



*Speak out for those who
cannot speak, for the rights
of all the destitute.
Speak out, judge
righteously, defend the
rights of the poor and needy.*

Proverbs 31:8-9

Turning Tables

A Toolkit for Scripture
and Social Action



Foreword

I am pleased to commend this resource as means to explore the riches of Catholic Social Teaching, grounded in the Scriptures.

While it has often been said that Catholic Social Teaching is a 'well-kept secret', this is perhaps no longer the case as increasing numbers of people across society are finding in the Church's social teaching a response to the challenges of the age.

Thanks go to all those who have been involved in the production of this new resource which will surely open Catholic Social Teaching to a yet wider audience.

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Once again we exhort our children to take an active part in public life, and to contribute towards the attainment of the common good of the entire human family as well as to that of their own country. They should endeavour, therefore, in the light of the faith and with the strength of love, to ensure that the various institutions – whether economic, social, cultural or political in purpose – should be such as not to create obstacles, but rather to facilitate or render less arduous humanity’s perfectioning of itself both in the natural order as well as in the supernatural.

**Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth)
Pope John XXIII, 1963, sec. 146.**



Introduction

Jesus Teaches at Nazareth

¹⁶And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." ²⁰And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke 4:16-21

Who is this Toolkit for?

Turning Tables is a resource designed to help adult Catholics across England and Wales to understand and engage with their faith, Scripture and social justice in practical ways.

It will do this by covering five core themes:

Understanding the Bible: how it lays the foundations for a just and fair world.

Deepening our faith: how to translate our beliefs and spirituality into social action.

Understanding social action: how to bring about change at local and national levels.

Knowing who to contact: how and where to contact governments, policy makers and charities.

Creating momentum and support: how to share resources and ideas, lobby and volunteer.

Government policies influence much of our lives. They lay out what we can and cannot do; how we should relate to, and treat, each other; and how we should treat the earth and its resources. The Bible also has much to say about these issues and that's why the Catholic Church is concerned with social justice at local, national and international levels. If we understand how the foundations of social justice are developed throughout the Scriptures, and how Jesus modelled social action in His lifestyle and teachings, then we can apply these values and principles in our own times.

As Catholics, building community is important to us. We are a universal Church and our faith is based on relationships with God and with each other. Therefore, we have a common responsibility to help build a culture that upholds the dignity of every human life, especially the most vulnerable. This responsibility works at

different levels: local and individual, national and global. Scripture, Tradition and Catholic social teaching provide us with a framework to build a better world, but sometimes this vision seems impossible to achieve or feels out of our reach. This Toolkit shows us how, and helps us to put our faith into social action.

Across our dioceses of England and Wales we have the capacity to create real change in our churches and communities. From small local acts to challenging our governments, we can demonstrate gospel values as individuals and as the Church standing together since '*...no one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society.*' (Evangelii Gaudium sec. 183).

Section 1

What is Social Action?



Social action is the umbrella term for ensuring fairness and justice in our societies and in our everyday living. Whereas social policy is the term used by governments to implement social justice through legislation, research and analysis. Social action is therefore, a phrase to describe a collective response to social problems. Other terms and phrases we often hear to describe this approach include: social concern, welfare state, and the common good.

During the 19th century, the concept of social policy developed in the UK out of sociological and philosophical thought regarding how families, charities and the government should care for children and other vulnerable groups, including the elderly and the sick. Yet the roots of social policy were formulated much earlier in the Bible which we will see in *Section 2*.

1 Social action - issues of social concern and their causes

Social action engages with issues that affect society such as:

Alcohol abuse; care for the unborn child; discrimination; domestic abuse; education; the elderly and end of life care; the environment; family breakdown; homelessness; human trafficking; inequality; mental health problems; migration; pornography; poverty; social exclusion; unemployment; violence and war. Some of these issues are inter-related – some will be causes and others will be effects. The root causes may be sociological, political, economic or psychological – but they consequently have an impact on society.

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

James 2:14-17

Social action identifies systems and structures that abuse people such as:

- Unaffordable cost of living frameworks – food, housing, healthcare, transport and utilities
- Unfair taxation rates, unrealistic universal credit and benefits criteria
- Lack of access to technology, education and learning resources
- Unjust discrimination in the employment and legal sectors
- Marketing that involves sexualisation and appeals to consumerism and materialism
- Inhumane detainee, refugee and prison conditions



2 Social action identifies solutions and ways of administering these solutions

Social action has often been used to identify practical and technical ways of managing social justice problems. It also challenges unjust structures and systems that are either dealt with by the state or the state itself is perpetuating. As governments fund and run state provision, they are usually required to take appropriate action through their own policies, legislation and budgets. However, governments do not work alone. They consult many other groups in the public and private sectors as well as the informal sector – e.g. families and individuals. They may carry out their own research or use the research findings of others.

Social action is not just about patching up social problems, it addresses and finds ways to prevent what is causing them in the first place. This requires commitment and perseverance but the impacts can be worth it: our children and future generations will benefit.



3 Social action directs the work of democratic governments

Equipped with possible solutions or ways of managing social problems, social action is used by decision makers such as national and local governments. They may carry out their own research or use the research findings of others to change inequalities and injustice wherever they prioritise the need. While short- and long-term solutions are constantly reviewed, changing societal attitudes also influence how social justice is understood and applied.

4 Social action informs our response

We all have a role to play in upholding social justice, whether collectively as the Catholic Church or as individuals. We may decide to pray for an issue and then take practical action, or get more involved in an issue at a deeper level.

We can be part of the prevention of social injustice as well as the solution to it. We can raise awareness of issues by forming or joining a campaign, writing individually to our MP (Member of Parliament), a Peer (Member of the House of Lords) or MS (Member of the Senedd).

We can volunteer with charities or organisations in our local community since *"the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church's mission and an indispensable expression of her very being. By her very nature the Church is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes."* (Evangeli Gaudium, sec. 179).

Why should the Catholic Church get involved?

As Catholics we live in relationship with God. As human societies we live in relationship with each other. To manage our societies we have a history of appointing leaders and creating structures of power. We also create systems to manage these power structures in order to safeguard justice and prevent corruption.

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Proverbs 31:8-9

In our modern societies we are bound by laws – some of which reflect the will of God while others appear contrary. We can see that good governance is necessary to balance both social relationships and individual freedoms. Where societies are ruled inconsistently and unjustly, society is weak, freedom is fragile and people are more vulnerable. Therefore, *‘if indeed “the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics”, the Church “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice”’*. (Evangelii Gaudium, sec. 183).

The Catholic Church has been building community for centuries: from protecting individuals, relationships and family life, to upholding the dignity of the human person at all ages and stages of their life; from advocating just work, safe working conditions and fair wages to promoting peace, education and environmental care; from challenging poverty, homelessness and global debt to promoting reconciliation, forgiveness and social inclusion.

Popes, theologians, saints and other Catholic thinkers have promoted social justice and social action in their teachings, writings, lifestyles, faith

and spirituality from the early Church onwards. Catholic social teaching has become a framework for social action and promoting the common good. Numerous religious orders and Catholic charities devote their mission and purpose to social action and in upholding social justice in multiple areas.

And we know the need is great. As it says in *Gaudium et Spes*: *“This social order requires constant improvement. It must be founded on truth, built on justice and animated by love; in freedom it should grow every day toward a more humane balance. An improvement in attitudes and abundant changes in society will have to take place if these objectives are to be gained”* (sec. 26).

With over 4.5 million Catholics in England and Wales, we have plenty of reasons and opportunities to respond to local, national and worldwide issues and to challenge social injustice in the name of God. When we respond to the needs of our world through prayer, practical action and promoting social justice, and these are underpinned by Scripture, we can be confident that we follow in the teachings of Jesus. Exploring Scripture is the focus of our next section.



Section 2

Social Justice in Scripture

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.

Matthew 25:40

In this section we will look at:



How is social justice explored and handled in the Old and New Testaments?



What does the Bible show us about our responsibilities towards each other?



How does God guide us?

Social justice runs like a golden thread throughout Scripture.

The Bible is very clear that we have social responsibilities for the earth and towards each other; not only in what we do but in what and who we speak up for. Some people think that religion and politics shouldn't mix but this is a false dichotomy. Politics is the art of living well together and Jesus was always concerned with those who suffered at the hands of other people. His own death was, in part, a political challenge to the status quo.

When we leave out faith from politics, we leave out God from our local, national and international decision-making and legislation. We see the multiple effects of this with the breakdown of civil society, corrupt governance and dictators leading oppressive regimes. With substantial levels of poverty and rising levels of conflict and violence in many parts of the world leading to mass migration and unstable global economics, we need Catholic perspectives more than ever. Engaging in politics and living out our faith are not a choice between God and the world. How we seek God's guidance in our daily life and management of world affairs shapes the common good and the kingdom that Jesus invited us to share.

In a democratic system we have the right to participate in politics at different levels: from electing our representatives to responding to government consultations, to making a difference in our neighbourhood, to challenging institutions and various sectors. We should take advantage of these opportunities whenever we can. In this way we express our faith through social action. We try to look at the world through the eyes of Jesus, to draw on our Catholic Tradition, to challenge injustices wherever we can, and to support others in their pursuit of the common good.

Catholic Principles for Reading the Bible

Before we look at a number of important themes in Scripture, here are some Catholic principles for reading the Bible:

1. God is the principal author of Sacred Scripture
2. God used specific people who wrote in human language at a particular time and place in history. These writers reflected their own personalities and educations.
3. The truth that they conveyed is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression.
4. Catholics seek to understand what a sacred author is saying to be true, distinguishing that from something he is using as an image to help them understand the truth more clearly.
5. God chose to reveal certain truths for the sake of salvation. This message of salvation is the set of revealed truths which Catholics call the "deposit of faith," or Divine Revelation. The Bible is primarily concerned with telling these truths, which are without error.



To help Catholics grow in faith as they read Scripture, the Church gives us three important points for interpreting and understanding the Bible:

1. *'Be especially attentive "to the content and unity of the whole Scripture"'*. (Catechism, 112). It all fits together, so we shouldn't just look at selected parts in isolation.
2. Read the Bible within *'the living Tradition of the whole Church'* (Catechism, 113), since the Holy Spirit guides the Church in interpreting Scripture. Especially helpful is seeing how the saints, popes, early church fathers and mothers and Church councils have commented on Scripture throughout history.
3. Pay attention to *'the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation'* (Catechism, 114).

The entire deposit of faith forms a wonderful unity - doctrine sheds light on Scripture, and Scripture on doctrine.

The Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book'. Christianity is the religion of the 'Word of God', a word which is 'not a written and mute word, but the Word is incarnate and living'.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, sec. 108.

How the Bible Speaks to Catholics

In the New Testament, the Old is generally spoken of as '*the Scriptures*' or '*the sacred writings*' (Matthew 21:42). Gradually the word 'Scripture' has been used in the singular and has become a synonym for the Bible. Catholics cite Acts 8:32 to support this definition.

Catholics believe that there are different senses to our understanding of the Bible:

1 The **literal sense** is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation. All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal.

2 The **spiritual sense** – In light of the unity of God's plan, not just the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs.

3 The **allegorical sense** – We can find a more profound understanding of events by seeing their significance in Christ; so the crossing of the Red Sea is both a sign of Christ's victory and of Christian baptism.

4 The **moral sense** – The events we read in Scripture should lead us to act justly and fairly.

5 The **anagogical sense** (Greek: anagoge, 'leading') - We can see the realities and events in the Bible in terms of their eternal significance, leading us home to God. So the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem.

The whole point of reading the Bible is to encounter God, understand the revelation he has given us, and to grow in faith and wisdom in our everyday life.

We do not read alone, we read the Bible within the tradition of the Church to benefit from the holiness and wisdom of all the faithful who have gone before us.

Let us now take a look at the Bible through the lens of some key social justice themes as they emerge and develop in the Old and New Testaments.



Creation care

God created the world so that we would live in harmony with each other and flourish in community (Genesis 1-2). *"The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made"*. (Psalm 145:9). Any breakdown in relationship between humans, and humans and the rest of the created world, is a violation of God's design and purpose. Social justice helps to address this violation and aims to heal creation once again.

Our global climate crisis is revealing the extent of our misunderstanding of our relationship to creation and provokes us to renewed action and concern on behalf of our world and its multiple life-forms. The misunderstanding arises, in part, from our traditional translation of Genesis 1:26 as:

The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, as well as its role in the harmonious praise of God.

**Lumen Gentium,
sec.34**

The world sings of an infinite Love: how can we fail to care for it?

**Laudate Deum,
sec. 65**

²⁶ *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

Some interpretations of the word 'dominion' imply human control and power over the rest of the earth. Whereas it really relates to our responsibilities as created beings. More recently 'stewardship' and 'care for creation' have been used to describe the relationship and role between humanity and creation. In his recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis provides us with a different idea called 'situated anthropocentrism' where humanity is still at the centre, but at the centre of a web of necessary and mutual relationships across all of creation.

Today, as we see the damage to our planet and acknowledge our responsibility for the causes, we know our relationship and responsibilities towards creation need to change urgently. We are co-creators of the earth's wellbeing not passive consumers of its resources.

Contemplating the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we discover anew what it is for us to be the image of God. If we are created in the image and likeness of the Creator incarnate in Jesus then our rule and dominion is to be like his. Service to all inspired by love of all, and a sustained commitment to their wellbeing and flourishing. *"That they may have life and have it abundantly."* (John 10:10).

Pope Francis also reminds us in *Laudato Si*: *"...we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image justifies absolute dominion over the earth and her creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context... recognising that they tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world. (Genesis 2:5). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing, or working, while "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving."*

Laudato Si, sec. 67





For all our blessings, progress and achievements, we remain creatures among creatures; at one with the multiple life-forms created and willed into being by the loving Creator. We are called to grow in a perfect compassionate love imaging the compassionate Creator who Jesus revealed to us. To imitate the God who knows the falling of even the smallest sparrow from the sky.

Our need for universal harmony is made possible through Christ's incarnation as expressed in Colossians 1:15-20:

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Since all things come from, through and in God (Romans 11:36), the final goal of creation is that Christ should be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).



Going Deeper / Further Reading:

- [The Call of Creation - Catholic Bishops' Conference \(cbcew.org.uk\)](https://www.cbcew.org.uk)
- [The God Who Speaks – Creation Care](#)
- [Laudato Si' \(On Care for Our Common Home\) – Pope Francis – May 24, 2015](#)
- [Laudate Deum \(On the Climate Crisis\) – Pope Francis – October 4, 2023](#)

Law and a new social order

The social order requires constant improvement; it must be founded in truth, built on justice, and enlivened by love: it should grow in freedom towards a more humane equilibrium.

Gaudium et Spes, sec. 26

We are called to direct society to the pursuit of the common good and, with this purpose in mind, to persevere in consolidating its political and social order, its fabric of relations, its human goals.

Fratelli Tutti, sec. 66

The prolonged oppression of the people of Israel exiled in Egypt is the model of social injustice. God hears their cry (Exodus 2:23-25; 3:7) and calls Moses to lead Israel to Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:4). There God establishes a constitution for Israel as a free people living according to a different order of social justice - The Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:2-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21). The institution of the Sabbath promotes social equality, enabling everyone to rest and worship God, whether servants, strangers, employers, citizens and even the animals. (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

One product of our 24/7 culture is a needs-based employment where workers' hours are determined by someone else's priorities, conditions and profits. Without appropriate rights and sufficient rest this leads to widespread employment insecurity and financial instability.

The Law (Torah), as described in the Pentateuch, prioritises our duties towards the weakest people at all stages of life. Social justice depends on the fairness and strength of the legal system and the ability to challenge corruption, the Torah states: "*You shall not render an unjust judgment*" (Leviticus 19:15); "*You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen: for I am the Lord your God.*" (Leviticus 24:22). God is the model of the just judge who "*loves righteousness and justice...*" (Psalms 9:5; 33:5; 36:6; 37:6). In order for people to receive justice, our current UK legal system must function fairly, efficiently and affordably. It should enable justice to be met without lengthy and costly processes and for there to be clearly defined mechanisms of support as determined by the police and Crown Prosecution Service.

Again and again in the Bible, God defends the most vulnerable from social injustice: "*You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan... If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry*" (Exodus 22:21-23). A commitment to respect and pay the poor for their work promptly is repeated explicitly, as is the harvest provision to the poorest (Deuteronomy 24:6-22). These issues are highlighted by Jesus when he reads from Isaiah 58 and 61 in Luke 4:16-21 and in so many of his parables and teachings.

One of the defining issues of our time is the number of migrants and asylum seekers needing safety and

sanctuary regardless of whether they are fleeing war, violence or natural disaster. With migration figures globally recorded at their highest ever, it is an issue at the heart of the Church's mission. In the face of this challenge, the migration experiences of many communities throughout the Scriptures speak powerfully to our own times including Jesus' very own parents soon after his birth.



Going Deeper / Further Reading:

- [Love the Stranger - Catholic Bishops' Conference \(cbcew.org.uk\)](https://www.cbcew.org.uk)
- [The God Who Speaks – Good Work and the Bible](#)
- [The God Who Speaks – Law and Mercy in the Scriptures](#)
- [The God Who Speaks – Poverty in the Bible](#)
- [Laborem Exercens \(On Human Work\) – Pope John Paul II – September 14, 1981](#)
- [Deus Caritas Est \(God Is Love\) – Pope Benedict XVI – December 15, 2005](#)
- [Caritas in Veritate \(Charity in Truth\) – Pope Benedict XVI – June 29, 2009](#)
- [Fratelli tutti – Pope Francis – October 3, 2020](#)

Kings and Prophets

There is no better way to establish political life on a truly human basis than by fostering an inward sense of justice and kindness, and of service to the common good.

Gaudium et Spes, sec. 73

Government leaders should be the first to make the sacrifices that foster encounter.

Fratelli Tutti, sec. 190

The Scriptures take a critical view of the many kings of Israel who represent an often, abusive, centralised national power (1 Samuel 8). We see the result of the breakdown in the fall of the kingdom and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (2 Kings 24-25).

The true King of Israel and of the world is God (Psalms 95-99). His messengers are the prophets who serve him as their true King and who cry out for justice and liberation.

Woe to those who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right...

Isaiah 10:1-2a



Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos and Micah constantly speak on behalf of the marginalised. They are the social reformers who oppose the bastions of power – the bad kings, corrupt judges and flawed institutions, including religious leaders and the wealthy, in support of the poor and oppressed. They command the people to: “*hate evil and love good, and establish justice at the gate*” (Amos 5:15). Later, Jesus becomes the ultimate prophet dying for justice as well as speaking up for it.

We still have prophets in our own time. Their voice and leadership can speak just as powerfully to our hearts and minds. The prophetic role of Pope Francis in particular, has challenged us to think and live in radically new ways.



Going Deeper / Further Reading:

- [Deus Caritas Est \(God Is Love\) – Pope Benedict XVI – December 15, 2005](#)
- [Caritas in Veritate \(Charity in Truth\) – Pope Benedict XVI – June 29, 2009](#)
- [Laudato Si’ \(On Care for Our Common Home\) – Pope Francis – May 24, 2015](#)
- [Fratelli tutti – Pope Francis – October 3, 2020](#)
- [Laudate Deum \(On the Climate Crisis\) – Pope Francis – October 4, 2023](#)

Equality and respect

Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through such courtesy and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them.

Gaudium et Spes, sec. 28

The dignity of others is to be respected in all circumstances, not because that dignity is something we have invented or imagined, but because human beings possess an intrinsic worth superior to that of material objects and contingent situations.

Fratelli Tutti, sec. 213

Jesus re-defined the idea of kingship and the 'Kingdom of God' on earth, by championing equality before God rather than hierarchy. His politics build on Old Testament foundations and develop them further: *"you know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all"* (Mark 10:42-44).

This inspires Paul to say that belief in Christ enables us to overcome social, religious and cultural differences. *"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28) and therefore, the gifts of each should be valued. (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12).

Jesus continues to develop his teachings on social justice beyond the limits of the Jewish Law, to help one's neighbours even in situations that fall outside the legal framework. This is demonstrated in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) as well as his healing people on the Sabbath, and talking with children, women, sex workers, lepers and tax collectors.

Jesus' criteria are laid out in the Last Judgement: *"truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me"* (Matthew 25:40) and in the Golden Rule (Mark 12:28-34). Here Jesus re-emphasises the founding values of the Torah (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:4-9) as the key to religious living and warns of unethical working practices (Matthew 18:23-35; 25:14-30), so that the private and the public spheres are equally called to justice and compassion (James 2:14-26).

These texts are just as powerful today. The same issues are often perpetuated with those incarcerated in our prisons, those who can and cannot get work, those who are discriminated against and excluded at multiple levels of societal wellbeing.



Going Deeper / Further Reading:

- [Love the Stranger - Catholic Bishops' Conference \(cbcew.org.uk\)](https://www.cbcew.org.uk)
- [The God Who Speaks – Good Work and the Bible](#)
- [The God Who Speaks – Law and Mercy in the Scriptures](#)
- [The God Who Speaks – Poverty in the Bible](#)
- [Evangelium Vitae \(The Gospel of Life\) – Pope John Paul II – March 25, 1995](#)
- [Fratelli tutti – Pope Francis – October 3, 2020](#)



Wealth and poverty

Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the world's citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty.

Gaudium et Spes, sec. 4

As a community, we have an obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development.

Fratelli Tutti, sec. 118

Jesus despised luxury at the expense of those in poverty. He addresses the economic roots of social injustice by challenging our fear for personal security and greed with regard to material goods. *"No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and wealth. Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"* (Matthew 6:24-34).

This mandate motivated the early Christian community to live modestly: *"all who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need"* (Acts 2:44-47).

Today there are many options being explored to address the continued gulf between those living in poverty and those with wealth. These include a commitment to a universal minimum wage; adequate housing; fair and just access to education and healthcare necessary for a dignified life; and revisions of both the benefits' and taxation systems.



Going Deeper / Further Reading:

- [The God Who Speaks – Poverty in the Bible](#)
- [Deus Caritas Est \(God Is Love\) – Pope Benedict XVI – December 15, 2005](#)
- [Caritas in Veritate \(Charity in Truth\) – Pope Benedict XVI – June 29, 2009](#)
- [Fratelli tutti – Pope Francis – October 3, 2020](#)



Belonging and community

For the bonds which unite the faithful are mightier than anything dividing them.

Gaudium et Spes, sec. 92

By its very nature, love calls for growth in openness and the ability to accept others as part of a continuing adventure that makes every periphery converge in a greater sense of mutual belonging.

Fratelli Tutti, sec. 95

The biblical vision for society is rooted in a community of love and belonging among all its creatures. The animals are to enjoy the same Sabbath rest as the king and the pauper.

James 2:14-26 summarises this vision by saying that *'faith without works is dead'* so that we have a duty to put our faith into practice by caring for those in need and challenging injustice wherever we find it.

It took Jesus' death and resurrection to unite faith in Christ with social justice, and with him we build community, solidarity and the common good. So, we must continue to work towards the peace and reconciliation of a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21).

Pope Francis makes this focus on solidarity very clear in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* when he states that challenging the structural causes of poverty is a key dimension of social action:

Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights.

Fratelli Tutti, sec. 116



When we challenge social injustice we:

Deepen our relationship with God.

- Live out the biblical imperative.
- Love and serve our neighbours before God.
- Pray regularly for justice and peace.
- Transcend and break down boundaries.



Give generously of ourselves.

- Provide mutual affirmation and support.
- Give hope to ourselves and others.
- Translate what we believe into action.
- Empower and transform the world.



Advocate and protect human dignity.

- Demonstrate Catholic social teaching.
- Help to build God's kingdom on earth.
- Express real values and meaning in human life.
- Be a voice for the voiceless.
- Encourage others to work for social justice.



Going Deeper / Further Reading:

- [Deus Caritas Est \(God Is Love\) – Pope Benedict XVI – December 15, 2005](#)
- [Caritas in Veritate \(Charity in Truth\) – Pope Benedict XVI – June 29, 2009](#)
- [Fratelli tutti – Pope Francis – October 3, 2020](#)
- [Laudato Si' \(On Care for Our Common Home\) – Pope Francis – May 24, 2015](#)
- [Laudate Deum \(On the Climate Crisis\) – Pope Francis – October 4, 2023](#)

Biblical Reflections for discussion

Social Justice for Workers



A Bible reflection on Luke 19:11-27 (and Matthew 25:14-30)

Read the parable of the Talents and see how the different perspectives and experiences of the slaves raise key questions about workers' rights and the role of the Master – the boss.

The Parable of the Talents

¹¹As they were listening to this, he went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. ¹²So he said, "A nobleman went to a distant region to receive royal power for himself and then return. ¹³He summoned ten of his slaves and gave them ten pounds and said to them, 'Do business with these until I come back.' ¹⁴But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to rule over us.' ¹⁵When he returned, having received royal power, he ordered these slaves to whom he had given the money to be summoned so that he might find out what they had gained by doing business. ¹⁶The first came forward and said, 'Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds.' ¹⁷He said to him, 'Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities.' ¹⁸Then the second came, saying, 'Lord, your pound has made five pounds.' ¹⁹He said to him, 'And you, rule over five cities.' ²⁰Then the other came, saying, 'Lord, here is your pound. I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, ²¹for I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man; you take what you did not deposit and reap what you did not sow.' ²²He said to him, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked slave! You knew, did you, that I was a harsh man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? ²³Why, then, did you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with interest.' ²⁴He said to the bystanders, 'Take the pound from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds.' ²⁵(And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten pounds!') ²⁶I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ²⁷But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to rule over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.'"

We all know the traditional interpretation of this parable. God has given us 'talents' - here described as 'pounds', and we will be judged on our use of them at the Last Judgement. But is

that the meaning Jesus intended? The head of the household in Luke 19:12 is an aristocrat who is going off on business and leaves his most powerful servants a huge amount of money, each according to their skill, to make him a profit while he is away.

The amount of money is on a fabulous scale: 10, 5 and 1 talents or pounds. We are talking about millions of pounds in today's currency. The investment opportunities would include lending to peasants with high interest rates to plant crops and with the land forfeit as collateral or buying up essential supplies and selling them on at profit to those in most need. Remember that the peasants in Jesus' time are already paying a large part of their produce in tax in kind to the Romans and to the Temple, so the stewards' extortionate and exploitative profit-making is on top of an already heavy taxation. Again, this buys into the process of alienating the peasants from the land so that they become dependent on the new elite large estate owners. In Luke's gospel, the aristocrat departs a nobleman and returns a king. There is a memory of Herod's sons rushing off to Rome to claim the throne with Herod Antipas returning as King of Galilee.

Look at the praise poured out on the first two stewards, but what would the original audience have thought of them? Amazingly, the third steward tells it as it is. He has safeguarded his master's money but refused to collude with the iniquitous practices of his fellow stewards. He cuts through the seeming virtue of their service and names and shames his master as strict, cruel, harsh and merciless, as an exploiter of the labour of others. He is the vulnerable whistleblower who exposes the structure of exploitation and gives a prophetic judgement on it. His reward is exclusion, poverty, misery and gnashing of teeth with the homeless. He is being excluded from the luxury of his master's household into the daily struggle of the day labourers.

This is a dangerous story. It makes those at the top and bottom of society reflect on what would happen if retainers and stewards no longer colluded with their master. What would happen if they took up common cause with the landless and powerless masses that remain in the majority today?

Questions for discussion

- How does this Bible text speak to you?
- What does it invite us to do as individuals?
- What does it invite us to do as groups, communities and as the Church?

Social Justice for the Poor Man at the Gate



A Bible reflection on Luke 16:19-31

Read this story about wealth and poverty and how two very different people received the opposite responses from Abraham after death for the way in which they had lived on earth.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.

²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.

²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’

²⁷He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰He said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Here we have a powerful and wealthy man, dressed in purple clothes. These cost a fortune and imply a royal or imperial official, whose fine cotton is imported at great expense from Egypt. Lazarus meanwhile, is described as destitute, corpse-like, almost carrion for the wild dogs. Yet the dogs alone are kind to him, licking his sores which are the result of malnutrition. The social difference between the two protagonists could not be greater and, to underline this, Jesus emphasises the great gate that keeps Lazarus (whose name in Greek ironically means “God helps”) excluded. If only the gate had been open, everything would have been different. The Rich Man dies and is no doubt buried with honour.

But now in paradise, like a privileged dinner guest, Lazarus reclines on the breast of Father Abraham and the Rich Man is in torment in Hades; not Hell but the place where you await the resurrection and learn

the lessons you should have done in life. What has the Rich Man learnt? He asks Abraham to command Lazarus to bring him water but Abraham reminds him of his life and that this is the consequence.

There is a play here between the gate the Rich Man could have opened at any time to have comforted Lazarus and the great gulf that now separates them. Next, the Rich Man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers so they can avoid his fate. Abraham points out they already have all they need in the teaching of Moses.

Again, notice how the Rich Man speaks of Lazarus, as an insignificant slave. He has learnt nothing. And then that extraordinary, ironic sentence ‘*If someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.*’ And Abraham’s retort: if they have ignored Moses and the prophets, who spoke God’s word, why would they listen to one resurrected?

Throughout, Abraham seeks the Rich Man's recognition of Lazarus as equally a child of God. Yet he only cares about his brothers. He cannot see Lazarus as a child of God and, therefore, as his brother, which is the teaching of the Torah. In telling this story Jesus places himself squarely in the prophetic tradition of Isaiah 1:16-17,5:7; Jeremiah 5:23-29; 21:11-14; Amos 2:6-11; 5:10-24 and Micah 3:1-3, 9-12, which condemns the exploitation of earlier generations of Kings and oppressive royal officials. But the story also highlights how class and family interests within the new economy have undermined the sense of solidarity among the people.

The parable gives us a way of interpreting the two-tiered society of the time. That such a great divide between the rich and the people of the soil is the direct result of serious interest on loans, of high taxation and their consequences. What is required is the re-establishment of a sense of mutuality, of fundamental relationship. Without this, it is possible for the rich to continue to exploit the poor, seizing land and building great estates through the manipulation of debt.

The shared space that they all once inhabited as Israel, the people of God, has been undermined and re-interpreted. The poor are meant to believe this is God's will or blessing.

As Jesus tells the story, this official interpretation unravels. The destitute on the street becomes the honoured guest at the heavenly banquet. It is fitting that Jesus should have referenced Abraham, whom the Jerusalem elite had used as the symbol of their class and its ethnic purity, and who legitimated their rule. In Jesus' story, however, Abraham is now the one who restores true kinship and hospitality to the destitute. Such stories show Jesus in serious conflict over the interpretation of the religious Law and its application.

Questions for discussion

- How does this Bible text speak to you?
- What does it invite us to do as individuals?
- What does it invite us to do as groups, communities and as the Church?



Social Justice for Women



A Bible reflection on Luke 18:1-8

Read the parable of the struggle and perseverance of a poor widow and see how faith and resistance are crucial if we aren't satisfied with an unjust life.

The Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge

¹Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ²He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my accuser.' ⁴For a while he refused, but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" ⁶And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"



Jesus told this parable to encourage his followers to persevere in prayer and to confront injustice while awaiting God's Kingdom. Jesus assures his followers that God will provide justice in the end. The place of this parable is an unnamed city. Here are the civil authorities who frequently make corrupt alliances with the priests, lawyers, governors, militia and the rich. Widows were very vulnerable in Jesus' society - they were among the powerless ones.

In this parable we have two people: the judge described as one of these bad characters who did not fear God or respect humanity. The Biblical insistence of doing justice for the widow and orphan was because there was no justice for those living in poverty, such as described in Exodus 22:21-23. And since there are so many similar texts in Exodus, Deuteronomy and the Prophets, it is clear that such compassionate practice was often abandoned. And we have the widow who constantly begs the judge to grant her justice. These two people lived in the same city but represent opposites at every level.

While we do not know the nature of the injustice the widow has suffered, it must have been serious if she wasn't willing to give it up. She was defenceless and trying to make a legal case against someone who had wronged her. Jesus' story presumes the woman is without support or worse, that her family have undermined her inheritance rights by bribing the local judge. A woman had to be represented in court by a man usually of her immediate family, but Jesus tells us she is alone, so her prospects are not hopeful.

In this story the widow's claims are just, but she has no means to persuade the judge to act positively on her behalf. The presumption is the judge has already been bribed to find fault against her. Jesus tells us the judge is so corrupt that he *"has no fear of God and has no respect for anyone"*. This is already clear as he deals with her case alone. All such cases, by right, demand a tribunal, so bribes have already perverted the Law. This is a judge who has colluded with the Roman forces of occupation and their systematic alienation of the local masses from their means of support and survival, creating a culture of debt and dependency.

But the widow does not give up. She sees exactly what is happening, she knows what her rights are and she works out an effective strategy to bring about the justice which the corrupt process deprives her of. She does not appeal to the court, as the local justice system has been clearly undermined. She identifies the key figure who can change things and targets him – the unjust judge. She goes public. She appears day after day at the town gate where the men of influence gather, and she cries out against him. One woman's voice repeatedly calling for justice. She speaks the truth and many there will recognise it as truth. She makes public the corruption of the Law which should serve all. Notice her emphasis is on calling him to do justice. She is calling him to account in public.

And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them.

Luke 18:6-8

So what made the judge change? Was he afraid of her, worried about how she might discredit him or is he just fed up with her insistence? One day he says to himself: *"because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming."* At last, her constant demand brought her justice. He can only take a certain amount of shame, because beyond that, his own authority will be undermined and his wealthy backers may no longer have use of him.

Jesus gives us a model of a thoughtful and creative woman whose unorthodox action, beyond the norms of gender and status, gains the just verdict that simple appeals to the compromised system could never have achieved. As a piece of sustained grass roots activism it has a lot to teach us.

Women are often the most vulnerable persons in our cultures today. They should not need to beg for justice nor should they beg alone. No woman should passively allow themselves to be imprisoned in roles that diminish them or that oppressive societies determine for them. As Christ's followers, both men and women have a responsibility to persist, to be faithful in prayer, and to be active in the struggle for social justice.

Questions for discussion

- How does this Bible text speak to you?
- What does it invite us to do as individuals?
- What does it invite us to do as groups, communities and as the Church?





Section 3

How to Take Action

The Catholic Church does not teach definitively where the role of the political authorities should begin and end in relation to the issues discussed in other sections. However, the Church believes that actions to promote social justice are necessary at all levels in society.

Throughout its history, Catholic Tradition has consistently promoted care for the vulnerable and a preferential option for the poor. Pope Paul VI challenges the Church directly in this call to action in his Apostolic Letter 'Octogesima Adveniens' when he says:

It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. It is too easy to throw back on others responsibility for injustice, if at the same time one does not realise how each one shares in it personally, and how personal conversion is needed first.

Octogesima Adveniens, sec. 48

While social action is an intrinsic part of our faith and gospel imperative, it is important to remember here, that Catholics legitimately hold different views on many issues. Indeed, the nuance of Catholic teaching changes over time and its application may depend on a number of factors. The extent to which it is felt that problems of social justice should be addressed by local and national governments, the international community, by civil society organisations, the Catholic Church's own charities and by individuals will depend

¹The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, ²to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn...

Isaiah 61:1-2

on different circumstances and prudent judgement. That is why Catholics differ on public policy issues and that Catholics can be found in all major political parties. The fact that they differ on issues does not reduce our responsibility to act. We all have a duty to participate in debate and enrich that debate with our Catholic social justice perspective and lived experience.

Social action takes many forms from engaging with your MP or MS to volunteering for a charity or befriending the lonely in your neighbourhood. It does not need to be complicated.

In the Bible, social action starts with how we see the world and our response to those in need, as individuals and as communities. This idea of shared responsibility runs throughout the Old and New Testaments and is why the Catholic Church has always placed social action at the heart of its mission. In Matthew's Gospel (25:31-46) Jesus gives a sermon on the Last Judgement. He compares people with sheep and goats who will be separated at the end time by how they cared for other people.

Jesus says: "...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

These merciful acts are to be performed not just for the sake of charity, but to deepen one's faith by imitating Christ and his teachings. A believer is reminded of their wider responsibilities to those in need and can receive grace by performing them. These acts support the emphasis Jesus places on serving others rather than worshipping God through sacrificial rituals as we read in Matthew 9:13 where we are told that God "... desires mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners."

Known in the Catechism as the 'Seven Corporal Works of Mercy' they are:

1. To feed the hungry.

2. To give water to the thirsty.

3. To clothe the naked.

4. To shelter the homeless.

5. To visit the sick.

6. To visit those in prison.

7. To bury the dead.

Some of these acts are also mentioned in the Book of Isaiah 58: 7-10 but the seventh act of burying the dead is found only in the Book of Tobit and not in Matthew's gospel. It was added to the list during the Middle Ages.

In Pope John Paul II's encyclical "Dives in misericordia" written in 1980 he states that: *"Jesus Christ taught that man not only receives and experiences the mercy of God, but that he is also called 'to practice mercy' towards others."*

And in an address on the 2016 World Day of Prayer for Creation, Pope Francis invited the world to make *"care for creation"* a new work of mercy, describing it as a *"complement"* to the existing works of mercy. Pope Francis described this new work as having both corporal and spiritual components. Corporally, it involves *"daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness"*. Spiritually, it involves contemplating each part of creation to find what God is teaching us through them.

This pronouncement included many quotations from his encyclical on the environment *Laudato Si* and is further supported in his Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*.

We can all make a difference to the world regardless of our education, employment or vocation. We do not need to be academically qualified in politics or economics to hold valid opinions on social justice issues or to take social action. Do not forget that engagement with decision makers is available to people of all ages and political affiliations. You do not need to be of voting age or to share the political views of your MP/MS in order to contact them. They represent you, no matter your age or your political affiliation.

Getting started

You have heard of a new council or government initiative and can see the potential implications for family life; you have noticed a particular social issue within your community; or you are concerned about the impact of poverty on families across the world – you want to get involved but how do you go about it?

Here are 7 steps you can take:

1. **Identify** the issue and **get a group together**.
2. **Research** and **analyse** the issue.
3. Identify **potential solutions** or ways of managing the issue.
4. Decide **what message** about the issue you want to get across.
5. Identify **who needs to hear your message**; and who you need to influence.
6. Decide **how you will get your message across**.
7. Create **Prayer resources and prayer events**.

*The Lord looked and was
displeased that there was
no justice. He saw that there
was no-one to intervene...*

Isaiah 59:15-16

1. Identify the issue and getting a group together.

What is the issue?

There may be many issues that concern you but you need to prioritise the one that you can commit to, that you have some knowledge about, that you are passionate about challenging and that has serious consequences for your community or the wider world.

Issues can be identified through:

- Conversations with other people.
- Prayer and discernment together and on your own.
- Noticing what is happening around you locally, nationally and globally.
- Looking at the Media – the internet, newspapers, TV, radio, and social media.
- Looking at Catholic Church policy statements and priority areas of work.
- Reading resources from your local church, school network, workplace, or community news and council activities.

Get a group together

If you can persuade other people to join you in taking the issue forwards, you will find it easier and more encouraging than working alone.

Start with people you know in your family, friends, work, neighbourhood and church communities. Ask them if they are as concerned about an issue you have identified as you are;

or are they concerned about other issues which you might decide are more important after some prayer and reflection. You could run a simple poll on identifying priority issues.

Invite other people to support your concerns on social media or through other media such as in your parish newsletter, poster in your local supermarket, surgery, dentist or library information boards, by posting a simple question with a contact email – such as:

- i. are you concerned about the lack of affordable childcare in our area?
- ii. are you concerned about the number of asylum seekers stuck in hotels because there is a lack of available housing?
- iii. are you concerned that the government allows differences in healthcare provision across a highly diverse country?

Or you can create an event and invite people to discuss the issue either on Zoom or in your local church hall, community centre or other public building.

2. Research and analyse the issue

Without counsel, plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed.

Proverbs 15:22

What should I research?

It is a good idea to carry out your research with some basic questions in mind:

- Who is affected by this issue?
- What are the possible causes and effects?
- What can be done to address the issue?
- What are Jesus' teachings in relation to this issue?

This will help to concentrate your work and make it solution-focused.

How do I do this?

Through **primary research** (research you carry out yourself) such as questionnaires, surveys, discussion groups and case studies.

Through **secondary research** (using other people's research) such as council or government reports, resources from the relevant charities or organisations that focus on your issue, from websites, newspapers and other relevant magazines.

Once you have carried out your research, analyse the information in terms of your initial questions. It may be helpful to analyse the information using tools such as diagrams, flow charts and mind maps.

Example issue:



Analyse the issue in terms of cause and effect. Use your own experience as well for insight into the issue and think about the historical and cultural contexts of the issue.

- Is it a new issue or one that has affected previous generations, perhaps in different ways?
- Is it an issue that affects one particular group of people, e.g. children or the elderly; or a particular area such as rural areas as opposed to towns?

It is good to ask yourself additional questions about your findings:

- i. Have any of your findings surprised you?
- ii. Does the issue relate to other issues you are concerned about?
- iii. What else have you learnt?

3. Identify potential solutions or ways of managing the issue

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Jeremiah 29:7

Social action is not just about identifying problems in our societies – it is about finding ways of managing problems or finding potential solutions to difficult issues we face in our societies. Decision makers will take more notice of those who have positive suggestions to make rather than supplying lists of negative complaints.

You can identify potential solutions in a number of ways:

- Look to what the Bible has to say about social injustice and upholding justice.
Does the Bible say anything specific about your issue and more generally about how we should relate to one another? *See Section 2.*
- Use learning from previous Catholic thinking and thinkers, Vatican documents, policy statements and other research from Catholic organisations and universities.
Look at solutions the UK Parliament and Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) may already be considering. Research what other organisations, thinktanks and networks have suggested.
See Section 5 for links to relevant websites and organisations.
- Draw from your own expertise and experience.
Contact the Social Justice and International departments at the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales for ideas and advice.
Contact your diocesan departments that focus on social action e.g. Justice and Peace, Caritas, SVP, marriage and family life, human trafficking and the environment.
See Section 5 for links to relevant websites and organisations.

4. Decide what message about the issue you want to get across

What do you ultimately hope to achieve?

Here are some sample suggestions:

- Do you want to prevent your local authority from building on a children's playground?
- Do you want your council to do more to tackle climate change?
- Do you want the Government to support marriage through its tax policies?
- Do you want governments across the world to cancel national debts, end poverty and hunger, or enable primary and secondary education for all girls and boys?

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan.

Proverbs 29:2

From your aim develop a clear message that can be adapted for different audiences, such as Catholics at your church, the decision makers you want to influence and the media.

Make sure you stick to your core message – however, you could have one primary message but with further, more detailed messages for

those who have time to listen. So that whether you go on radio, are interviewed by a newspaper – online or offline, or are using social media, your message has more chance of being heard, and you are more likely to gain support and attention. If a message is too complicated to grasp it will either be ignored or will become lost in translation from your original intention.



5. Identify who needs to hear your message; and who you need to influence

The people who need to hear your message are the people who have the power to make the change! These include not only decision makers but also decision stakeholders (those who have an interest in the decision) and decision advisers (those who advise around the decision).

Don't forget that human rights are not created by institutions, they are rooted in intrinsic human values and morals. Human rights flow from our individual and collective conscience. This is where we see the relationship between our faith and social action. It is our values that we try to uphold and governments should protect. Governments cannot create these human rights and values, but they must always work in accordance with them, so when they do not, that is when we need to challenge them.

Similarly, the love and support that exists within families and other relationships makes social justice possible since it is here where care and concern can be clearly seen. Governments and other agencies can complement this care and support but they cannot ever replace it. This type of care and support depends on people like you around the world. In this way, we build up the Church on earth and its place in society.

Woe to those who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right...

Isaiah 10:1-2a

We are therefore, called to support all legislation that strengthens the common good, human flourishing and the sanctity of life.

The rights of some people such as:

- a) the unborn,
- b) those living with a disability,
- c) the terminally ill,
- d) the homeless,
- e) and asylum seekers

are so fragile that they demand uncompromising protection to ensure social justice.

This is what the Bible consistently tells us in the Old and New Testaments. *See Section 2.*

Key Decision Makers

Your MP or MS

You can write to your constituency MP by letter or by email. In Wales, you can also contact your constituency and regional Senedd Members to raise issues on devolved matters. They may pass the issue along to the relevant Government department or raise the issue in the House of Commons or Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament).

To locate your MP: members.parliament.uk/members/commons

To locate your MS: senedd.wales/find-a-member-of-the-senedd/

Your local party

As we said at the beginning of this Section 3, Catholics are active in all political parties. The Catholic Church strongly encourages this. It might surprise people to know that many issues are not decided in Parliament on a party political basis, and influencing individual MPs and Senedd members is always important (for example, on a range of life issues). However, the most important questions are debated within council and parliamentary political groups and then the party will take a more-or-less united line. So political parties are an important part of our political life. And there is a long tradition of Catholics being active in political parties.

Joining a political party is important for a number of reasons:

- It gives you a say in the selection of council and parliamentary candidates. Often the meetings that select candidates are quite sparsely attended and so you can easily influence them.
- You can be involved at any level you wish from simply voting in candidate selections, to attending events and campaigning, to becoming a chair of a local ward or constituency branch. It is remarkably easy to become actively involved and influential.
- It gives you an inside track to enable you to influence the thinking of local councillors, Senedd members and members of parliament.
- You can easily stand for election for a local political party, especially in a local council election, once you are a member.

- Most members of parliament realise their ambitions after being a member of a political party for a few years. Perhaps, one day, you might decide that this is for you!
- You can influence the policies of the political party you join in a more Christian direction.
- Political parties are social and fraternal organisations.

While no political party has a programme that entirely accords with Catholic social teaching, by joining a political party you can still help to influence their programmes.

In recent decades, political party membership has declined hugely. You may think that membership is not for you and that the activists who are members of political parties do not share our Catholic worldview. Nevertheless, the fall in political party membership means that small numbers of people joining a party can make a real difference. You can help to be that change using your faith and political expertise.

Main Political Parties

- Conservative Party – [conservatives.com](https://www.conservatives.com)
- Labour Party – [labour.org.uk](https://www.labour.org.uk)
- Liberal Democrat Party – [libdems.org.uk](https://www.libdems.org.uk)
- Reform Party – [reformparty.uk](https://www.reformparty.uk)
- Welsh Conservatives – [conservatives.wales](https://www.conservatives.wales)
- Welsh Labour – [welshlabour.wales](https://www.welshlabour.wales)
- Welsh Liberal Democrats – [libdems.wales](https://www.libdems.wales)
- Plaid Cymru – [partyof.wales](https://www.partyof.wales)
- Green Party – [greenparty.org.uk](https://www.greenparty.org.uk)

Your local councillors

The majority of local public services such as libraries, parks and homelessness accommodation are provided by councils. If you have a concern, check your local council website to find out more and for contact details. Some services will be provided by smaller district councils, others by larger county, borough or city councils. Should this not help address the issue, contact details of elected councillors for the local government ward (area) you live in will be on the website – they may also knock on your door or post a leaflet asking for your vote ahead of elections.

Ward councillors can hold regular surgeries in places like libraries or housing offices, so you can go along and raise the matter with them directly. Councils can also allow deputations of residents or local businesses to address monthly full council meetings, or smaller council committee meetings, e.g., for housing or transport.

To locate your local councillors:

England: _____

Wales: gov.wales/find-your-local-authority

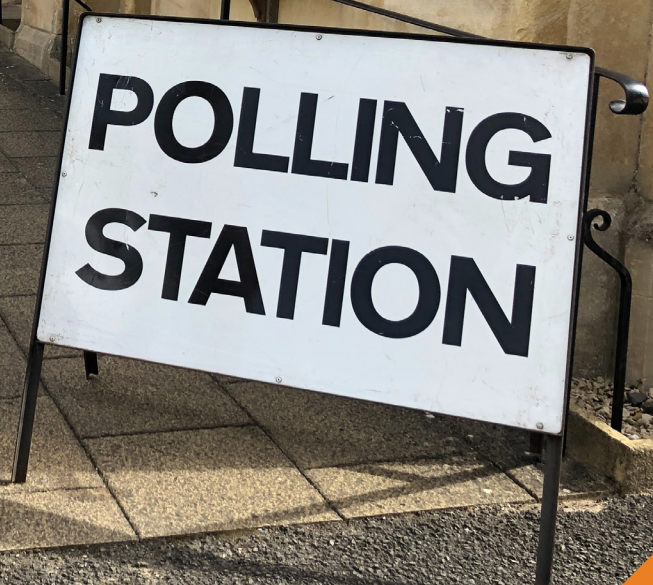
Other organisations

Many organisations may share your ideas and concerns such as other churches, charities or networks, and joining forces can strengthen your campaign. However, ensure that any partnerships or alliances are appropriate to the Catholic Church's mission and beliefs.

Wider society or civil society

Getting your message across to wider society will:

- a)** Raise awareness.
- b)** Influence other people's behaviour directly.
- c)** Encourage others to join in lobbying government.



**POLLING
STATION**

6. Decide how you will get your message across.

...He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

John 2:15b-16

Getting your message across can be the most challenging part of social justice. How can one voice out of millions be heard? There is no one way – so be imaginative and creative.

Do remember that your MP, Senedd Member or other representative are there to represent their communities, so when you raise issues with them they value your opinions in helping to shape their policies and further action. In this way, it is really important that you try to make your voice heard because when you do, you are living out your faith and speaking up for the vulnerable, just as Jesus commanded us to do.

Influencing decision makers:

Engagement with decision makers is available to people of all ages and political affiliations. You do not need to be registered to vote, of voting age or of a shared political party in order to contact your MP, Senedd Member or other local representative.

Building relationships with decision makers enables you to collaborate with them longer term and helps create trust in raising issues across different priority areas.

• Write them a letter or email

It is always best to write personalised letters or emails to those you hope to influence. Decision makers want to hear about how an issue specifically affects the people they represent – your voice can be very powerful!

Make sure that you use their correct title (e.g. Rt. Hon., Councillor etc) and get your message across in a positive and polite way.

Invite them to come and see your project or the work you are doing. This will help them to stay engaged with you and the issue you are highlighting.

Don't forget to thank them if they reply. This is not only good manners but helps to develop a working relationship should you wish to contact them again about the progress of your issue or another issue.

• Visit them

Most politicians provide opportunities for face to face meetings. MPs and Senedd Members hold constituency 'surgery' hours, during which time you can talk individually to them. You can visit them either as an individual or as a small group. Make sure you have your message planned clearly and concisely – take short additional written information for them as well if you have never met them before as this will help them to remember you and your issue.

• Invite them to a meeting

Why not invite your MP, Senedd Member, regional or local government representative to an event or discussion related to your issue you are focusing on? Get a group of people from your church and other local community networks together to raise questions, participate and debate and then afterwards, take time to review what social action is required next.

• Provide them with a briefing paper

Politicians get their information from many sources – you could be one of them! Find out from your diocese or from the Catholic Bishops' Conference website whether a briefing on your issue has already been produced, or write one yourself. Briefing papers are just that – brief; so use bullet points to outline the issue, its impact and your solutions. Including up to date statistics or a case study add credibility to your briefing. For more information about how to write a briefing paper, see Section 5.

- **Respond to central Government consultations (Green Papers)**

Government consultations provide citizens with the opportunity to comment on Government proposals. Consultations are usually posted on the relevant Government department's website and are generally open from 8 to 12 weeks.

Check whether the Catholic Church is sending a co-ordinated response on a related issue.

- **Organise a rally**

Rallies or protests are another way of raising awareness and galvanising support. They require planning and good co-ordination to ensure that meeting places and routes are well publicised and that the event is stewarded. You will also need to notify the local police force about your event at least 2 weeks beforehand. Make sure you contact your Diocesan Communications' Officers to gain maximum positive media coverage and support.

- **Send an e-Petition**

e-Petitions are a good way to raise awareness of an issue and get more supporters. e-Petitions are easy to sign and most are circulated by email or social media.

Number Ten Downing Street website has an e-Petition page where you can post and sign petitions. You will need five other people to support the application. Simply go to: petition.parliament.uk and follow the instructions on that page.

There is an 80 character limit for the title of your petition and you need to be very clear what you are asking the Government to do. Once you have submitted the title, the next page will ask you to provide further detail on what you want the Government or Parliament to do, and why you want them to do it. You can find further information on how petitions work here: petition.parliament.uk/help#standards

Once your petition is live, you will be able to publicise it and anyone will be able to come to the website and sign it. Your petition will show the total number of signatures received. It will also display the names of signatories, unless they have opted not to be shown.

If a petition receives more than 10,000 signatures, it will receive a response from the Government. If it receives more than 100,000 signatures, it will be considered for debate in the House of Commons. Downing Street will email the petition organiser and everyone who has signed the petition via the website giving details of the Government's response.

For further details: petition.parliament.uk

Senedd Cymru website has an e-Petition page where you can post and sign petitions. You will need two other people to support the application.

Simply go to: senedd.wales/senedd-business/petitions/creating-a-petition

For monitoring petitions: petitions.senedd.wales



Influencing others:

Distribute information sheets, newsletters and online information. Raise awareness of the issue and highlight your campaign in your parish and diocesan newsletter and websites. Contact your Diocesan Communication Officers to help spread the message including on social media which is vital to gain maximum support.

Using the Media

It is helpful to talk to your Diocesan Communication Officers about how you should approach the media. They will ensure that your story is represented positively and show you how to:

a) Use social media carefully and create virtual support groups.

Responding to social media requires polite and positive action. Well-thought out responses increase support and attention of the issue, and reduce the risk of inflammatory and negative comeback. As social media can share messages around the world in seconds, it is essential that it is used to galvanise support for your issue. Creating a virtual support group to raise awareness of your issue is quick and easy to do. It also enables people who cannot meet in person to support your cause as they can pray, petition and promote the issue wherever they are and at any time. This can greatly increase the groundswell and momentum for change.

b) Use print, radio and TV.

Approaching local media with a story may prove the most successful avenue but it is worth trying to get national coverage as well. Writing letters, emails and press releases to the local and national newspapers, radio and TV will also help get the message across.

c) Plan your message and timing carefully.

The media are interested in putting a human face to a story or issue so explain your message in terms of how it affects you and your community. Bear in mind that working with the media involves working quickly and to very tight and changing deadlines.

d) Research what other media coverage there has been about your issue.

It may be useful for you to provide a new angle on an existing issue.

e) Plan what you want to be reported.

You do not have to let journalists set the agenda if you are well prepared.

f) Be aware that the media will be looking for a particular angle.

They may present your message in a different slant from the one you intended. However, not all journalists follow the particular bias of their paper, TV, radio station and social media channels. You will need to reinforce your message time and again. As your social action progresses, evaluate what have been your most successful methods of communication. For more information about how to write a press release, see *Section 5*.

Host a public meeting or event

If you are aware of local interest in your issue then gather supporters together. A meeting or event provides you with the opportunity to reinforce your message, share ideas and strengthen your campaign.

Networking

Take advantage of meeting other people who might be interested in your campaign. This might be at church or at a public meeting. You may be interested in talking with other faith groups or networks e.g. schools or local businesses and learning what they think about the issue.

7. Create Prayer resources and prayer events

Praying to discern the right approach to an issue you have identified is really important. As Catholics, daily prayer and discernment are an essential part of our faith life as individuals and as the church around the world.

Asking other people to pray for your work and for the issues you raise is just as important as getting other types of support. We believe that God guides us in our work to tackle social injustices everywhere.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

1 Timothy 2:1-2

Setting up prayer chains, prayer vigils, prayer and worship events at your local church or ecumenically in rotation with other churches and networks is a very powerful way to take action. These activities bring people together, they build community and respect for faith and religious practice and they give us spiritual support in our social action.

They can be created online, e.g. through WhatsApp, Facebook groups or other social media platforms, or they can take place in your local church, school or community centres.

Providing simple prayer resources will help gain support and raise awareness such as:

- Writing intercessions for Sunday Mass that include an issue you are tackling.
- Putting an issue in the parish newsletter or on the parish and diocesan websites.
- Creating simple prayers to send by WhatsApp, text or email.
- Adding your issue for prayer support to an established rosary group.
- Exploring your issue in an established Bible Study Group.

Tried and Tested ideas in Dioceses:

- Creating shared prayer and worship events/resources to pray for issues.
- Using Catholic Bishops' Conference policy papers, research and projects to raise awareness and engagement.
- Using discussion papers to identify and analyse issues.
- Producing awareness-raising materials to highlight issues.
- Raising awareness through running road shows, events and debates.
- Taking part in local, national and international campaigns and initiatives.
- Creating and signing petitions.
- Introducing fast track/quick response groups to communicate issues and respond to Government consultations quickly.
- Running workshops and training on how to address local issues and write to your MP/Senedd Member/ local Councillor.
- Contacting MPs, Ministers, Senedd Members, Councillors, Civil Servants.
- Developing relationships with decision makers and influencers.
- Working with ecumenical partners/other partnerships to lobby on issues of mutual interest.
- Speaking at a local or national event to raise awareness and gain support.
- Speaking to the media to raise awareness and gain support.

Prayer Resources

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Philippians 4:6

Social Action and Prayer

An important part of social action is prayer. Prayer is a powerful way to take action especially when supported by all the other actions outlined in this Toolkit.

As we have seen throughout this resource, social policy is a body of social wisdom, about human individuals in different societies, and about the structures of those societies that enable humanity to come to its fullness. In the context of prayer as social action - social policy is given a deeper meaning and a compelling reason for its purpose.

The purpose of prayer in the context of social policy is three-fold:

1 *Personal* – to guide individual consciences in making just decisions - e.g. about fair wages to pay, whether to join a strike or protest, the treatment of women and children, and respect for the environment.

2 *Ecclesial* – to shape the response of the church to social issues - e.g. about migration, racial attitudes, political involvement, care for the poor and vulnerable, and respect for the collective practice of people's faith.

3 *Governmental* – to influence the activities of the public sector - e.g. about economic policies, international relations, peace and war strategies.

These purposes – personal, ecclesial and governmental – are the reason why prayer as part of social action is so important in the world today, and an integral part of evangelisation.

Social Justice and the common good are built up or torn down each day in the countless decisions and choices we make.

We have a responsibility of discernment in prayer both to our neighbour and to our fellow human beings across the world.

So how best can we carry the values of our faith into family life, the workplace and the public arena? How best can we be responsible in what we do in our daily lives?

As we think about our faith and social action, we gain a deeper insight into what God is like, which in turn feeds our spirituality. In other words, God can use social justice to reveal himself to us and to others. The more we open our hearts and minds to God, the stronger our relationship with God becomes and the more we become aware of the needs of others.

To help us to do this we will now look at Scripture and peoples' lived experiences in a set of Bible quotations and reflections from people around the world, drawing on social justice and faith issues.

They are grouped in pairs and you can use these quotations:

- To start a prayer at the beginning of a discussion about a particular issue
- As part of an opening or closing prayer and/or in a worship setting in church
- To explore what these quotations are saying to us about social justice and faith
- In written information and campaign materials

Reflection	Bible Quotation
<i>Bread for myself is a material matter, but bread for my neighbour is a spiritual matter.</i> Nikolai Berdyaev	<i>"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind", and, "Love your neighbour as yourself."</i> Luke 10:27
<i>Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.</i> Martin Luther King Jr	<i>The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no-one to intervene...</i> Isaiah 59:15-16
<i>You can't divorce religious belief and public service... I've never detected any conflict between God's will and my political duty. If you violate one, you violate the other.</i> James Earl Carter Jr (Former US President Jimmy Carter)	<i>And God placed all things under his (Jesus') feet and appointed him to be head over everything...</i> Ephesians 1:22
<i>But I can tell you that equating development with money, evaluating the human condition only in coin, is a great untruth. Human development cannot be equated simply with income level. For poverty is not just about low incomes; it is about loss of dignity, being treated as nothing, and basic needs not being met.</i> Njongonkulu Ndungane (Former Archbishop of Cape Town)	<i>You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.</i> Matthew 5:13-16
<i>Racism is a gaping wound in the body of Christ. We are each of us made in God's image and to deny the humanity of any one individual is to strike at the wholeness of God's creation.</i> Paul Boateng	<i>People cry out under a load of oppression; they plead for relief from the arm of the powerful.</i> Job 35:9
<i>Let us not despair. Let us not lose faith in man and certainly not in God. We must believe that a prejudiced mind can be changed, and that man, by the grace of God, can be lifted from the valley of hate to the high mountain of love.</i> Martin Luther King Jr	<i>You have already been told what is right and what Yahweh wants of you, only this, to do what is right, to love loyalty and to walk humbly with your God.</i> Micah 6:8

Reflection	Bible Quotation
<i>Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.</i> Margaret Mead	<i>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.</i> Acts 1:8
<i>These days the metaphor slips off the tongue rather easily. 'Hunger and thirst for justice' – we know the words ... Do you know or remember what hungry and thirsty people feel? The experience is weakening, frustrating. To be hungry is not to have had what you need to live; to be thirsty is to be trapped in a body that has become a burden.</i> Rowan Williams (Former Archbishop of Canterbury)	<i>Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, brothers, sisters, relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.</i> Luke 14:12-14
<i>Where human lives are concerned, time is always short: yet the world has witnessed the vast resources that governments can draw upon to rescue financial institutions deemed 'too big to fail'. Surely the integral human development of the world's peoples is no less important: here is an enterprise, worthy of the world's attention, that is truly 'too big to fail'.</i> Pope Benedict XVI (Apostolic Visit to the United Kingdom, 2010)	<i>Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.</i> James 1:27
<i>Do not turn your back on the needy, but share everything with your brother and call nothing your own. For if you have what is eternal in common, how much more should you have what is transient.</i> The Didache	<i>Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.</i> Philippians 2:3-4
<i>True reconciliation... means taking sides on behalf of the weak and the downtrodden, the voiceless ones. We cannot be neutral in situations of injustice and oppression and exploitation.</i> Archbishop Desmond Tutu	<i>Make your views heard... pronounce an upright verdict, defend the cause of the poor and the destitute.</i> Proverbs 31:8-9
<i>No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas. This is an excuse commonly heard in academic, business or professional, and even ecclesial circles. While it is quite true that the essential vocation and mission of the lay faithful is to strive that earthly realities and all human activity may be transformed by the Gospel, none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice.</i> Pope Francis	<i>But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.</i> Amos 5:24



Prayer for Social Justice

Lord,
We pray that through your vision
of the kingdom here on earth,
we may work for social justice.
We do not want to fly from your world
but to engage within it.
Where there is injustice help us to find ways to eradicate it.
Where basic human rights are denied and life drains away,
be with us to fight for equality and for dignity.
May ours be voices for change and compassion where none exist.
Stimulate our hearts to provide food, clothing and shelter
for your children who have none.
Help us engage in a politics based upon gospel values,
serving you our Living God,
through our service of your creation.
May our world be transformed into the paradise you first dreamed.
Amen.

Prayer for World Leaders

All-powerful God,
source and end of all,
guide our leaders as they strive to govern and serve their peoples.
Send them your spirit of wisdom,
bless them with the strength and courage of servant leadership,
and the generosity to see and face the injustices of our time.
May world leaders commit to the way of peace,
and not by oppression or violence.
May their rule be fair and just.
Help world leaders develop a new politics
which values equality above status,
and the welfare of the common good above their personal ambition.
Amen.

In The Same Spirit – A Prayer for Understanding

We will not all stand in the same place on many issues,
but we can stand in the same spirit of our faiths.
And that spirit is one of hope, love and justice.
Whatever our faiths, the route to which we come to God,
is based on humility and not selfishness.
We will refrain from using language
which stereotypes or labels others as inferior or evil.
We will challenge the desire for religious, military, political or economic power
that costs other people's lives.
In your Spirit, we cannot deny another person their basic right to live
or their desire to live as they would wish to live.
May this be our shared understanding.
Amen



Section 4

Monitoring and Evaluation

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?

Luke 14:28

In any social action it is important to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness and successes:

- i. the effectiveness of the methods you use to get your message and issue across.
- ii. the success of being heard.
- iii. any successes in creating change.

Monitoring and evaluating systems needs to be established and should take place:

- i. In the planning and development of your ideas and social action.
- ii. During the social action itself.
- iii. After the social action, initiative or campaign.

There are three steps that you should monitor and evaluate:

- **Activity**
e.g. emailing your MP/ Senedd Member; running an event etc.
- **Outcome**
e.g. changes in legislation.
- **Impact**
e.g. better life for families, communities etc.

It does not have to be complicated. Here are some basic principles that you can use to ensure your issue stays on target and is effective in creating the change you hope for.

1. Set clear and realistic goals

If you have defined a clear vision of what you want to achieve at the start of your social action, this will help you to monitor and evaluate whether you are achieving it. Your primary focus should be on your ultimate aim but you should also monitor how effective your methods are such as:

Evaluate the usefulness of your tools – writing to an MP/ Senedd Member, social media, hosting an event in your church, speaking on radio etc.

Decide on some milestones – how many weeks or months do you wish to spend on your issue?

- Set some dates by which you want to hear from different target groups.
- Set a date for creating or hosting an event.
- Change happens slowly so do not expect immediate results or results that will fulfil all of your aims and objectives.

Decide on some indicators of success – think in terms of short and long term goals.

Tips

- Be sure of the reasons for your social action
- Do not be too ambitious but do not limit your vision.

2. Be flexible

If one method of communication isn't proving effective, e.g. no one is signing your petition, think about another way to gain support, such as contacting local media or holding an event. Do stay on track with your message – if it seems that your goals are changing what might this suggest about your aims?

3. Monitor your resources

It is important to ensure that you have adequate resources to see the social action through. Resources include: time, people, commitment, materials, information, and for an event – a venue and refreshments.

4. Evaluate your activities

Once your goals have been reached, assess the effectiveness of the methods that you used to get your message across.

- What were your successes?
- What were the challenges?
- How manageable were your activities?
- What response did you have from decision makers?
- What would you do the same in future social action?
- What would you do differently in future social action?

5. Monitor the outcomes

When the social justice change that you have campaigned for has been agreed to, even in part, it is important to monitor its implementation. This can often be done through monitoring the media.

It is also important to share the outcome and the successes of your social action with those who have supported it. You might be interested in hearing about what others thought of your social action.



Tips

- Assess whether there were any surprises or unintended outcomes to your social action.



6. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the outcomes

Social justice change is just the beginning. Once you have carried out your assessment of the social action and whether it has achieved a result, it is good to see whether the changes you campaigned for achieve your ultimate objectives. This is a long term task and is rarely fulfilled quickly. Keep an eye out on the media as others will be monitoring and researching the impacts as well.

If the results you hoped for don't come about as a result of the social action you campaigned for, think about whether you want to explore different solutions to the issue that concerned you at the start.

Pray about whether you should commit yourself to further action or whether you should stop the action altogether for now. Whatever you decide, thank God for the learning and for guiding you as you live out your faith in social action. Sometimes, something we began a while ago is taken on by another person or group when the timing or environment is better, and so our efforts are not in vain.

Tips

- Use a case study – speak to someone who is affected by the issue you are campaigning on, before and after the policy or legislation changes. This could include you, someone in your family, friends or workplace. Although it won't be 100% scientific, it will give you some anecdotal evidence about the success of the change and social action that brought it about.



Remember that any change, no matter how small, as a result of your campaigning is valuable in the short and long term. Pope Francis can encourage us here when he says:

'We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread. Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile.'

Laudato Si, sec. 212.

It is our job to respond to God's call, to do what is right wherever we live in the world and never to be discouraged. We build the kingdom of God one brick at a time and we do it together. Pope Benedict XVI expresses the value of this service and of continued trust in God in *Deus Caritas Est*, sec. 35:

'There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged... In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord... We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work: "The love of Christ urges us on."'

2 Corinthians 5:14



Section 5

Volunteering and Further Resources

The Catholic Church is one of the greatest providers of voluntary and charitable services across England and Wales. Catholic volunteering schemes such as helping at L'Arche centres, soup kitchens, prison support, food banks or befriending the elderly are a crucial means of social action. Not only do these organisations model the gospel imperative that Jesus proclaimed so clearly, but they are found in every diocese where the need is there.

In this way we see how faith and social action go hand in hand. So in *Section 3* we highlighted the importance of the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy:

1. To feed the hungry.
2. To give water to the thirsty.
3. To clothe the naked.
4. To shelter the homeless.
5. To visit the sick.
6. To visit those in prison.
7. To bury the dead.

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:8

There are Catholic charities across England and Wales which respond to these works of mercy and many other social issues every day and they need our help and support.

'In the social sphere, the Church has always wished to assume a double function: first to enlighten the minds in order to assist them to discover the truth and to find the right path to follow amid the different teachings that call for their attention; and secondly, to take part in action and to spread, with a real care for service and effectiveness, the energies of the Gospel.'

Octogesima Adveniens sec. 48



If you would like to volunteer or get involved locally or nationally, it is helpful to think about the mission you're most interested in, how much time you have got and how far you would like to travel. Once you have decided where you would like to offer your support, you can contact the relevant charity to see whether they need your help. They will let you know what roles are available and provide you with relevant information and next steps to becoming a volunteer.

Here are some Catholic charities to choose from:

Aid to the Church in Need UK (ACN UK) – acnuk.org/our-campaigns/

Caritas in our archdioceses and dioceses:

- **Caritas Arundel & Brighton** – www.abdiocese.org.uk/formation-team
- **Caritas Brentwood** – www.caritasbrentwood.org/
- **Caritas Cardiff** – <https://rcadc.org/directory/commissions-committees/caritas-cardiff/>
- **Caritas Clifton** – www.csan.org.uk/member/caritas-clifton/
- **Caritas East Anglia** – www.rcdea.org.uk/caritas-east-anglia/
- **Caritas Hallam** – <https://hallam-diocese.com/caritas/>
- **Caritas Hexham & Newcastle** – <https://diocesehn.org.uk/services/caritas/>
- **Caritas Jersey** – www.csan.org.uk/member/caritas-jersey/
- **Caritas Catholic Care, Leeds** – <https://catholic-care.org.uk/>
- **Caritas Middlesbrough** – <https://middlesbrough-diocese.org.uk/>
- **Caritas Northampton** – <https://northamptondiocese.org/caritas/>
- **Caritas Nottingham** – www.dioceseofnottingham.uk/departments/caritas-and-justice-peace
- **Caritas Plymouth** – www.plymouth-diocese.org.uk/caritas-2/
- **Caritas Portsmouth** – <https://caritasportsmouth.org.uk/>
- **Caritas Salford** – www.caritassalford.org.uk/
- **Caritas Shrewsbury** – www.caritasshrewsbury.org.uk/
- **Caritas Southwark** – www.csan.org.uk/member/caritas-southwark/
- **Caritas Westminster** – <https://caritaswestminster.org.uk/>

Other Charities

- **Aid to the Church in Need campaigns** – <https://acnuk.org/our-campaigns/>
- **British Province of the Society of Jesus** – www.jesuit.org.uk/
- **CAFOD Campaign for Change** – cafod.org.uk
- **Cardinal Hume Centre** – www.cardinalhumecentre.org.uk/
- **Caritas** – www.caritas.org
- **Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN)** – www.csan.org.uk
- **CARJ** – <https://stagc.carj.org.uk/>
- **Catholic Children's Society** – www.cathchild.org.uk/
- **Catholic Disability Fellowship** – www.cfdn.org.uk/
- **Catholics for AIDs Prevention & Support** – <https://caps-uk.org/>
- **Coalition for Marriage** – www.c4m.org.uk/
- **CYMFed** – <https://cymfed.org.uk/>
- **Daughters of Charity Services** – www.dcsvpsservices.org/
- **Depaul Trust UK** – <https://www.depaul.org.uk/>
- **DoCat | Social Doctrine of the Catholic ChurchK** – <https://youcat.org/products/docat/>
- **Fr Hudson's Caritas** – www.fatherhudsons.org.uk/
- **Institute of Our Lady of Mercy** – <https://ourladyofmercy.org.uk/>
- **Irish Chaplaincy** – www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk/
- **JRS UK | Jesuit Refugee Service UK** – <https://www.jrsuk.net/>
- **L'Arche** – larche.org.uk
- **Marriage Care** – www.marriagecare.org.uk/
- **Mary's Meals** – <https://marymeals.org.uk>
- **The Medaille Trust** – <https://medaille-trust.org.uk/>
- **Million Minutes** – <https://millionminutes.org/>
- **Missio** – www.missio.org.uk/
- **National Board of Catholic Women** – www.nbcw.co.uk/
- **Noah Enterprise** – <https://noahenterprise.org/>
- **Nugent** – <https://wearenugent.org/>
- **Order of Malta** – www.orderofmalta.org.uk/
- **Oscar Romero Award** – www.romeroaward.co.uk/
- **Out There** – www.outtherecharity.org/
- **PACT (Prison Advice & Care Trust)** – www.prisonadvice.org.uk/
- **The Passage** – <https://passage.org.uk/>
- **Pax Christi** – <https://paxchristi.org.uk>
- **Santa Marta Group** – <https://santamartagroup.org/>
- **Seeking Sanctuary** – <https://seekingsanctuary.weebly.com/>
- **Stella Maris – Home** – [Stella Maris](http://StellaMaris)
- **St Antony's Centre for Church & Industry** – www.stantonyscentre.org.uk/
- **St Elizabeth's Centre** – www.stelizabeths.org.uk/
- **St John of God Hospitaller Services** – <https://sjog.uk/>
- **St Joseph's Hospice** – www.stjh.org.uk/
- **St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP)** – <https://svp.org.uk/>
- **Women at the Well** – www.watw.org.uk/
- **Your Place** – <https://your-place.org.uk/>

- **National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)** – ncvo.org.uk

NCVO produce a range of tools and resources for effective campaigning, from free downloadable factsheets to more detailed publications, and to guide you to useful resources produced by other organisations.

- **Catholic Schools**

Catholic schools sit at the heart of local communities. There are many different ways that you can support and engage with your Catholic schools, from volunteering on school trips to being on the parents' association panels. You can also live out your faith and serve your community by volunteering as a foundation governor at a local Catholic school – to find out more contact your diocese.

Model Press Release and Briefing Paper

Here are some helpful tips and templates when writing a press release or briefing paper.

Writing a Press Release

If you and your group set up a campaign to address a local issue, you may want to promote it so that others can get involved. A way to do this is through local news outlets, which can have big social media followings.

If you contact a local journalist they may ask you to send details of your campaign in an email format for consideration as a news story.

Be brief – they only want the who/what/where/how/why of a story – and no more than an A4 side or 300 words.

Always make clear the press release is on behalf of your local campaign group.

Here is a suggested template:

[your group name] St Peter's RC Church Food Bank

[date] XX MONTH 202X

[headline, be brief] Call for more food bank donations

[first line, 25 words max] An Anychester food bank is calling for more donations to come forward as winter and the cost-of-living crisis worsens.

[slightly longer, key names and numbers] The food bank set up at St Peter's RC Church Hall, on Hill Road, last summer has seen a big drop in donations recently as winter fuel bills have gone up, and with volunteers calling for more tinned produce and jars of baby food.

[name, indirect quote] Fionn McGann, chair, said that a local supermarket donating perishable food is a great help, but more is needed from the local community, in particular cans and jars.

[direct quote] Fionn said: *"Fighting hunger is also about fighting waste, as Pope Francis has said, and it's up to all of us to help out those who find themselves in difficulties."*

As the weather has worsened we've seen more people using the food bank while donations have gone down.

We're really grateful for things about to go out of date, though tins and jars are also a great help because it means households can plan ahead, and not just get by hand to mouth."

[include calls to action at the end] All donations for the food bank should be left in the container outside 22 Atalanta Road, Anychester at any time or day, or brought along to the church hall on Saturdays.



Writing a Parliamentary Briefing

The Catholic Church has a voice at local, national and international levels. It is important to make those with power and influence aware of the wonderful work undertaken by Catholic communities across our country and the world.

One way to do this is through sending parliamentarians briefings. Parliamentary briefings are often written for one of two reasons:

- It may be reactive. This means that perhaps you are aware that a particular debate is going to take place or a bill is going through its various stages in Parliament/the Senedd on a theme related to a concern you have, or a project you are involved with. In order to share your work or viewpoint with parliamentarians before a debate, or to encourage them to attend, it can be helpful to send a briefing.
- Sending a briefing can also be a proactive step. Sometimes it is important to inform parliamentarians about a project or a concern whether it is being discussed in parliament or not. This can be helpful in raising an issue which perhaps is not often discussed, or parliamentarians and wider society are less aware of. This can be particularly effective if the topic you want to engage parliamentarians with is taking place in their constituency or region.

MPs, MSs and Peers receive a huge amount of information each day, so it is important the briefings are kept short, concise and that it is made clear what action you want them to take.

You can include links and references if they serve a helpful purpose in explaining your points. If you have a published press release, you may wish to include a link to it within your briefing.

Please see a suggested structure below to help you write briefings for parliamentarians:

Title

Here you can name the debate or bill you are responding to, the date that this debate is taking place and your organisation/project's name.

Introduction and Overview

Here you will need to give a brief overview of:

- Who you are as an organisation/project.
- What your aims are.
- How your work is connected to the debate/discussions in Parliament/the Senedd.

For example, if the topic was protecting the environment, the Bishops' Conference may write: *The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) is the permanent assembly of Bishops in the two member nations, which acts as the national representative body of the Catholic Church. This briefing provides updated information on the Catholic approach to the environmental crisis. It highlights the importance of faith communities in tackling the crisis, especially the pioneering work of Catholic communities in England and Wales, and showcases the recently updated teaching document by the Bishops on the environment, 'The Call of Creation'.*

Body of Text

- This can be split into a number of sections with different titles if it makes your points clearer.
- You may want to speak about your project in more detail and then in a separate point, raise the issues that your project is facing and why.
- If you have produced a document you may wish to show case this, explain a bit about it and include a link.

For example, sticking with the environment theme the Bishops' Conference may use the following sections:

- Catholic social thought on protecting the environment.
- The Guardians of Creation Project
- The Call of Creation Document

Key Asks

After outlining your points, it may be helpful for you to include some bullet points at the end to emphasise what you would like parliamentarians or the UK/Welsh Government to do. This could range from asking them to:

- Raise the issues in the chamber or at a debate.
- Write to a Minister to make them aware of an issue.
- Table an oral question to ask a Minister.
- Meet with you or even to come and visit your project.

You do not need to send your briefing paper to every parliamentarian. You may choose to send it to your constituency MP/MS, the convenor of a debate or parliamentarians that are interested in the issue you want to raise. You can do this by sending the briefing via email usually in a pdf format to the official parliamentary email addresses of parliamentarians.

Websites

Here is a selection of websites, organisations and useful resource ideas to help you and your supporters be as effective as you can in your social action.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales:

- **Key Issues, Policy papers, Briefings and Contacts** – cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work
- **The Care of Creation and Love the Stranger documents** – Can be found here cbcew.org.uk/documents-and-publications
- **Social Justice** – cbcew.org.uk/home/the-church/catholic-bishops-conference-of-england-and-wales/departments/social-justice
- **International Affairs** – cbcew.org.uk/home/the-church/catholic-bishops-conference-of-england-and-wales/departments/international-affairs
- **Dialogue and Unity** – cbcew.org.uk/home/the-church/catholic-bishops-conference-of-england-and-wales/departments/dialogue-and-unity

Main Political Parties

- **Conservative Party** – conservatives.com
- **Labour Party** – labour.org.uk
- **Liberal Democrat Party** – libdems.org.uk
- **Reform Party** – www.reformparty.uk/
- **Welsh Conservatives** – conservatives.wales
- **Welsh Labour** – welshlabour.wales
- **Welsh Liberal Democrats** – libdems.wales
- **Plaid Cymru** – partyof.wales
- **Green Party** – greenparty.org.uk

Political Institutions

- **UK Parliament** – parliament.uk
- **UK Parliament Live TV** – parliamentlive.tv/commons
- **Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament)** – senedd.wales

UK Unions

- **Unison** – unison.org.uk
- **Unite the Union** – unitetheunion.org
- **Trades Union Congress (TUC)** – tuc.org.uk

Alliances, Networks and Thinktanks

- **Care** – care.org.uk
- **Care for the Family** – careforthefamily.org.uk
- **Centre for Enterprise, Markets and Ethics** – theceme.org

- Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) – centreforsocialjustice.org.uk
- Citizens UK – citizensuk.org
- Electoral Reform Society – electoral-reform.org.uk
- Fabian Society – fabians.org.uk
- Fairtrade Foundation – fairtrade.org.uk
- Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) – iea.org.uk
- Institute for Public Policy Research – ippr.org
- Joseph Rowntree (JRF) – jrf.org.uk
- Liberty – libertyhumanrights.org.uk
- Living and Dying Well – livinganddyingwell.org.uk
- Policy Exchange – policyexchange.org.uk
- Politeia – politeia.co.uk
- Right to Life – righttolife.org.uk
- Theos – theosthinktank.co.uk
- The Social Market Foundation – smf.co.uk
- Together for the Common Good (T4CG) – togetherforthecommongood.co.uk
- Working Families – workingfamilies.org.uk

Ecumenical organisations

- Christians in Parliament – christiansinparliament.org.uk
- Church Action on Poverty – church-poverty.org.uk
- Churches Together in England (CTE) – cte.org.uk
- Just Money Movement – justmoney.org.uk
- Pact – prisonadvice.org.uk
- Young Christian Worker movement – ycwimpact.com
- Quakers Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) – quaker.org.uk/our-work
- Campaigning in Collaboration – ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/running-a-charity/collaboration/ways-of-working-collaboratively/campaigning-in-collaboration

Christian Media

- The Tablet – thetablet.co.uk
- The Catholic Herald – catholicherald.co.uk
- The Universe – universecatholicweekly.co.uk
- Church Times – churchtimes.co.uk

■ **News Media Association** – newsmediauk.org

Diocesan Social Action websites

If you want to find out what's happening in your diocese visit your diocesan website.

Key Social Justice Bible Texts for further reflection and prayer

For more information about the
Bible and Scripture engagement
go to godwhospeaks.uk

Genesis 1-2	Psalms 9:5; 33:5; 36:6; 37:6; 95-99; 145:9	Micah 6:8	Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-35
Exodus 2:23-25; 3:7; 19:4; 20:2-17; 22:21-23	Proverbs 31:8-9	Zechariah 7:9-10	Romans 12:4-8; 13:1-7
Leviticus 19:15; 19:18; 24:22	Isaiah 5:8-24; 10:1-2a; 61:1-7	Matthew 6:24-34; 18:23-35; 25:14-30; 25:40	1 Corinthians 12
Deuteronomy 5:6-21; 5:12-15; 6:4-9; 24:6-22	Jeremiah 22:13-16; 34:8-16	Mark 10:42-44; 12:28-34	Galatians 3:28
1 Samuel 8	Ezekiel 18:5-9	Luke 6:20-26; 10:29-37; 16:19-31; 18:1-8	James 2:14-26
2 Kings 24-25	Amos 5:10-15; 5:21-24; 8:4-6	John 2:15b-16; 4:7-30	Revelation 21

Key Vatican documents on social justice issues

- Rerum Novarum (On Capital and Labor) – Pope Leo XIII – May 15, 1891
- Quadragesimo Anno (After Forty Years) (On Reconstruction of the Social Order) – Pope Pius XI – May 15, 1931 (40th anniversary of Rerum Novarum)
- Mater et Magistra (On Christianity and Social Progress) – Pope John XXIII – May 15, 1961 (60th anniversary of Rerum Novarum)
- Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth) – Pope John XXIII – April 11, 1963 – on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty
- Populorum Progressio (On the Development of Peoples) – Pope Paul VI – March 27, 1967
- Octogesima Adveniens (Eightieth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum) – Pope Paul VI – May 14, 1971
- Dives in Misericordia (On mercy) – Pope John Paul II – November 30, 1980
- Laborem Exercens (On Human Work) – Pope John Paul II – September 14, 1981 (90th anniversary of Rerum Novarum)
- Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (20th Anniversary of Populorum Progressio) – Pope John Paul II – December 30, 1987
- Centesimus Annus (The Hundredth Year) – Pope John Paul II – May 1, 1991 (100th anniversary of Rerum Novarum)
- Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life) – Pope John Paul II – March 25, 1995
- Fides et Ratio (Faith and Reason) – Pope John Paul II – September 14, 1998
- Deus Caritas Est (God Is Love) – Pope Benedict XVI – December 15, 2005
- Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth) – Pope Benedict XVI – June 29, 2009
- Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home) – Pope Francis – May 24, 2015
- Fratelli tutti – Pope Francis – October 3, 2020
- Laudate Deum (On the Climate Crisis) – Pope Francis – October 4, 2023
- Dilexi Te (On Love for the Poor) – Pope Leo XIV – October 4th, 2025

A Summary of Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching states that for everyone to be included and no one to be left behind, there needs to be a preferential option for the poor, vulnerable and marginalised. This principle has to be central to our decision-making and social action. It recognises that if the strong are separated from the weak, the strong also become impoverished. To be fully human means to live together with equal dignity alongside the rest of God's creation.

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.

Matthew 25:40

Dignity

Human life is sacred and the dignity of every human being is the foundation of a moral vision for society. We believe that every person is precious and that people are more important than things. We measure dignity by what enhances or threatens life, including war.

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The person is not only sacred but is a social being in relationship with other people. How we organise our societies in economics, politics, law and policy directly affects our capacity to build community. Marriage, family life and relationships are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened. All people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking the common good and well-being of all.

Rights and Responsibilities

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can only exist if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to flourish as a whole being. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities to one another, to our families, and to wider society.

Preferential Option for the Poor

How we treat our most vulnerable people defines our values and principles. In a world where there are increasing divisions between rich and poor, our faith instructs us to put the needs of poor and vulnerable first for the sake of the common good.

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected: the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to a safe working environment, to the organisation and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.



Solidarity

We are one human family regardless of our national, racial, ethnic, economic and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live in the world. Loving our neighbour has local, national and global implications. At the core of solidarity is the pursuit of universal justice and peace.



Care for God's Creation

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth and all its inhabitants is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect both people and planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This global challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.



For a more detailed exploration of Catholic Social Teaching go to:

- **An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought** by Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, CUP, 2006
- **DoCat** – youcat.org/products/docat
- **The Vatican** – Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church – vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html