

What is Catholic Social Teaching?

Catholic Social Teaching is the guidance that the Church offers to us about the world around us, the people in it, the resources of the planet, and our responsibilities towards the planet and each other.

Catholic Social Teaching is explained most eloquently by Our Holy Father in Rome.

Pope Francis has written two encyclicals (open letters) to the people of the world on this subject since he began his ministry, and these are the best starting point for the faithful. From these prompts, Church teaching and guidance emerges. Our current Pope's encyclicals are **Laudato Si'** (On care of our common home) from 2015 and **Fratelli Tutti** (On fraternity and social friendship) from 2020. The Pope has built on the work of his predecessors, most notably **Rerum Novarum** (On capital and labor) which was written by Pope Leo XIII and shared in 1891.

From these long letters, various Catholic organisations take up the call to respond and have developed different resources over the years. The direction that different groups take depends on their audience and their needs, but should only be taken up by us if they are sanctioned by The Church, usually via approval of the Church hierarchy.

The Catholic Church in the United States of America has responded enthusiastically to the encyclicals of Pope Francis and there is a wealth of official guidance available. In The UK, a good starting point for all of us is to use the resources created by large Catholic charities. In school, we have been using the learning resources made available free by CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development). The ideas shared by CAFOD are powerful as they encourage us to think globally about the challenges that we face, as well as locally.

Broadly speaking, recent Catholic Social Teaching can be condensed into about ten key ideas. CAFOD outlines nine, and Catholic Relief Services (empowered by the United States Conference of Bishops) pinpoints seven. The number of goals and the depth to which they are considered depends on the age and ability of the audience.

A summary of the nine themes via CAFOD is as follows:

AREA	KEY STATEMENT
Human Dignity	<i>We are beautifully made in the image and likeness of God.</i>
The Common Good	<i>We are called to work for the good of each and of all.</i>
Participation	<i>We all have the right and duty to participate fully in society.</i>
Subsidiarity	<i>We are called to empower communities, to let everyone have a say.</i>
Stewardship	<i>We are the guardians of God's creation, living sustainably and enhancing the wellbeing of our planet.</i>
Solidarity	<i>God created us as one global family called to support our brothers and sisters.</i>
Preferential option for the poor	<i>The needs of poor and vulnerable people should be put first.</i>
Distributive justice	<i>Everyone should have their fair share of resources.</i>
Promoting peace	<i>We can be God's instruments of peace through seeking justice.</i>

How can I help my child to understand these ideas?

The simple answer is to engage in conversation. CAFOD, for example, has a range of sources online that can serve as the start of a conversation with children to build knowledge and to encourage them to action. In school, many of our discussions are concluded with the powerful question, **'What am I called to do?'**

The next stage is to involve your family in Church-led activities that seek to respond to this question. Many churches have Justice & Peace Groups, SVP (St Vincent de Paul Societies), charitable initiatives, links to the Catholic Children's Society, and other clubs and societies that run through the year for the benefit of others.

The third element is to think about your family's understanding of and response to environmental issues. The Pope's encyclical **Laudato Si'** is particularly clear that every person has a responsibility to safeguard our common home.

Finally, and especially in Lent but at all other times, it is important to make time for prayer and reflection. We often talk to the children in school about the fact that our lives are busy and we don't often have the time to do this. It is only through prayer, reflection and careful consideration that we can have a clear plan of the way forward.

Further reading

Laudato Si'

Fratelli Tutti

Rerum Novarum

CAFOD