

# **The Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching <sup>1</sup>**

## **(1) Life and Dignity of the Human Person**

### **-All People are Sacred, Made in the Image and Likeness of God-**

*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 belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. The value of human life is being threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. 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 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.*

Pope John Paul II articulated Catholic teaching of human life and human dignity as the Gospel of Life in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae (On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life)*. From conception until natural death – and at every point in between, human life is to be defended and developed. Catholic Charities is an institutional expression of that commitment to human life, from “womb to tomb.” Catholic Charities believes in the sacredness of every life, no matter how challenged by poverty, abuse, disease, or disability. Every person, regardless of race, sex, and social class, born and unborn, has dignity and potential which flows from being created in the image and likeness of God.

## **(2) Call to Family, Community and Participation**

### **-The Human Person is Both Sacred and Social – When One Suffers We All Suffer-**

*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. Catholic Charities believes that the common good, the full flourishing of all people, is best served by the promotion of strong marriages and responsible parenthood. As the smallest social unit in society, the family’s protection and strengthening is essential to the flourishing of larger social units. As an organization, Catholic Charities practices subsidiarity, the principle that larger social entities should not take on roles that smaller social entities can successfully perform on their own unless the smaller entity becomes incapable of performing the role. This principle is the reason Catholic Charities encourages client participation in the decisions which affect their lives.*

## **(3) Rights and Responsibilities**

### **-People Have a Fundamental Right to Life, Food, Shelter, Health Care, Education, and Employment-**

*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.*

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<sup>1</sup> From “*Catholic In Charity & In Identity*”, Catholic Charities USA, 2010

Many of the specific programs Catholic Charities implements flow from human rights – what a person is due simply by being made in the image and likeness of God: food, clothing, shelter, and medical care, to name a few. At the same time, many Catholic Charities staff members work with clients to help them take ownership of their own responsibilities: to work, to care for children, to heal broken relationships. The wisdom required is the discernment of which approach is needed at a given moment.

#### **(4) Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

##### **-The Moral Test of a Society is How It Treats Its Most Vulnerable Members-**

*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 (Matthew-25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.*

Through its education, advocacy, and public policy work, Catholic Charities offers both analysis of how the most vulnerable members of our nation are faring and vehicles for action for Catholics and other agencies, groups, and associations concerned about poor and vulnerable people. The Catholic Charities USA Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America offers a national forum for local agencies to unity policymakers and all people of goodwill toward a common mission of cutting poverty in half. These efforts at times require a prophetic stance, and in other instances a convening role, bringing people of differing views to the table.

#### **(5)The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers**

##### **-The Economy Exists to Serve People, Not the Other Way Around-**

*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 God's continuing creation of the world. 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.*

*The righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:31-46)*

Catholic Charities promotes the dignity of work and the rights of workers in many parts of the country by removing internal and external barriers to work for poor and vulnerable people. As an employer, Catholic Charities is committed to the dignity of its workforce. As the CCUSA Code of Ethics states: "Employment with the Catholic Charities agency involves the development of a mutual relationship between the organization and the individual staff member that is guided by the values of respect, openness, and transparency."

## **(6) Solidarity**

### **-We are Called to Work Globally for Justice-**

*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, "If you want peace, work for justice." 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.*

For Catholic Charities, this principle of Catholic social teaching points us in four important directions. First, our CCUSA Code of Ethics affirms that solidarity with the poor places a responsibility on staff and boards to "engage those served to have a representative voice in decisions impacting policies and programs...Structures and processes for obtaining appropriate input from stakeholders" are also necessary. Second, the principle of solidarity animates Catholic Charities' efforts to fight racism, particularly as it relates to poverty in America. Third, exercising its convening role, Catholic Charities works to build strong relationships of solidarity between the non-poor and people living in poverty. Finally, as an agency of a global church, Catholic Charities ministers in solidarity with sister agencies throughout the world in the network of Caritas Internationalis.

## **(7) Care for God's Creation**

### **-The Earth is the Lord's – Love, Protect, and Respect It-**

*We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan; it 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.*

Catholic Charities recognizes both the interdependence of all of God's creation and the disproportionate health affects that people living in poverty experience from environmental degradation. The environmental justice dimensions of Catholic Charities ministries cannot be overlooked. In addition, members of the Catholic Charities USA network must practice good stewardship in God's creation by engaging in sustainable environmental practices.