

SOCIAL JUSTICE, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION PALMERSTON NORTH

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Sub-committees:

- a. Church & Land
- b. Living Wage
- c. Anti-euthanasia
- d. Lenten Programme
- e. Social Justice Week
- f. Industrial social justice matters

PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Catholic social teaching is a body of thought on social issues that has been developed by the Church over the past hundred years. It reflects Gospel values of love, peace, justice, compassion, reconciliation, service and community in the context of modern social problems. We can trace the beginnings of Catholic social teaching back to 1891 when Pope Leo XIII wrote the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. In this document, Pope Leo set out some basic guiding principles and Christian values that should influence the way societies and countries operate. It talked about the right, for example, to work, to own private property, to receive a just wage, and to organise into workers' associations.

Human Dignity

Every single person is created in the image of God. Therefore they are invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family. The dignity of the person grants them inalienable rights – political, legal, social, and economic rights. This is the most important principle because it is from our dignity as human persons that all other rights and responsibilities flow.

Human Equality

Equality of all people comes from their inherent human dignity. Differences in talents are part of God's plan, but social, cultural, and economic discrimination is not.

Respect for Human Life

All people, through every stage of life, have inherent dignity and a right to life that is consistent with that dignity. Human life at every stage is precious and therefore worthy of protection and respect.

The Principle of Association

The human person is not only sacred but also social. The way we organise society directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to develop. People achieve fulfilment by association with others – in families and other social institutions. As the centrepiece of society, the family must be protected, and its stability never undermined.

The Principle of Participation

People have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the well being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. Everyone has the right not to be shut out from participating in those institutions necessary for human fulfilment, such as work, education, and political participation.

The Principle of the Common Good

Individual rights are always experienced within the context of promotion of the common good. The common good is about respecting the rights and responsibilities of all people. The individual does not have unfettered rights at the expense of others, but nor are individual rights to be subordinated to the needs of the group.

The Principle of Solidarity

We are one human family. Our responsibilities to each other transcend national, racial, economic and ideological differences. We are called to work globally for justice. The principle of solidarity requires of us that we not concern ourselves solely with our own individual lives. We need to be aware of what is going on in the world around us.

Preferential Protection for the Poor and Vulnerable

Our Catholic tradition instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. The good of society as a whole requires it. It is especially important we look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor.

The Principle of Stewardship

We have a responsibility to care for the gifts God has given us. This includes the environment, our personal talents and other resources.

The Universal Destination of Goods

The earth and all it produces is intended for every person. Private ownership is acceptable, but there is also a responsibility to ensure all have enough to live in dignity. If we have more than we need, there is a social mortgage to pay to ensure others do not go without.

The Principle of Subsidiarity

No higher level of organisation (such as government) should perform any function that can best be handled at a lower level (such as families and local communities) by those who are closer to the issues or problems.

<http://www.catholic.org.nz/social-action/dsp-default.cfm?loadref=62>