

# Common Good

## What is the Common Good

1. The basis of the Common Good rests on the human person and human dignity. The human person is by *nature* social. We need each other. Our dignity is realized in each other, in the community

*"In the Catholic social vision, the human person is central, the clearest reflection of God among us. Each person possesses a basic dignity that comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment, not from race or gender, age or economic status. The test of every institution or policy is whether it enhances or threatens human life and human dignity. We believe people are more important than things."* (US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 'A Century of Social Teaching', #4)

2. Definition of the Common Good: *"the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily."* (CCC, 1906)

We are responsible to enact just laws, so people can fulfill their potential. This is the reason why such issues as abortion, poverty, holocaust and racism among others are unacceptable, because the child aborted or the individuals living in poverty, discriminated or killed does not have the opportunity to fulfill his/her potential. Working for the Common Good means working to eliminate these barriers to the flourishing of the human person.

3. The Common Good consists of three essential elements:
  - respect for the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person (see 1.);
  - the social well-being and development of the group itself: every society in the world is guilty of racism and discrimination, which should be eliminated;
  - peace - the stability and security of a just order: this is the necessary condition to allow the social well-being and development of human persons.

*"Each human community possesses a common good which permits it to be recognized as such; it is in the political community that its most complete realization is found. It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens, and intermediate bodies."* (CCC 1910)

Laws must be judged on the Common Good, whether or not the laws allow for the flourishing of the human person.

*"Human interdependence is increasing and gradually spreading throughout the world. The unity of the human family, embracing people who enjoy equal natural dignity, implies a universal common good. This good calls for an organization of the community of nations able to "provide for the different needs of men; this will involve the sphere of social life to which belong questions of food, hygiene, education, . . . and certain*

*situations arising here and there, as for example . . . alleviating the miseries of refugees dispersed throughout the world, and assisting migrants and their families.” (CCC 1911)*  
All countries are interdependent. As such the laws of one country may affect other countries, especially the laws of ‘powerful’ countries affect the laws of ‘poor’ countries. This is a call to action to be involved in the political process.

*“The common good is always oriented towards the progress of persons: ‘The order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons, and not the other way around.’ This order is founded on truth, built up in justice, and animated by love.” (CCC 1912)*

Catholic Social Teaching is not from the left, or from the right. Its basis is the respect of the ‘Life and Dignity of the Human person”, the most important principle from which all others derived.

Because the person is at the center of the Common Good, occurrence like lay off of employees should be considered very carefully.

## **Responsibility and Participation**

*“‘Participation’ is the voluntary and generous engagement of a person in social interchange. It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person.” (CCC 1913)*

The family is the primary cell of the society and laws should keep family together to allow for the flourishing of all members of the family.

Adults should fulfill their responsibility as a member of the society and go to vote.

*“Participation is achieved first of all by taking charge of the areas for which one assumes personal responsibility: by the care taken for the education of his family, by conscientious work, and so forth, man participates in the good of others and of society.” (CCC 1914)*

Personal responsibility is very important. Each person should be honest with oneself, take responsibility for their life and actions. If one does not take personal responsibility seriously, one cannot be responsible for one’s family. If a child can flourish in the family, the child may do good to the society; if the child is not allowed to flourish, the child may not do good to the society. For example, a child allows to reach his/her potential may become an entrepreneur and create many jobs, such providing a livelihood to many families. But the reality is that sins like greed, jealousy exist and work in the detriment of the common good.

*“As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life. The manner of this participation may vary from one country or culture to another. ‘One must pay tribute to those nations whose systems permit the largest possible number of the citizens to take part in public life in a climate of genuine freedom.’” (CCC 1915)*

The US is a model of freedom for the world: this is a democracy with checks and balances, with all adult citizens having the right to vote. Changes for the Common Good can only happen through participation in the political process, therefore through

exercising our right to vote. The low turn out of voters to elections is a sign of low interest due principally to too much self-centered interest.

*“As with any ethical obligation, the participation of all in realizing the common good calls for a continually renewed conversion of the social partners. Fraud and other subterfuges, by which some people evade the constraints of the law and the prescriptions of societal obligation, must be firmly condemned because they are incompatible with the requirements of justice. Much care should be taken to promote institutions that improve the conditions of human life.”* (CCC, 1916)

Conversion constitutes the most difficult part of the Common Good. Everyday we need to renew our conversion, to recommit to Christ, to look to our own sins and work on eliminating them. This is a work of a life time. We need to detach from sins in order to make good decisions for the Common Good. We need to know the Church teachings and through grace we can come to a better understanding of these teachings.

*“It is incumbent on those who exercise authority to strengthen the values that inspire the confidence of the members of the group and encourage them to put themselves at the service of others. Participation begins with education and culture. “One is entitled to think that the future of humanity is in the hands of those who are capable of providing the generations to come with reasons for life and optimism.”* (CCC, 1917)

Education is key, this is the very beginning of the process of working for the Common Good. The Catholic Church has been fundamental in providing education in the US through the numerous Catholic schools run by nuns. Catholic schools have offered education to many poor children, thus providing them the opportunity to flourish and reach their full potential. Education should help people to think.

The Catholic Church has also been a major provider of health care through the Catholic hospitals.

In conclusion, all of us have a dignity. It is our responsibility to work for the Common Good by insuring that each person has access to what the person needs in order to flourish. We are responsible to be informed, to be engaged in the society. We need to continuously work to root out our own sins.