



A FUTURE  
FULL OF HOPE

*Catholic Social Teaching*



Catholic Social Teaching is not a new phenomenon it is rooted in scripture and its principles have always guided Catholics in their relationship with the world and with each other. In its present form it is said to have originated in 1891 with the encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum*. This document called for the protection of the weak and the poor through the pursuit of justice. Since then, a wealth of teaching continues to give new life to the Scriptures and shape the Church's response to our modern world. From the beginning of his Pontificate, Pope Francis has stressed our need to take seriously these principles and try to live by them. "An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it."<sup>1</sup> Catholic Social Teaching is often thought of as having seven major themes;

- *The dignity of work and the rights of the worker*
- *solidarity with all people*
- *a preferential option for the poor*
- *stewardship and care for creation*
- *the call to community and participation*
- *the sacredness of life and the dignity of the human person*
- *human rights and the responsibility to protect them*

These themes echo through our lives and have a particular resonance today. When looking at these themes you can see that many of them are interconnected.

In our schools we strive to present a vision of life based on the Gospel. The Gospel finds its lived expression as we try to live out these principles. Some of these themes, perhaps in particular our care of creation and our solidarity with all people, are particularly important to young people today.

This is an opportunity to review how we develop and live out Catholic Social Teaching in our schools today.

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<sup>1</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* par 184



## Stewardship and the Care for Creation

In 2015, Pope Francis wrote a ‘letter to the world’ bringing together decades of Church teaching in the encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. This letter begins by reminding us that in his canticle our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. However he goes on: *“This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her”*.<sup>2</sup> Even before this encyclical our own Catholic Bishops’ Conference had in 2002 already called for urgent action to prevent more damage being done to the earth. *“A way of life that disregards and damages God’s creation, forces the poor into greater poverty, and threatens the right of future generations to a healthy environment and to their fair share of the earth’s wealth and resources, is contrary to the vision of the Gospel.”*<sup>3</sup> This document goes on to remind us of some key principles including the idea that creation reveals God so that when we allow creation to be degraded and damaged we lose our sense of God’s very self. It goes on to ask that we do the following things:

- We educate ourselves so that we can make right choices
- We need to take personal responsibility for our actions and not make it somebody else’s problem
- We need to try to live simply
- We need to act in partnership with others to bring about change.

### Questions for Leaders and Governors

- How do you educate your school community in environmental awareness?
- What informs the choices you make about the school environment?
- How do you encourage your school community to live in a simpler way?
- How do you help pupils to appreciate, and develop a sense of responsibility for, creation?
- How do you work in partnership with others to care for creation?

### Resources

- The Call to Creation Bishops’ Conference 2002
- *Laudato Si’* Pope Francis 2015
- Materials from CAFOD on both ‘Live Simply’ and the environment.

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<sup>2</sup> *Laudato Si’* 2015 para 2

<sup>3</sup> The Call to Creation 2002

*“In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers [or sisters] of mine, you did it to me.” MT 25:40*



## Solidarity with all People

Solidarity begins with the idea that all of us, created in the image and likeness of God, are part of one family. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we are reminded that; *“The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren.”*<sup>4</sup> It is clear in the Gospel that loving your neighbour, especially the ‘least of your brethren’ becomes an act of solidarity towards God. Solidarity is an act of love. Just as there is solidarity between individuals we also aim for solidarity between and within institutions and nations. In practice, signs that show our solidarity with others are the way we love and serve each other, by the way we are involved in social issues like the treatment of refugees and the homeless, by the way we show respect for, and engage in dialogue with, those from other cultures, races, religions. In our world today over 1.3 billion people live below the agreed UN poverty line, Pope Francis reminds us that *“The many situations of inequality, poverty and injustice, are signs not only of a profound lack of fraternity, but also of the absence of a culture of solidarity”*.<sup>5</sup>

### Questions for Leaders and Governors

- How do you educate the school community in aspects of Solidarity?
- What practical steps does your school have in place to show solidarity with others?
- What opportunities do pupils have to help others?
- How do pupils grow to understand and show respect for other cultures, races, religions?
- What does your school community do to support other schools in different parts of the world?

### Resources

- <http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/themes/solidarity/reflection/> A website about Catholic Social Teaching
- Pope Francis’ messages for various World Day of Peace. Download from <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/index.html>
- CAFOD: Projects for schools in global partnerships
- The work of Missio. Secondary <https://missio.org.uk/> Primary <https://missiontogether.org.uk/>
- The Common Good in Education Bishops’ Conference 1996

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<sup>4</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1397

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis: Message for World Day of Peace 2014

**“So God created humankind<sup>1</sup> in his image,  
in the image of God he created them” Gen1:27**



## **The sacredness of life and the dignity of the human person.**

The belief that all of us are created in the image and likeness of God teaches us that every person has value, every person must be treated with respect, every person has an inherent dignity, not because of what they achieve, not because of their status in life but simply because they are. The principle of Human Dignity means that Catholic Social Teaching takes a strong position not only on issues around the start and end of life (like the death penalty and abortion) but also everything in-between. For example: it can affect how we think about how our society supports those with disabilities, how we address global inequality, how we think about trade and the approach we take to civil rights issues. Pope Francis asked: **“How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?”**<sup>6</sup> Our concern for the dignity of others should shape our economic policies and find expression through the way we live our lives. It is not enough to be against abortion we must be involved in: “working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Questions for Leaders and Governors**

- How do you as leaders model respect for the dignity of all?
- How do we help the school community become informed about issues that affect human dignity?
- How do you as leaders ensure your policies and practices support human dignity?

### **Resources**

- Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel) Pope Francis (Further resources on this available from the schools department)
- Gaudium et Spes -The Church in the Modern World, Second Vatican Council 1965
- The Jesuit Refugee Service produces a number of resources including prayer resources. <https://www.jrsuk.net/>

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis: Evangelii Gaudium para 53

<sup>7</sup> As above Para 188

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor” LK4:18



## *A preferential option for the poor*

In Luke’s Gospel as Jesus begins his ministry, he states clearly those principles which will guide him. He talks about being ‘Good News’ for the poor and throughout the Gospel demonstrates his compassion for and his involvement with those on the margins of society. He overturns convention, those who are poor are blessed. This is our call today to hold a preferential option for the poor, *“We may not always be able to reflect adequately the beauty of the Gospel, but there is one sign which we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards.”*<sup>8</sup> Pope Benedict in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* reminded us that caring for those who are poor is a defining characteristic of the church and that the definition of poor extends beyond those who lack physical wealth and extends to those in any form of need.

The Psalmist reminds us that *“God does not forget the cries of the poor”*<sup>9</sup> and neither should we. *“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. . . . “Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defence, and liberation.”*<sup>10</sup>

### Questions for Leaders and Governors

- How does a ‘Preferential Option’ for the poor manifest itself in your policies and procedures?
- How do we help pupils develop their understanding of the causes of poverty?
- How do we offer pupils opportunities to put into practice practical strategies for helping the poor?

### Resources

- *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis 2013
- *Populorum Progressio* Encyclical of Pope Paul VI 1967
- *Pastoral Constitution On The Church In The Modern World* His Holiness, Pope Paul VI 1965

“It is not good that the man should be alone;” Gen 2:18



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<sup>8</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 195

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 9: 12

<sup>10</sup> The catechism of the Catholic Church 2444 & 2448

## **The call to community and participation**

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we are reminded that it is not good to live alone or for ourselves, *“Love of neighbour is inseparable from love for God”*<sup>11</sup>. We need to be part of a community to contribute to society, this the catechism goes on to say is an essential part of our nature and through our interactions with others we begin to fulfil our potential. Everyone needs to take part in the building of community and this requirement can at times be at odds with our society which emphasises and focuses on individualism. The phrase Common Good is perhaps one of the best-known elements of Catholic Social Teaching and it has been appropriated by others, however it does sum up something important about our faith. We are called to show solidarity with others to put the needs of the weak and vulnerable first. The family is the first place we learn how to be human, to interact with others, our first experience of community and hence supporting family life is an essential element of faith. We take part in community, in our society not for what we can get out of it but because we are called by faith to contribute to the common good of others.

### **Questions for Leaders and Governors**

- How do you form community within your school?
- How does the school try to strengthen its connections to the universal church and to the parish?
- How do you support the families connected to your school?
- How does your school contribute to ‘The Common Good’?
- How do we help young people critique the current ideology of individualism?

### **Resources**

- Choosing the Common Good Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales 2010
- Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love) an apostolic exhortation by Pope Francis 2016 (extra resources on this document are available from the schools Department)
- Various resources on Cafod including ‘Community Cohesion’ a unit for sixth form general RE

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<sup>11</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church 1878/1879

cease to do evil, learn to do good;  
seek justice, rescue the oppressed,  
defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Isaiah 1:16-17



## Human rights and the responsibility to protect them

This principle is often connected with the need to work for peace. In the encyclical ‘Pacem In Terris’ Pope John XXIII reminds us that everyone has certain inalienable rights. These rights include” *the right to live.*” The right to “*bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services. In consequence, he has the right to be looked after in the event of ill health; disability stemming from his work; widowhood; old age; enforced unemployment; or whenever through no fault of his own he is deprived of the means of livelihood*”<sup>12</sup> In order to ensure however that one person’s rights are respected we have the corresponding duty to see it as our responsibility to protect those rights. Pope Francis talks of the fact that when we individually or collectively lose our sense of responsibility for each other, in particular for the weakest and most vulnerable it leads to increasing tragedies and the fragmentation of society. We are called to protect the rights of all, to work for peace and to ensure that peace is built on justice and an equitable distribution of resources.

### Questions for Leaders and Governors

- How do you encourage the formation of a community that accepts its responsibility to others?
- How do you promote peace education within your school community?
- How do you encourage your pupils to work for a world where the rights of all are respected?
- How do you encourage and promote ‘signs of hope’?

### Resources

- Pacem In Terris Encyclical Of Pope John XXIII, 1963
- Pax Christi. A variety of resources available from <http://paxchristi.org.uk/>
- Rights & Duties - Caritas Australia This can be downloaded from <http://www.caritas.org.au/docs/cst/education-for-justice-worksheet-on-rights-and-responsibilities.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

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<sup>12</sup> Pacem In Terris Encyclical Of Pope John XXIII, 1963 para 11

“Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,  
and his upper rooms by injustice;  
who makes his neighbours work for nothing,  
and does not give them their wages;” Jer 22: 13



## **The dignity of work and the rights of the worker**

Catholic Social Teaching holds that work is dignified and an intrinsic good, and workers must always be respected and valued. The economy has to serve people not the other way around. Work is more than a way to earn a living it is a participation in God’s creation and therefore the dignity and the rights of those who work must always be protected. Supporting the rights of workers to safe and dignified working conditions, to a work life balance that ensures the promotion of the human person, the right to be represented by a union or similar organisation and the right to a just wage have always been a part of Catholic Social Teaching. As we become more aware of our global responsibilities, there is need to consider whether the goods and services we buy exploit other workers in different parts of the world or prevent an equitable distribution of wealth.

### **Questions for Leaders and Governors**

- How do protect the rights and work life balance of your employees?
- How do you encourage Fair trade within your school community?
- How do develop in young people an awareness of the need to exercise care in the goods we buy and promote an understanding of global conditions?
- How do we develop a culture of vocation within our schools?

### **Resources**

- Look on the website <http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/themes/dignity-in-work/resources/> for a variety resources on the dignity of work
- Use the diocesan resources to develop a culture of vocation.
- Cafod has a variety of resources on Fair Trade
- Rerum Novarum Encyclical of Pope Leo X111 1891