

# Catholic Social Teaching



Catholic social teaching is part of the Catholic intellectual and moral tradition rooted in the Bible and developed through history. Modern Catholic social teaching finds its origin in Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which addressed the conditions of workers and the moral economic order in the industrialized world. Since that time, a number of popes, bishops, and councils of bishops have written documents responding to the social issues of the day. These documents, along with applications and reflections from practitioners and scholars, make up the broader Catholic social tradition. The University of St. Thomas embraces Catholic social teaching and actively participates in Catholic social tradition. Here are seven key points of Catholic social teaching.

## TWO FOUNDATIONAL CONVICTIONS

### Promote, protect, encounter the dignity of persons.

Created in God's image, all persons have fundamental dignity. From this dignity flow the moral claims to the freedoms, the fulfillment of basic needs, and the social conditions necessary for their development. Persons experience their dignity and the dignity of others most fully in the giving and receiving that comes within a variety of relationships.

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### Work for the common good.

The common good is the sum total of social conditions that allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily. Working for the common good is a social expression of love, meeting the needs of neighbors within the dimensions of one's life. It "sees" the particular community as it is and as it could be, it "judges" social processes by the requirements of justice, and it "acts" to support or change the processes to enhance the development of persons and their dignity.

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## FOUR PARTICULAR THEMES

### Give priority to the poor, the powerless, and the marginalized.

Throughout Scripture, we see God's love for the poor; indeed, Jesus identifies himself with the poor. Thus, we are called to make a "preferential option for the poor." In charity we care for the immediate needs of the poor, giving them something that is our own. In justice we respond to the social practices that work against the inclusion of the marginalized into full participation in society, enabling them to have what is due them.

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### Work for peace and the development of peoples.

Conflict will always be a part of life, but violence does not have to be. We are to actively take part in actions and practices to make violence and war less likely. These include understanding and addressing the causes of conflict, building relationships, and working for the development of persons, nations, and groups.

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### Recognize the dignity of work and the rights of workers.

Work is a key element of the social order. It provides the material means for persons to develop, the opportunity for self-expression, the foundation for the support of the family, and it contributes to the well-being of society. The significance of work primarily resides in the worker and thus the worker has moral claims to appropriate working conditions and compensation.

5

### Care for creation.

Creation is the order of God's love and a place for us to encounter God. The earth is the common home of persons, meant for the use of all people and the rest of God's creatures. Our flourishing, the hope of future generations, and the integrity of the earth are bound to our concern for and responsible stewardship of God's interconnected creation.

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## THE INTEGRATIVE THEME

### Live mercy, solidarity, and love.

Love of neighbor is the primary social responsibility of Christians and is at the heart of Catholic social teaching. With solidarity we see other persons and nations, whether next to us or across the globe, as neighbors loved by God. It impels us to do justice and to transcend justice with compassion and mercy.

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# Some Ways to Live Catholic Social Teaching at the University of St. Thomas

## **Promote, protect, encounter the dignity of persons.**

Volunteer at one of the 17 Catholic Charities sites in the Twin Cities • Support campaigns that advocate safe, affordable and accessible housing • Speak up when you see someone be treated unjustly • Support the Keystone Foodmobile initiative.

## **Work for the common good.**

Join UST's Catholic Relief Services program -- advocate on concerns including human trafficking, climate change, global hunger and migration • Participate in a service project with your residence hall • Join a club or organization that has a Changemaker focus • Take a Community Engagement course.

## **Give priority to the poor, the powerless, and the marginalized.**

Engage in the President's Plan to Combat Racism and attend training to discuss and address racism in our communities • Learn about marginalized communities in our country, in our city, and on our campus • Volunteer with Meals on Wheels.

## **Work for peace and the development of peoples.**

Volunteer with the Tutor Mentor Program • Participate in a VISION global community-building and learning trip • Join Peace Meals for intercultural/faith dialogue • Learn about opportunities for restorative justice on campus • Choose to engage with people outside of our own community who have different life experiences • Apply to be an interfaith leader or attend a program with the Jay Phillips Center.

## **Recognize the dignity of work and the rights of workers.**

Participate in Staff Council • Respect and value the many people around campus who work to make your life easier • Support fair trade • Be an ethical consumer.

## **Care for creation.**

Be mindful of your personal consumption habits • Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle • Choose sustainable modes of transportation • Volunteer in the St. Thomas Sustainability Garden • Participate in the Annual St. Thomas Day Service Project • Join a student club like BrightSide Ambassadors, Engineers for a Sustainable World, or the Sustainability Club • Learn about the university's sustainability initiatives.

Take a class that addresses one of these issues • Research one of these topics for class • Stop by one of our chapels, prayer rooms, or reflective places and pray for peace and justice in our times • Spread the word around campus • Be a morally responsible leader. Think critically. Act wisely. Work skillfully. Advance the common good.