

Archdiocese of Milwaukee
Synod 2014
Background Paper:
Catholic Social Teaching

Written by

Rev. Javier I. Bustos, S.T.D.

Sacred Heart School of Theology

Introduction by

Bishop Donald J. Hying



SYNOD 2014
ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE

Table of Contents

I. Introduction: Discipleship: Our Fundamental Catholic Identity

This section was written Bishop Donald J. Hying, the Auxiliary Bishop of Milwaukee, and it serves as the introduction for all eight Synod background papers. Bishop Hying presents “intentional discipleship” as our fundamental Catholic identity and the singular focus for all of our Synod considerations and challenges us to view all aspects of the Church in light of “formation for discipleship.”

II. Our Call to Build the Kingdom of Justice: Introduction and Overview

III. The Ups and Downs of Postmodernity: Current Cultural Reality

IV. The Values and Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

V. Some Key Social Issues of our Time

VI. Our Challenge Ahead: Conclusion & Key Questions for Consideration

I. Introduction: Discipleship: Our Fundamental Catholic Identity

Introduction written by Bishop Donald J. Hying

In the Gospels, Jesus confronts us with a fundamental question: Who do you say that I am? As Christians and members of the Church, we answer with Simon, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” In faith, we can add Savior, Light of the world, the Word made flesh, the Resurrection, the Prince of Peace. Through the saving activity of Jesus’ Incarnation, life, death and resurrection, we become adopted children of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit, all in the mystery, communion and sacrament of the Church. The relationship that Jesus enjoys with the Father by nature of who he is, we receive as a pure offer of grace.

Baptized into the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, we proclaim Christ’s saving Gospel through a faith lived out in the words, actions, work, relationships and values of our lives. Our fundamental identity as disciples of Jesus Christ gives focus and method to the important activity of the new evangelization. As we painfully know, too many Catholics have not really been evangelized to know and experience the personal love of Jesus Christ, have been poorly catechized in the fundamentals of the Catholic faith, and do not participate in the sacramental life of the Church in any meaningful way. If we seek to change this disturbing trend, parishes must continue to grow in their fundamental identity as dynamic communities of faith which form intentional disciples. If we are not focused on formation for discipleship, we are failing the mission of Christ.

What do intentional Catholic disciples look like? How do they act? What is qualitatively different about their lives and personalities? The answer is clear yet challenging. Disciples are ordinary people who have experienced the love, forgiveness, presence, consolation and challenge of God poured out through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. They have fallen in love with the Lord and find their deepest identity in their relationship with him. They find God and the mission of his Kingdom to be the fundamental purpose of their lives and, having a strong **Catholic identity**, find the whole Catholic experience of the Scriptures, sacraments, moral life and prayer to be the transformative means of their ongoing conversion. As Paul discovered on the road to Damascus, they are people loved and forgiven by Jesus Christ.

Disciples instinctively **evangelize**, that is they naturally share their experience of God and their faith in him with others. The power of moral example itself evangelizes, as others intuitively sense that such a person lives from a very different center of meaning and purpose than secular society. In addition to witnessing by example, disciples are both courageous and articulate in their proclamation of Jesus and the difference he has made in their lives. They will freely pray with others, do volunteer work, witness to how the Lord has worked in their daily experience, offer moral advice when asked, share spiritual books, CDs and DVDs with family, friends and co-workers, all the while actively cultivating a discipleship response in those around them. The power of one Catholic who knows, practices and proclaims the faith is truly remarkable.

An intentional disciple is a good **steward**, knowing that everything in life is a superabundant gift freely bestowed upon us by the Lord, both to enrich us but also to bless and benefit others. This deep conviction of existence as a gift leads to a profound gratitude that pours itself out in deeds of mercy, love and healing. Like Mary who anoints the feet of Jesus with an extravagant costly perfume that cost 300 days' wages, we are compelled to break open and pour out the gifts of our lives in loving service of others and so fill the world with the sacred fragrance of Christ.

An intentional disciple is a Catholic maximalist, not asking what the minimum is that **must** be done in order to be saved, but rather asking what **can** be done for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Like St. Paul, a disciple has moved from the obligation of the law into the astonishing freedom of Christ, who liberates us to do every good work. In this context, the Blessed Virgin Mary is clearly the first and premier disciple who responds in total faith to the seemingly impossible proposal of the angel, places her entire being at the service of God and gives flesh to the Incarnate Word.

St. Augustine insists that when a Christian disciple places the whole mystery and gift of life at the service of God, the Lord Jesus takes flesh within that person and is offered to the world once again. For us as Catholics, in this critical moment in history, we cannot afford to proceed with business as usual. All over the world, millions of Catholics are asking the same questions:

- How can I have a deeper and more authentic relationship with Jesus Christ?
- How can I more effectively live out my faith in such a way that it actually makes a difference in the lives of others, especially my family and friends?
- How can we continue to insert Gospel values into the public square of politics, economy, health care and education?
- How can we bring back all of those Catholics who have fallen away from the practice of the faith?

In millions of different ways, intentional disciples are living out the exciting answers to these important questions. If the Gospel is the script of our lives, the new evangelization is the urgent challenge to act out with fresh enthusiasm and generosity the great drama of Christ's salvation.

Synod 2014 invites us to consider anew how to be intentional disciples, especially in the areas of Catholic Social Teaching, Cultural Diversity, Evangelization, Formation, Leadership, Liturgy, Marriage and Family, and Stewardship.

II. Our Call to Build the Kingdom of Justice: Introduction and Overview

An intentional Catholic disciple seeks the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the values of the Gospel. We are being called to put Catholic Social Teaching into practice by the method of See, Judge, and Act. After this brief introduction on the call we all have to build the Kingdom of Justice, this background paper continues with three subsections. The first will be an attempt to see what is happening in our world. The second will provide church teaching on how we are to judge what we see. The third will look at ways we may act on our judgments.

Made in the image and likeness of God (see Gen. 1:26), human beings are called to live and reflect the relational nature of the Triune God. Being fully human involves being fully relational. The selfish and individualistic actions of some people disfigure the true image of the human person. On the contrary, the generous, self-giving actions of humans reveal the Christ-like image of who we really are. As Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds of Bethlehem, we become witnesses to Christ's presence among us when a human person is able to fulfill his or her vocation and let God's image shine through his or her actions. God's truth is incarnated (embodied) right before our eyes and we become part of God's salvific intervention in human history. This fundamental truth is at the very core of the Church's social teaching.

The highest point of God's salvific intervention is Jesus, who "summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Lk. 9:1-2). The proclamation of the kingdom of God is at the center of Jesus' mission and of His Church (see Lk. 4:43); further, Jesus himself is the Kingdom, the Good News, the one who was anointed "to bring glad tidings to the poor... to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Lk. 4:18-19).

Since Jesus *is* and *proclaims* the kingdom of God, we can understand how, in our journey of faith, "there is an identity between the message and the messenger, between saying, doing and being" (Bl. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 13). As Christians, we are called to "put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27), proclaim, and build the kingdom of God. As Pope Francis writes, "being Church means being God's people, in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love. This means that we are to be God's leaven in the midst of humanity. It means proclaiming and bringing God's salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel" (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 114).

There is not such a thing as a "theoretical" Christian, that is, someone who professes his or her faith in Christ, but is unable to live a Christ-like life in human history. This is an absurdity; it would be like a priest or a Levite unable to help someone in need on their way from Jerusalem to Jericho (see Lk. 10:29-37), or someone unable to forgive a repentant sinner (see Jn. 8:3-11). The demands of building the kingdom God involve becoming part of it.

From her very beginning on Pentecost, the Church has understood this fundamental truth of her identity: we have an inherent vocation to be a gift for others. By living the self-giving nature of our faith, the Christian community is transformed into what Pope Francis called “an evangelizing community”:

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance. Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time. Faithful to the Lord’s gift, it also bears fruit. An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful. It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. The sower, when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear. The disciple is ready to put his or her whole life on the line, even to accepting martyrdom, in bearing witness to Jesus Christ, yet the goal is not to make enemies but to see God’s word accepted and its capacity for liberation and renewal revealed. Finally an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization. Evangelization with joy becomes beauty in the liturgy, as part of our daily concern to spread goodness (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24).

The social and self-giving nature of the Church’s mission is not, however, a recent discovery. It is present in the Gospels (see Mk. 2:1-12; Jn 5:1-9; Mtt. 5:3-12; 25:31-46) and in the teaching of the Fathers and Church writers (for example, St. Gregory the Great explained the Christian view on wealth and poverty in *Regula Pastoralis*, 3, 21: PL 77, 87).

Nonetheless, the pressing social issues of the end of the 19th century led the Church to a more systematic approach to the theological reflection on living the Gospel message in our society. Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) faced the threat of communism and the consequences of industrialization and urbanization in the lives of many; the inequalities and confusion caused by these events led the Pope to write the first Social Encyclical Letter, *Rerum Novarum*, on the condition of labor (1891). This was the beginning of a number of publications and speeches dealing with social principles and issues. Other documents include Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), Bl. John XXIII’s *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963), *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council (1965), Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), Bl. John Paul II’s *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) and *Centesimus Annus* (1991), and Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in veritate* (2009). Some bishops’ conferences have also published a number of documents dealing with concrete social issues; for example, the bishops of the United States published documents dealing with racism (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 1979), peace (*The Challenge of Peace*, 1983), the economy (*Economic Justice for All*, 1986) and immigration (*Welcoming the Stranger among Us*, 2000), among many other issues. This doctrinal body of documents and speeches is what is referred as “Catholic Social Teaching.”

III. The Challenges of Today's Culture

The methodological starting point of the Church's social teaching is a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural reality. Trying to do so is not an easy task. It is like asking a fish to define water. We, the Church, are part of this culture; this is our generation, our society. And even though we might disagree with aspects of our times, we often find ourselves being part of it without even knowing it. An accurate comprehension of the challenges and blessings of our times allows us to properly fulfill our task of living the richness of Catholic Social Teaching in the concreteness of our "daily existence in specific social and cultural situations" (Bl. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 4).

In his book "Jesus of Nazareth," Pope Benedict XVI begins his reflection on the Beatitudes by studying the first verse of chapter 5 of the Gospel of Matthew, "When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him." What did Jesus see when he saw the crowds? Jesus probably saw people who were poor in spirit, people who mourn, people who were meek, people who hunger and thirst for righteousness, people who were merciful and clean of heart. He saw peacemakers and people who were persecuted for the sake of righteousness and people who were insulted and persecuted because of Him. Before we strive to understand and live our Christ-centered faith, we put on His eyes, and as a community of the baptized, we ask ourselves: "What do we see when we see our society and culture?"

We see an economy of exclusion supported by worshipers of money and a financial system that rules rather than serves. "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? This is a case of exclusion" (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53). Our economic systems foster a lifestyle through which some are the beneficiaries and others are considered "losers." The efforts for any revision of these systems tend to protect the growing trend of increasing profits for the rich while overlooking the needs of the outcast, the one who is "irremediably" excluded. Such an unjust situation is primarily caused by the growing materialistic culture. "The worship of the ancient golden calf (see Ex. 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose" (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 55). By allowing the rule of "almighty money," the human person has taken the back seat, and financial systems have substituted moral values for economic ones. On the other hand, ***we also see a growing number of charitable organizations,*** which have made their presence known through their generous efforts assisting victims of natural disasters and gun violence.

We see increasing violence in our society, usually caused by deep social inequalities, broken families, and unjust laws. "Until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. The poor and the poorer peoples are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities the different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile ground for growth and eventually explode. When a society (whether local, national or global) is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programs or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility" (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 59).

One grave inequality is the one suffered by those who are victims of broken families, who are deprived and excluded of experiencing the irreplaceable love and education of a family. The efforts for reversing these inequalities become a great challenge if we consider the individualistic DNA of our times. Both at the political and economic levels, people seek to accomplish their *individual* goals isolated from social and global solidarity. On the other hand, ***we also see a few concrete efforts, especially among faith communities, that exemplify the type of social justice work that builds bridges instead of walls.*** For instance, some churches have committed themselves to consistently call for just immigration reform in our country.

We see an inaccurate understanding of tolerance, and a superficial, often emotional, life of faith. Our age postulates a practical rejection of any position that claims one absolute way of being. Instead, our current age is, in principle, founded under the basis of *tolerance*, through which we reject force and intimidation toward those who think differently. The Catholic Church values the place of a well understood *tolerance* (see Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 29; Bl. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 70). However, *tolerance* is often misinterpreted and comes with challenges. *Tolerance* could be seen as the minimal civic acceptance of the other who is different. For many Christians, this limited understanding of *tolerance* has translated into the willful reduction of the Christian Commandment of love, from “love one another” (Jn. 13:34) to, “*tolerate* one another.” Minimalistic respect is the “new love,” and our age has reduced, for example, the death of Jesus on the Cross to an act of *tolerance*. As a consequence of this, we see some people who may not question the fact that our call is not only to respect life, but to love life; or who rather accept cohabitation or contraception as a “better” condition than divorce or abortion.

A false understanding of *tolerance* has set the stage for an increased *relativism*. Since we are to *tolerate* everyone’s opinion, we often tend to give every opinion the same weight. The pretension that one’s opinion is “better” than the other one, though respected, is often rejected. Pope Francis explains that “the process of secularization tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal. Furthermore, by completely rejecting the transcendent, it has produced a growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin, and a steady increase in relativism” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 64).

As a consequence of this, we have allowed our age to place Christ in the line of truths to be *tolerated*. The truth of Salvation in Christ has been weakened by our relativistic society; for some people, Christ is seen no longer as the Second Person of the Trinity, but as an opinion. In light of this challenge, Pope Benedict XVI realized that we live in a society capable of reducing any moral truth to an opinion when he said to the Canadian Bishops, “In the name of ‘tolerance’ your country has had to endure the folly of the redefinition of spouse, and in the name of ‘freedom of choice’ it is confronted with the daily destruction of unborn children. When the Creator’s divine plan is ignored the truth of human nature is lost” (*Ad Limina Apostolorum* Visit, September 8, 2008).

Precisely because some people have a weakened understanding of their faith, they are often left with an emotional spirituality. Today’s culture gives the primacy to emotions over reasoning. Emotions, however, are not in themselves good or evil; they are neutral. Our

Christian tradition is filled with the good use of emotions. In the Gospels, for example, we see Jesus weeping (Jn. 11:33-36) and angry (Mk. 3:5; Mt. 21:12-13), we see Mary full of joy (Lk. 1:46-47). In our tradition, emotions are to be nurtured by the truths of reasoning, or in other words, passions and reason are to be integrated (see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 22, aa. 1-3). Our age, however, presents our emotions as the primary (and at times, the only) moving force of religiosity; it is all about “how we feel.” Some people see no problem in rejecting, at any cost, anything that causes pain. Happiness is seen as the opposite of suffering and sacrifice. On the contrary, for Catholics happiness is the grace and ability to make sense of suffering and sacrifice.

This over-*emotional* religiosity paired with the materialistic trend of our culture leaves us with a superficial approach to our faith; the seeds of the Gospel fall “on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep” (Mt. 13:5). Pope Francis warns us about this particular challenge when he wrote: “The great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2).

We see violation of human liberties and dignity. Every violation of human dignity is by nature contrary to our Christian faith. As we review the state of our societies, we see the tragic sexual abuse of refugee women and children; we see people being persecuted because of their faith; we see the implementation of immoral laws against people because of their sexual orientation; we see children being forced to do hard work; we see human trafficking and prostitution; we see the implementation of immoral laws that force individuals to act against their religious belief; we see families being divided by unjust immigration laws; we see extreme poverty caused by an economic globalization divorced from solidarity; we see a devastating number of abortions; we see a systematic abuse of political power and corruption that keep many countries in poverty; we see many people without healthcare, and a healthcare system exclusively for the rich. Many of these violations and tragedies are often (but not exclusively) challenges of what Pope Francis called “urban cultures:”

We cannot ignore the fact that in cities human trafficking, the narcotics trade, the abuse and exploitation of minors, the abandonment of the elderly and infirm, and various forms of corruption and criminal activity take place. At the same time, what could be significant places of encounter and solidarity often become places of isolation and mutual distrust. Houses and neighborhoods are more often built to isolate and protect than to connect and integrate. The proclamation of the Gospel will be a basis for restoring the dignity of human life in these contexts, for Jesus desires to pour out an abundance of life upon our cities (see Jn. 10:10). The unified and complete sense of human life that the Gospel proposes is the best remedy for the ills of our cities, even though we have to realize that a uniform and rigid program of evangelization is not suited to this complex reality. But to live our human life to the fullest and to meet every challenge as a leaven of Gospel witness in every culture and in every city will make us better Christians and bear fruit in our cities (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 75).

As we deepen and continue our global review, ***we also see a Church animated by the call to work for justice and for the poor.*** From his humility and simplicity, Pope Francis helps the Church to continue her mission of building the kingdom of justice.

We see our Catholic hierarchy voicing the respect for non-negotiable human liberties; we see parish programs providing food for the poor; we see organizations who build homes for the homeless; we see Church ministers clearly denouncing human trafficking and prostitution; we see ongoing efforts in favor of a just immigration reform; we see pro-life groups voicing the need for the protection of human life; we see nations willing to negotiate and avoid the evil of war; we see parish communities reaching out to sister parishes in more impoverished countries.

IV. The Values and Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

The understanding of our culture and society leaves us with many questions and anxieties. What should we do? What is the role and place of the Church in today's society? How could we take advantage of the challenges and blessings of our times in our commitment to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples? Does the Church have some type of guide that helps us to navigate through this troubled time? Catholic Social Teaching seeks to answer these questions as we, the People of God, fulfill our vocation to build the kingdom of justice and peace. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace outlined the values and principles developed throughout the Catholic social documents in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (hereafter *CSD*), published under the pontificate of Bl. John Paul II in 2004.

Human dignity is the heart of Catholic Social Teaching. Being created in the image and likeness of God, the person relates to the Creator "in the most profound manner" (*CSD*, 109). The human person possesses that platform that allows a true and unique relationship with the Creator. The person's worth is not acquired or assigned by other humans; instead, it is given by God from the very moment of creation. Human dignity has no levels; it does not depend on age, nationality, ethnicity, health, religion, gender or even moral character. Catholic Social Teaching sees human dignity as the non-negotiable foundation of true human development and society. The ultimate goal of Catholic Social Doctrine is to facilitate an understanding of the integration of the Gospel message as we build a society worthy of the human person. In order to do this, we are called to protect, defend, and foster the *fundamental values of social life*.

a) The Fundamental Values of Social Life

A fundamental value of social life is an expression of the goods that are fostered by the Principles of Social Doctrine; they "are inherent in the dignity of the human person, whose authentic development they [the principles] foster" (*CSD*, 197). These values are to be present in every social community, in every norm or law that promotes an authentic human society. The fundamental values of social life are *truth, freedom, and justice*.

Truth as a social value refers to the one discovered by our conscience; it is the one given to us by God (see Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 52) and lived in love as a gift. Because it is a discovered gift, *truth* is objective and universal. Even though it is understood by human reason, it is not a mere intellectual truth, but one that fills the human being with meaning and sets him or her free (see Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 9).

Freedom is both an ability of making individual choices (see Bl. John Paul II *Veritatis Splendor*, 48), and a demand to walk in truth (see *Gaudium et Spes*, 17). Consequently, freedom is not just an ability to choose, but an ability and grace to “choose truth.” This salvific and liberating encounter between *freedom* and *truth* happens in our conscience (see *Gaudium et Spes*, 16). As a social value, *freedom* “is the highest sign in the human being of his or her being made in the divine image and consequently, is a sign of the sublime dignity of every human person” (CSD, 199).

Justice “is a habit whereby a person renders to each one his or her due by a constant and perpetual will” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 58, a. 1). Permeated by love, *justice* does not only consist in rendering to others what by right and nature belongs to them, but also what belongs to us. Through every act of *justice*, the person is able to recognize the dignity and God’s image in another person (see CSD, 201).

b) The Principles of the Church’s Social Doctrine

In order to foster and protect these values, the Church’s Social Doctrine presents us with five principles: *Common Good*, *the Universal Destination of all Goods*, *Subsidiarity*, *Participation*, and *Solidarity*.

The Common Good is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26). The *common good* “touches the whole person, the needs both of his or her body and of his or her soul” (Bl. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 57). This good is “common” because it is “indivisible and because only together is it possible to attain it, increase it and safeguard its effectiveness” (CSD, 164). “A society that wishes and intends to remain at the service of the human being at every level is a society that has the common good... as its primary goal” (CSD, 165). An accurate understanding of the *common good* presupposes respect for the person as such, it requires the social well-being and development of the group itself, and it requires peace, that is, the stability and security of a just order (see CCC, 1906-1909).

The Principle of the Universal Destination of All Goods states that “the original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and the human being, and who gave the earth to the human being so that he or she might have dominion over it by his or her work and enjoy its fruits (Gen 1:28-29). God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone” (CSD 171). The human person has the God-given right to use the goods of the earth, and the right to have access to them to the level of well-being necessary for his or her full development. Such an access is the “first principle of the whole ethical and social order” (Bl. John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, 19). However, “universal destination and utilization of goods do not mean that everything is at the disposal of each person or of all people, or that the same object may be useful or belong to each person or all people. If it is true that everyone is born with the right to use the goods of the earth, it is likewise true that, in order to ensure that this right is exercised in an equitable and orderly fashion, regulated interventions are necessary, interventions that are the result of national and international agreements, and a juridical order that adjudicates and specifies the exercise of this right” (CSD, 173).

Thanks to the **Principle of Subsidiarity** we understand that “just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do” (Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 79). This principle helps us to protect the rights of individuals and the family as they relate to higher organization units, like the city or the State.

The Principle of Subsidiarity needs to be understood along with the **Principle of Participation**, through which people are called to take part in the building of a human society and fostering of the common good. Every person, “either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he or she belongs. Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good” (CSD, 189).

Solidarity is a virtue and a principle through which interdependent relationships between individuals are transformed into Ethical/Social ones, oriented toward the common good (see CSD, 193). “The principle of solidarity requires that men and women of our day cultivate a greater awareness that they are debtors of the society of which they have become part” (CSD, 195). Through this principle, Catholics understand that our option for those in need and poverty is a demand of our Baptism and Christian discipleship; it is not limited to a particular act, but it is a way of living our friendship with Christ. “This love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future” (Bl. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42).

V. Some Key Social Issues of our Time

Even though Catholic Social Teaching provides foundational truths, values and principles, it also helps us to understand some concrete issues of our time by applying those principles and fostering the objective truth and values of social life. A careful reading of the social documents of the Church will help us to understand these and many other issues of our time. Given the scope of Catholic Social Teaching, people at any various points along the political spectrum may quote a papal speech or bishops’ statement to support their particular issue. Certainly all issues do not carry the same moral weight, but it is important for us to be attentive to all aspects of Catholic Social Teaching as we try to live out the values of the Gospel. Let’s briefly look at some concrete social issues in light of the Church’s Social Teaching.

Health, as physical life, is a gift entrusted to us by God. **Health care**, then, is not only a right, but also a responsibility, which must take into account the common good and the dignity of the person. “Concern for the health of its citizens requires that society help in the attainment of living-conditions that allow them to grow and reach maturity: food and clothing, housing, health care, basic education, employment, and social assistance” (CCC, 2288).

Peace is the original state of harmony of Creation; however, because of our sinful condition, it is often broken. In order to restore **peace**, humans are called to work for love-permeated justice and authentic human development. When every possible moral resort to restore **peace** has been used, **war** or the use of force might be morally accepted only when it is a *legitimate defense* (see *Gaudium et Spes*, 79). “A war of aggression is intrinsically immoral” (CSD, 500). At the domestic level, peace is also and constantly challenged by the devastating and growing gun violence in our society, by psychological and physical abuse of women and children, by racism and other forms of immoral discriminations, by the growing number in poverty without access to education and healthcare, and by the destructive implementation of unjust laws. True peace, at any level, is the result of the committed and on-going work for justice.

Immigration is a human right that is closely related to the God’s given right to life and the duty of the political (national and international) community to foster and protect human dignity, the common good, and the right to have a family (see CCC, 2211, 2241-2243). Special attention needs to be given to the phenomenon of **illegal immigration**. In this regard, Bl. John Paul II stated:

The Church considers the problem of illegal migrants from the standpoint of Christ, who died to gather those who are distant, in order to integrate all within a communion that is not based on ethnic, cultural or social membership, but on the common desire to accept God's word and to seek justice... The Church acts in continuity with Christ's mission. In particular, she asks herself how to meet the needs, while respecting the law of those persons who are not allowed to remain in a national territory. She also asks what the right to emigrate is worth without the corresponding right to immigrate. She tackles the problem of how to involve in this work of solidarity those Christian communities frequently infected by a public opinion that is often hostile to immigrants (*Message of Bl. John Paul II for World Migration Day, 1996, 3*).

In order to avoid this “infection” and applying Catholic Social Teaching to the issue of **illegal immigration**, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops clearly stated the minimum conditions a just immigration reform must contain (Letter to President Barack Obama, April 24, 2012): (1) reaffirm federal authority and responsibility to enact and implement the nation’s immigration laws; (2) protect and recognize the central importance of family unity as the cornerstone of our immigration system; (3) establish more functional legal mechanisms for the entry of immigrant workers; (4) create a sound, equitable process toward citizenship for currently undocumented immigrants who desire to embrace the responsibilities and privileges of becoming a U.S. citizen; and (5) ensure that our laws are enforced in ways that recognize the importance of due process of the law, the sanctity of the human person, the incomparable value of family, and the integrity of our borders.

Racism is one of the many types of immoral or unacceptable discriminations (see Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 63); it is an expression of human blindness to truth and God’s image in every human being (see Bl. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 86); “racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church... Racism is a sin... Racism is a fact” (U.S. Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on Racism, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*).

“The members of humankind share the same basic rights and duties, as well as the same supernatural destiny. Within a country which belongs to each one, all should be equal before the law, find equal admittance to economic, cultural, civic, and social life, and benefit from a fair sharing of the nation’s riches” (Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 16). In dealing with **racism**, the Church realizes that “the ultimate remedy against evils such as this will not come solely from human effort. What is needed is the recreation of the human being according to the image revealed in Jesus Christ. For He reveals in himself what each human being can and must become” (U.S. Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on Racism, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*).

When the economy and human work are not nurtured by moral truth, **poverty** results as one of the most urgent sicknesses of humanity. Wealth in itself is not evil; but “wealth exists to be shared” (CSD, 328). The sinful use of wealth is contrary to the dignity of human being and human work. In fighting **poverty**, the Church affirms that every economic activity, true economic development, must have the human person as its center; it must be at the service of the human person (see *Gaudium et Spes*, 64-65). This truth demands that “vigorous efforts must be made, without violence to the rights of persons or to the natural characteristics of each country, to remove as quickly as possible the immense economic inequalities which now exists” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 66).

Relevant to the issue of poverty is the phenomenon of **globalization**, which “brings about new forms of production where plants are located away from where strategies are decided and far from the markets where the goods are consumed” (CSD, 310). Even though it is originally understood as an economic phenomenon, **globalization** has a connection with other aspects of human life, such as healthcare, culture, use of mass media and other means of communication. For Catholics, **globalization** needs to be understood in light of and challenged by solidarity (see *Bl. John Paul II, Message on World Day of Peace*, January 1, 1998, 3).

Other important social issues of our time includes, **capital punishment**, the moral use of **mass media**, the just relationship of the **employer and employee**, the Church teaching on **democracy and communism**, and our moral responsibility of the **environment and creation**.

VI. Our Challenge Ahead: Conclusion & Key Questions for Consideration

It has been said that Catholic Social Teaching is the “best kept secret” in the Church. Nobody in the Church has intended to keep this teaching “secret;” on the contrary, this doctrine must make every Catholic proud and help us to engage today’s culture with the eyes of Christ. The problem, however, is that this teaching becomes a mere “secret” if we do not put it into practice.

By living our baptismal call to build the kingdom of justice, we open our lives to the Truth that sets us free. Catholic Social Teaching seeks to facilitate the understanding of the meaning of the Incarnation of Jesus among us. When we feed the hungry, or welcome an immigrant, or visit the sick, or listen to a prisoner, or denounce unjust laws, we become a “new Bethlehem.” Christ, the Truth, is incarnated in that act of justice right before the eyes of the community. It is this Christ-present-act that transforms a group of human beings into a community of disciples. This is why Catholic Social Teaching is not just a group of lessons on “Catholic social work,” but a doctrine that begins in our sacred dialogue with God in our conscience and in prayer.

Upon a careful reading and reflection of our reality and the richness of Catholic Social Teaching, some questions are provided to the people of God of Southeastern Wisconsin. Indifference is not an option for Catholics. The Social Teaching of the Church challenges us at many levels; especially, in bringing the Gospel message to the concreteness of our daily life and social commitment. The following questions are intended to motivate a faith-filled reflection among the people of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee:

- How do we honor God's image and the human dignity of every person in our community? Could we identify concrete acts of indifference or violation of this sacred truth in our community? Which Scripture text could we select to guide us in answering this question?
- What are concrete signs of relativism and individualism in our community? What strategies could we recommend to help our parish to live their social commitment to those in need in the context of the challenges of today's culture?
- How could we apply Catholic Social values and principles to the rising phenomenon of gun violence in our society? Using Catholic Social Teaching, how could we respond as individuals and as a parish community to the rising phenomenon of violence in our neighborhoods?
- How does the Catholic teaching on healthcare, peace, immigration, racism, and poverty challenge and/or change what we do as individuals and as a parish community?