“There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table.”

### **1 Peter 4:10-11 – Be hospitable to one another**

“Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

### **1 John 3:17-18 – Compassion for those in need**

“If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? Children, let us love not in word or speech, but in deed and truth.”

## **Stage III - ADVOCACY**

### **Proverbs 31:8-9 – Be an advocate for the voiceless**

“Open your mouth on behalf of the dumb, and for the rights of the destitute. Open your mouth, decree what is just, defend the needy and the poor!”

### **Jeremiah 22:3 – Rescue the victim from the oppressor**

“Thus says the Lord: Do what is right and just. Rescue the victim from the hand of the oppressor.”

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### **Luke 10:29-37 – The Good Samaritan**

Jesus replied, “A man fell in with robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped him and beat him and went off leaving him half dead.”

“But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’”

## **Stage IV - JUSTICE**

### **Psalm 34:16-18 – The Lord hears and protects the just**

“The Lord has eyes for the just and ears for their cry.”

“When the just cry out, the Lord hears and rescues them from all distress.”

### **Proverbs 21:3 – Justice is more pleasing than sacrifice**

“To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.”

### **Sirach 27:8**

“If you strive after justice you will attain it, and put it on like a splendid robe.”

### **Isaiah 10:1-2 – Bad legislators can deny human rights**

“Woe to those who enact unjust statutes and who write oppressive decrees. Depriving the needy of judgment and robbing my people’s poor of their rights. Making widows their plunder, and orphans their prey!”

### **Isaiah 58:6-7 – Setting Free the Oppressed**

“This rather is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke. Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke. Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless. Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own.”

### **Amos 5:23-24 – True conversion that leads to justice**

“But if you would offer me holocausts, then let justice surge like water, and goodness like an unfailing stream.”

### **Micah 6:8 – Act justly and walk humbly with God**

“You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

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## **Matthew 23:23-24 – Do not neglect justice and mercy**

“Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others.”

## **James 2:14-26 – Faith and Works**

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of them says to the, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also, faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

Daniel 12:3

Matt 5:10

# *Social Justice Documents of the Catholic Church*

**1891 – Rerum Novarum**

*Pope Leo XIII*

“The Condition of Labor”

**1931 – Quadragesimo Anno**

*Pope Pius XII*

“Reconstruction of the Social Order”

**1961- Mater et Magistra**

*Pope John XXIII*

“Christianity and Social Progress”

**1963- Pacem en Terris**

*Pope John XXIII*

“Peace on Earth”

**1965 – Gaudium et Spes**

*Second Vatican Council*

“The Church in the Modern World”

**1967 – Populorum Progressio**

*Pope Paul VI*

“The Development of Peoples”

**1971 – Octogesima Adveniens**

*Pope Paul VI*

“A Call to Action”

**1971 – Justice in the World**

*Synod of Bishops*

**1975 – Evangelii Nuntiandi**

*Pope Paul VI*

“Evangelization in the Modern World”

**1979 – Brothers and Sisters To Us**      *United States Bishops*

*(Statement on Racism)*

**1980 – Statement of the U.S. Bishops on Capital Punishment**

**1981 – Laborem Exercens**

*Pope John Paul II*

“On Human Work”

**1983 – The Challenge of Peace**

*United States Bishops*

**1986 - Economic Justice for All**

*United States Bishops*

**1987 – Sollicitudo Rei Socialis**

*Pope John Paul II*

“On Social Concern”

**1991 – Centesimus Annus**

*Pope John Paul II*

“The Hundredth Year” (*since Rerum Novarum*)

**1991 – Renewing the Earth**

*United States Bishops*

**1991 – Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines**

*Issued by the USCC*

**1995 – Evangelium Vitae**

“The Gospel of Life”

*Pope John Paul II*

**2009 – Caritas in Veritate**

“Charity in Truth”

*Pope Benedict XVI*

**2013 – Lumen Fidei**

“The Light of Faith”

*Pope Francis*

**2013 – Evangelii Gaudium**

“The Joy of the Gospel”

*Pope Francis*

# Social Justice

## *Moving from Charity to Justice*

	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III	Stage IV
	<u>Charity</u>	<u>Service</u>	<u>Advocacy</u>	<u>Justice</u>
<u>Giving</u>	Money	Time	Heart	Power
<u>Relation- ship</u>	Distance	Temporary Contact	Identification	Community
<u>Method</u>	Donations	Volunteer / Direct Service	Legal / Procedural	Organizing
<u>Focus</u>	Situational	Individuals	Causes	Systems and Structures