LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. Human life is threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. The intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong. Catholic teaching calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

CALL TO FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND PARTICIPATION

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Marriage and family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

OPTION FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.
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 the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

SOLIDARITY
We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Blessed Pope Paul VI taught that “if you want peace, work for justice.” The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

CARE FOR GOD’S CREATION
We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.
Match the answers on the right to the questions below.

1. ____ Human rights must be protected.

2. ____ Our faith calls us to protect the environment.

3. ____ We are one human family with more in common than what divides us.

4. ____ All human life is sacred.

5. ____ The needs of those with less should be prioritized.

6. ____ We all have a right and duty to participate in society.

7. ____ Our job is a way to participate in God’s creation.

Answers

A. Life and Dignity of the Human Person

B. Call to Family, Community, and Participation

C. Rights and Responsibilities

D. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

E. The Dignity of Work and Worker’s Rights

F. Solidarity

G. Care for God’s Creation
Spend some time researching one of the following people to learn more about how they lived Catholic Social Teaching in their lives. Write a short summary of this person’s life or draw a picture that depicts them and the work they did.

- St. Gianna Molla
- César Chávez
- Dorothy Day
- St. Oscar Romero
- Pope Leo XIII
- St. Catherine of Siena
- Venerable Augustus Tolton
- St. Katharine Drexel
- St. Mother Teresa
- Sr. Thea Bowman
Elementary students – Read this passage and then fill in the blanks to complete the statements (based on NABRE translation, found on www.usccb.org). Then, find these words in the word find.

1. He will place the __________ on the right and the __________ on the left.

2. Inherit the __________ prepared for you.

3. I was __________ and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me a __________, a stranger and you ____________ me, naked and you ____________ me, ill and you ____________ for me, in ___________ and you visited me.

4. Whatever you did for these ____________ brothers of mine, you did for me.

Using the Scripture passage, fill in the blanks of the statements above, then find each of those words below.

D Q O Y O S H E E E P
R P R I S O N D M F
I W S R K D E F S J
N J C P E M R T K E
K J D R O Z A Y O L
T I A C F O R F D E
B C L T G G X I I A
I E K I N G D O M S
W G B U P E C E D T
X H H C L O T H E D
Middle and high school students – Read this passage and discuss the following questions: (based on NABRE translation, found on www.usccb.org).

1. In this passage, what does Jesus say will determine whether we go to heaven?

2. Which of these actions do you find most easy to do?

3. Which of these actions do you find most difficult to do?

4. What is one way that you could embrace this teaching in your life today?
1. He will place the [SHEEP] on the right and the [GOATS] on the left.

2. Inherit the [KINGDOM] prepared for you.

3. I was [HUNGRY] and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me a [DRINK], a stranger and you [WELCOMED] me, naked and you [CLOTHED] me, ill and you [CARED] for me, in [PRISON] and you visited me.

4. Whatever you did for these [LEAST] brothers of mine, you did for me.