

Preferential option for poor and vulnerable people

Through our words, prayers and deeds we must show solidarity with the poor. In public policy, we must always keep the “preferential option for the poor” at the forefront. The moral test for society is how it treats its most vulnerable members.

Pope Benedict XVI has said that “love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is *as essential* as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel” (*Deus caritas est*).

Solidarity

Solidarity is the principle that binds people together and cuts across divisions of race, class and culture. All people belong to one human family.

Solidarity calls on us to welcome strangers – including foreigners, refugees and immigrants – and to oppose unjust and oppressive social conditions and structures.

Care for God’s creation

The Biblical vision of justice encompasses much more than civil society – it covers *right relationships* between all members of God’s creation, and between human beings and God.

The “goods of the earth” are gifts from God, and we must not use and abuse the natural resources God has given us with a destructive consumer mentality. We must be responsible stewards.

Social Issues pamphlets are published by the Justice and Peace group under the auspices of the Parish Pastoral Council to make known the social teachings of the Church.

This pamphlet aims to help you to view your world as our shared world, and to respond by living generously and responsibly through prayer and action wherever you are called to live out your Christian life.

Want to work with the J&P group?

Or simply be on the mailing list? Or do you have ideas about what we should be doing to make social justice a *living issue* in our parish – in every sense of the word?

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Further sources of information

[http:// www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0223](http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0223)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_social_teaching

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Paulines Publications Africa (2004)

The *Compendium* is available from the Paulines’ Catholic Bookshop, 118 Queen Street, Kensington, Johannesburg - 011 622 5195

JUSTICE & PEACE ROSEBANK

THE SOCIAL TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH

“If you want peace, work for justice.”

Pope Paul VI

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LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF!

In our personal lives, as we know, the Church teaches us that our faith is lived out in relation both to God and to other people, and that these dimensions are inseparable. Our faith is inescapably about *moral responsibility*.

But moral responsibility isn't only about our immediate personal relationships – though that is where our first duties are found.

Our responsibilities lie in concentric circles: we have duties and responsibilities in our families, and also in the wider society: as members of a society where there are people in need; as employers and employees; as citizens and voters; as decision-makers with the capacity to shape our societies; as part of the human community responsible for God's creation here and now, and as custodians for future generations.

The Church's social teachings encompass Catholic doctrine relating to the collective welfare of humanity as an integral part of our Christian duties. A distinctive feature is the concern for the poorest members of society.

This reaches back in time to the Old Testament, building on elements of Jewish law and the prophetic books. At its heart are the words of Jesus, that “whatever you have done for one of the least of my brothers, you have done to me.” (Matthew 25.40)

In its engagement with the challenges of the modern world, the foundations of contemporary Catholic social teaching were laid in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum (On Capital and Labour)*.

THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD

Successive popes - and Vatican II - have added to and developed the Church's body of social teaching, principally through the medium of encyclical letters.

Over the past century – marked by the most bitter and violent ideological and political confrontations – Catholic social doctrine has been distinctive for its steadfast defence of human dignity and its consistent critiques of the social and political ideologies of both the left and the right.

Communism, capitalism, socialism, Nazism, conservatism, liberalism and libertarianism have all been criticized and condemned - at least in their pure forms - by the popes at various times.

What can we do?

Our South African society is violent and fractured. Poverty, unemployment, and crime are stark realities. Corruption is rife in politics and business. Public figures speak and act irresponsibly and divisively. Far too many of the poorest of the poor are still waiting for democracy to deliver. Many of us are tempted by negativity, fear and despair.

Our deepest values as Christians are also challenged and undermined by many powerful forces in contemporary global culture – but let's not be too surprised by that. After all, though we rejoice in Creation, and the Incarnation, in many ways Christianity must always stand in opposition to “the world”.

But we live in this world. The Church tells us that the laity have a special responsibility for the common good of society. Wherever we are, we must think clearly, speak courageously, and act with vision.

SEVEN KEY THEMES

The sanctity and dignity of human life

From conception to natural death, human life must be valued infinitely above all material possessions (*Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II). Opposition to abortion is just the beginning of the story. We must do everything we can to protect, secure and enhance the well-being of children, young people and adults at every stage of their lives.

We are members of the community

We have social, economic and political rights - and duties - as members of our community. Conversely, every social institution, including the state, must be judged by what it does for the life and dignity of people in their actual circumstances and the common good.

Rights and responsibilities

Every person has the right to life and the necessities of life, as well as the right to what is required to live a full and decent life - education, health care, and employment (and in its absence, welfare support). The Church endorses private property but not as an absolute right. All rights must be exercised responsibly and carry corresponding duties towards others.

Dignity of work and the rights of workers

Societies must pursue economic justice, and the economy must serve the people, not the other way round. Employers must contribute to the common good through the services and products they provide; and also by creating jobs that uphold the dignity and rights of workers. Workers too have responsibilities – at the very least to provide a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.