

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- The dignity of human life applies to all people.
- Protecting human dignity and rights is a duty of all Christians.
- Christians must condemn prejudice, promote the common good, and care for creation.

The Dignity of Life

Catholics believe that all people have been created by God, redeemed by Christ, and called to spend eternity with God. Most people agree that everyone must be treated equally, yet biases and discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, age, ability, social condition, language, religion, and other factors remain common.

The spirituality of Christ demands that his followers take a stand against anything that dehumanizes, represses, or denies another person's rights and dignity. This means recognizing the dignity of all life and protecting human life from natural conception to natural death. It also means working to ensure that each person can live with dignity throughout life.

• *When have you witnessed human dignity being affirmed? When have you witnessed human dignity being threatened or denied?*

• *What groups are the object of prejudice in your community?*



Race and Ethnicity

We're living in a time when racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity is more evident than ever. The face of the Church in this century will become even more ethnically diverse.

The U.S. bishops say that we—each of us—should live our opposition to racism daily and concretely. We should move others to oppose racism as well. In *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, the bishops condemn racism as “a radical evil that divides the human family and denies the new creation of a redeemed world.” The bishops urge action by individuals, the Church, and society:

“As individuals we should try to influence the attitudes of others by expressly rejecting racial stereotypes, racial slurs and racial jokes. We should influence the members of our families, especially our children, to be sensitive to the authentic human values and cultural contributions of each racial grouping in our country.”

Brothers and Sisters to Us

The Catholic Church in the U.S. is experiencing a profound demographic shift as communities of non-European origin are on the rise. Hispanics now make up about 35 percent of all Catholic adults in the U.S., and more than 25 percent of all U.S. Catholic parishes have Hispanic ministries. Studies suggest the Latino composition of our Church will continue to grow for decades to come. Consequently, mono-cultural parishes are being replaced by “shared parishes,” that is, parishes in which more than one language, racial, or cultural group worship together as one Christian community.

Diversity is not something to overcome but is an essential component to foster. This can be an hour of great opportunity or a time of tragic disaster. As a people of God, we must learn to pray, work, and live together as an intercultural (not just multicultural) Church in which diversity provides an opportunity for growth and enrichment rather than separation and disunity. We need to affirm minority presence within the Church and acknowledge the gifts these cultures bring to the body of Christ.

"For you were slain and with your blood you purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue, people and nation."

Revelation 5:9

- How diverse is your parish?
- How well are minorities accepted and integrated into the life of the community?



Gender Equality

In the beginning, "God created mankind in his image; ...male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Human dignity applies equally to men and women. The *Catechism* says that when God created man and woman, he revealed two truths: the genders are distinct, and they have equal dignity (see CCC 369–70).

"Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his [or her] sexual identity. Physical, moral, and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life."

CCC 2333

- How can both men and women contribute their unique gifts to the faith life of the family?



Sexual Orientation

The Church provides pastoral guidance for those who identify as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) and those who care for them. Much of the teaching focuses on reaffirming the natural law and true nature of marriage and family and distinguishes between homosexual orientation and homosexual actions. The Church teaches that LGBT identification is objectively disordered and that the path of chastity—to which all of us are called according to our state in life—is the required route for avoiding sin.

"It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice.... It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law."

Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons, 10 (published in 1986 at the direction of Pope John Paul II)

Socioeconomics

In its pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, the U.S. bishops teach that economic decisions have moral and social dimensions, either enhancing or diminishing human dignity. Millions suffer the ravages of unmet needs, unrealized potential, and unfulfilled promises. The Church calls us to work toward building a just economy that works for all, and that includes food, security, work, affordable housing, and health care, tax assistance for low-income families, and programs for the poor and vulnerable.

The letter, published in 1986, proposes three questions that should form our economic perspectives:

- What does the economy do for people?
- What does it do to people?
- How do people participate in it?

"Part of the American dream has been to make this world a better place for people to live in; at this moment of history that dream must include everyone on this globe. Since we profess to be members of a 'catholic' or universal Church, we all must raise our sights to a concern for the wellbeing of everyone in the world."

Economic Justice for All, 363

As Christians, we must consider the consequences of our buying and saving habits not only on ourselves but on the whole world. Our financial systems and structures should promote the freedom and dignity of all persons and help them meet their basic needs.

- How might your economic choices have a negative impact on the poor? How might the gospel be calling you to make changes in your spending habits?



The Common Good

God created us to live in communion with the Trinity and each other. Within our communities, we mature, develop our abilities, and live out our Christian discipleship. In his encyclical *On Christianity and Social Progress (Mater et Magistra)*, Pope St. John XXIII explained that the common good includes "all those social conditions which favor the full development of human personality" (MM 65).

Such basic necessities as food, clothing, and shelter are included along with the rights to education, health care, taking an active part in public affairs, and worshiping God freely. Pope John stressed that the common good of one nation cannot be separated from the common good of the whole human family.

The *Catechism* lists three essential elements of the common good (CCC 1906–09):

1. *Respect for the person.* Societies should support individuals and communities in exercising their rights and freedoms and in fulfilling their vocations.
2. *Social well-being and development.* Authority should "arbitrate...between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed."
3. *Peace and security.* Members should expect stability, and "authority should ensure...the right to legitimate personal and collective defense."

Care for Creation

"God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good."

Genesis 1:31

Christian concern extends beyond the human race to the fullness of God's creation. Protecting and caring for the environment begins with understanding the world as a shared gift from God. Social and economic development should benefit more and more people while sustaining all forms of life and respecting the laws of nature.

In his encyclical *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')*, Pope Francis says we're to be stewards of the earth for our benefit and that of future generations. He equates environmental abuse with sin, quoting Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople:

"For human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life—these are sins."

On Care For Our Common Home (Laudato Si'), 8

Environmental degradation is felt most acutely by the vulnerable, infirm, and poor. Pope Francis writes:

"A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

LS 49

- How is your care of the earth—conserving resources, recycling, supporting sustainable models, and more—a reflection of your faith?
- What more can you do?



Witness the universality of human dignity by attending an event or presentation by a minority or underserved group. Then answer the following questions:

- How has your perspective of this group changed?
- What challenges or threats to human dignity do they face? What protection or assistance do they receive from Church or state?
- How can you better serve and respect this group?



Reflect on your inherent dignity and call to promote peace, equality, and unity throughout the world:

- How are you created in God's image? What makes you unique in his eyes?
- What draws you to others, especially those who might differ from you?
- How do your words, actions, personality traits, and gifts contribute to society and the common good?



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