

# Faith Formation

## Catholic Social Teaching

S t . I g n a t i u s L o y o l a P a r i s h

### Seven Themes of CST

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## What is Catholic Social Teaching?

It has been joked that Catholic Social Teaching is the best kept secret of the Catholic Church. It certainly should not be kept secret for it really is a gift from the Church to our society and to our selves.

What makes it perfect for Lent is that Lent is not so much about "giving up" as it is about conversion, that is turning towards God and grace. The various documents that are the foundation of Catholic Social Teaching are a rich mix of articulation of various social ills, a contemplation of the gospel and their application to these issues. As an example, consider how the Catholic Bishops of the U.S. responded to the disparity of wealth:

***"Our faith calls us to measure this economy not only by what it produces, but also by how it touches human life and whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person. Economic decisions have human***

***consequences and moral content; they help or hurt people, strengthen or weaken family life, advance or diminish the quality of justice in our land."*** [Economic Justice for All](#), 1986

Such statements call our attention to the moral dimension of so many different aspects of our lives. The Gospel speaks not simply to our individual salvation, but rather to the salvation of all in our relationships with God and with one another.

***"With her social teaching the Church seeks to proclaim the Gospel and make it present in the complex network of social relations."*** [Compendium of the Social doctrine of the Church](#), 2004

But Church documents are long, hard and not very interesting. It is true that there is a lot packed into these pages, often too much to digest in a single sitting. Yet, like poetry, many of these documents need quiet, prayer, contemplation, repetition and maybe even selective reading.

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## Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

Above is a listing of the [Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching \(CST\)](#). This Lent we ask folks to contemplate one of the themes during each of the weeks of Lent. It doesn't have to be a Lenten penance. In fact, each teaching can open for you new fonts of understanding

with regards to the scriptures.

Our first theme is, "[Life and Dignity of the Human Person.](#)" Many might jump ahead and believe that this theme centers on the issues of abortion and embryonic research. Surprise, it is about human life at all stages and in all places. Concerning the measure of

value we place on all life, the bishops respond "***We believe that every person is precious, that people 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.***"

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(Continued from "What is Catholic Social Teaching?")

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Finding God in All Things

When reading a research document, one doesn't stop to read all the footnotes. Yet with Church documents, it's almost as if the footnotes (supporting documentation and historical references) are interspersed in the text. A quick glossing of such can leave you fresh for the gist, the vision and the import of the document.

While I've just said what's bad with Church documents, let me follow with some of the wonders. Most documents are laced with examples from scripture. Pope Francis' recent encyclical "Fratelli Tutti" is crafted around the story of the Good Samaritan. It is a wonderful example of scripture applied to our world today. As such, Church documents can open the scripture to application in our life here and now. So too with all of Catholic Social Teaching.

In my younger days folks would wear bracelets that were inscribed with WWJD, "What would Jesus do?" The principles of Catholic Social Teaching give us that answer. They are indeed worth a reading.

[Begin here](#) for a listing of all seven themes. [Click here](#) for a handout listing all seven. A wonderful [children's version is here](#).

### Seven Themes of CST (Continued)

Tie this statement back to the scriptural reference of Psalm 139:13-16. ***"You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know...."*** and one can begin to see that the institutions of our society need to be responsive to such a vision of the person. It is not enough to say someone is a client, a citizen or a constituent. An institution only meets the needs of society when it recognizes and acts in such a manner that they see the person in front of them, one wonderfully made and known by God.

**"Call to Family, Community and Participation":** The Church recognizes that humans are social. As such they have a

right not only to health and well-being but to participation in life of society. This means participation in the government, in the church and in our communities. The most notable aspect of our social nature is the gift of family. We seek in all our institutions, laws and policies, which supports the integrity of our families as well as participation in education, health care, proper housing, political representation as well as religious affiliation. The Church cites Jeremiah 7:5-7 as a scriptural foundation for this theme: ***"If you act justly with one another, God will dwell in the land."***

**"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. For in Isaiah 1:16-17 we find the command to ***seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.***

**"Option for the Poor and Vulnerable":** ***"The Church's love for the poor . . . is a part of her constant tradition." This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor. . . . (Catechism 2444, 2448)***

Follow the embedded links and learn more about these first four themes. Next month we will continue the list and the wonderful story and history of Catholic Social Teaching.