



# Matthew 25

... whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine,  
you did for me.

The Social Justice Committee Newsletter  
of St. Mary's Catholic Center, College Station, Texas

September 2011

## Charity vs. Justice:

### What is the difference and why should we care?

By Carol Lange, Graduate student and member of St. Mary's Social Justice Committee

Charity and justice are often used interchangeably when describing acts of service associated with social outreach programs. It is true that both answer the Christian call to reach out to society's marginalized: the poor, the tired, the hungry; the imprisoned, the impoverished, the lonely; the sick, the weak, the vulnerable. Both encompass compassion towards one's fellow man in the model of Christ described in the Gospel. Yet, there is a very distinct difference that separates these two components of social ministry.

Charity and justice serve as the opposite, yet complementary parameters of our faith spectrum. At the one end, charity aims to relieve the immediate suffering and discomfort of our society by providing food, clothing, or shelter. Charity is often a private or individual act of reaching out. Global humanitarian efforts are generally met with approval and offer some instant gratification to both benefactor and beneficiary.

Justice sits at the opposite end of the spectrum and focuses on achieving long-term solutions to a difficult and uncomfortable problem. Justice is a joint effort, requiring every member of a given society, or perhaps every citizen of the world, to seek sustainable and everlasting change. Justice is often considered controversial because it is so public, and often political. While charity answers the question "How may I help relieve your suffering today?", justice wants to know "How can I remove suffering from the equation?". ([www.ihmsjc.org](http://www.ihmsjc.org))

*"Charity will never be true charity unless it takes justice into account ... Let no one attempt with small gifts of charity to exempt themselves from the great duties imposed by justice."*

*-Pope Pius XI, 1937, Divini Redemptoris, #49*

### THROUGH OUR FINGERS

By Ronald Stanley, O.P.

*"Two men were fishing in a river. Late in the afternoon they started cooking some of the fish they had caught. Suddenly they heard the cries of a man being swept down the river. Immediately the men jumped into the river, swam out to the man, and were gradually able to pull him ashore. As they were on shore catching their breath, they heard the cries of a woman being swept down the river. They jumped back into the water, made their way out to the woman, and slowly brought her to shore. They were exhausted but happy to have saved both people. Then they heard the cries of a child being swept downstream. One of the men started back into the water to get the child; the other held back. "Aren't you going to save the child?" asked the first.*

*"You go get the child," responded the second, "I'm going to go upstream to find out why so many people are falling into the river."*

Charity is happy to spend all day pulling victims out of the river.

Social justice asks: why are so many people falling into the river? Is there a pathway or a bridge in need of repair? Is there someone throwing people into the river? When there is

a pattern of people repeatedly falling victim, social justice seeks to discover and remedy the root causes of the problem.

Charity does the important work of meeting the immediate needs of suffering people, for food, clothing, housing, medicine, etc. Most everyone today approves and praises charity.

Social justice, on the other hand, dares to ask troubling questions: if the earth's resources are meant to meet the needs of all the earth's children, why are 20% of the world's population consuming over 80% of the earth's resources, leaving 80% of the world living in misery? Isn't it only just that the privilege few live more simply, so that the masses might simply live?

Our politicians smooth the pathways and bridges of the privileged, to the neglect of the poor. Little wonder then that so many of the poor keep falling into the river. Their falling is not simply

an accident. They are not "falling through the cracks." They are falling through our fingers.

*Love for others, and especially for the poor,  
is made concrete by promoting justice.*

*-Blessed Pope John Paul II, 1991*

*The Hundredth Year, #58*

## Economic Justice for All: A Call to Conversion and Action

*(Excerpts of the U.S. Catholic Bishops pastoral letter, 1986; see full text at [www.osjspm.org/economic\\_justice\\_for\\_all.aspx](http://www.osjspm.org/economic_justice_for_all.aspx))*

We should not be surprised if we find Catholic social teaching to be demanding. The Gospel is demanding. We are always in need of conversion, of a change of heart. We are richly blessed, and as St. Paul assures us, we are destined for glory. Yet, it is also true that we are sinners; that we are not always wise or loving or just; that, for all our amazing possibilities, we are incompletely born, wary of life, and hemmed in by fears and empty routines. We are unable to entrust ourselves fully to the living God, and so we seek substituted forms of security in material things, in power, in indifference, in popularity, in pleasure. The Scriptures warn us that these things can become forms of idolatry. We know that, at times, in order to remain truly a community of Jesus' disciples, we will have to say "no" to certain aspects of our culture, to certain trends and ways of acting that are opposed to a life of faith, love and justice. Changes in our hearts lead naturally to a desire to change how we act. With what care, human kindness, and justice do I conduct myself at work? How will my economic decisions to buy, sell, invest, divest, hire, or fire serve human dignity and the common good? In what career can I best exercise my talents so as to fill the world with the Spirit of Christ? How do my economic choices contribute to the strength of my family and community, to the values of my children, to a sensitivity to those in need? In this consumer society, how can I develop a healthy detachment from things and avoid the temptation to assess who I am by what I have? How do I strike a balance between labor and leisure that enlarges my capacity for friendships, for family life, for community? What government policies should I support to attain the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable? (#23)

The answers to such questions are not always clear -- or easy to live out. But, conversion is a lifelong process. And, it is not undertaken alone. It occurs with the support of the whole believing community, through baptism, common prayer, and our daily efforts, large and small, on behalf of justice. As a Church, we must be people after God's own heart, bonded by the Spirit, sustaining one another in love, setting our hearts on God's kingdom, committing ourselves to solidarity with those who suffer, working for peace and justice, acting as a sign of Christ's love and justice in the world. The Church cannot redeem the world from the deadening effects of sin and injustice unless it is working to remove sin and injustice in its own life and institutions. All of us must help the Church to practice in its own life what it preaches to others about economic justice and cooperation. (#24)

Charity	Justice
<i>Scriptural Reference:</i> Good Samaritan Story The Gospel story does not attempt to survey the causes of highway banditry. The Samaritan provides temporary and immediate relief.	<i>Scriptural Reference:</i> Exodus Story Moses does not ask for food and medicine for the Jewish slave-labor force. He challenges the institutional system. Message: "Let My People Go."
Private, individual acts	Public, collective actions
Responds to immediate need	Responds to long-term need
Provides direct service: food, clothing, shelter	Promotes social change in institutions
Requires repeated actions	Resolves structural injustice
Directed at the effects of injustice: symptoms	Directed at the root causes of social injustice
<i>Examples:</i> Homeless shelters, food shelves, clothing drives, emergency services	<i>Examples:</i> Legislative advocacy, changing corporate policies or practices, congregation-based community organizing

*[www.osjspm.org/charity\\_and\\_justice\\_chart.aspx](http://www.osjspm.org/charity_and_justice_chart.aspx)*

### **What can You do?**

**Pray** for dramatic social change, that all the world will seek to improve the quality of life for everyone forever. Reflect on Catholic Social Teaching and its call in everyday community life.

**Learn** more about Catholic Social Teaching and ways to implement acts of charity while seeking justice.

**Advocate** for better legislation that is pro-life and supports "people" issues. Monitor government agencies and encourage them to change administrative policies that cause problems.

**Give** financially to organizations that are justice-minded. Some examples include Catholic Campaign for Human Development ([www.nccbuscc.org/cchd](http://www.nccbuscc.org/cchd)), Catholic Charities ([www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/)), and Catholic Relief Services ([www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org)).

**Be** a catalyst for change by being politically active or volunteering for voter registration drives.

***Interested in learning more about St. Mary's Social Justice Committee? Join us on Monday September 5 in room 201 at 6:30 PM to learn what the Committee is about and what are the activities for the semester.***

***The Social Justice Committee meets on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays of the month and the Work of Human Hands Sale committee on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays of the month; all meetings (except the first) are at 6:30 PM in room 208. (The Work of Human Hands Sale is a fair-traded sale of handcrafts and food from around the world organized by the Social Justice Committee on the first weekend of December.)***

***For more information, contact Clotilde Pichon, Director of Social Ministries at [cpichon@aggiecatholic.org](mailto:cpichon@aggiecatholic.org) or call St. Mary's at (979) 846-5717.***