What Is Catholic Social Teaching?

And Why We Teach It At Every Grade Level

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Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is not a political addition or a new idea over old Catholicism. It reflects the Church's long history, rooted in Scripture and Tradition, on how the Gospel guides us: how to treat each other and live together. Since the late 1800s, official teachings have clarified this, but at its core, it's as old as the command to love your neighbor.

It is also in *the Catechism (CCC)*. Paragraphs 2419-2423 bring the Church's social doctrine directly into its teaching on the seventh commandment. The Church, the Catechism explains, has both the right and the duty to speak to economic and social life, because the Gospel touches the whole human person, not just the private, interior one.

Most catechists know CST by its seven themes: the life and dignity of the human person; the call to family, community, and participation; rights and responsibilities; the option for the poor and vulnerable; the dignity of work and the rights of workers; solidarity; and care for God's creation. This year's four issues cover dignity of work in Issue 2, rights and the vulnerable in Issue 3, and care for creation in Issue 4. This issue, United in Mission, emphasizes the first theme, the dignity of every human person.

This is explicitly a mission territory. St. John Paul II's 1990 encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, links evangelization to 'human promotion,' insisting they are inseparable. CST is a path of mission. Pope Francis emphasizes in *The Joy of the Gospel* that social concern is integral to proclaiming the Gospel, not optional. (See Paragraph 177)



Fr. Mike Bassano, MM teaching kids

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* reminds us that social doctrine aims to guide behavior, bridging Christian life and real-world conscience (Paragraph 73). Children have the right to education, and as teachers and parents, we must provide comprehensive education (Paragraph 242).

So why teach it to a kindergartner rather than just waiting until Middle School? Five-year-olds already have an instinctive, fierce sense of what is fair and what is unfair. CST gives language to something already stirring in them. Wait until eighth grade to introduce it for the first time, and "justice" will land disconnected, instead of deepening a component of their faith life they've held since before they could read.

One reassurance worth passing along to families: teaching CST is not the same as telling students what to conclude about any specific policy debate. It's handing them tools to understand the world through the lens of our faith tradition.

Sources: Catechism of the Catholic Church, §§ 2419–2423; USCCB, "*Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching*"; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990); Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013). *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church 2004* §§ 73, 242