Catholic Social Teaching

Our tradition of justice

Caritas study and discussion programme

Introduction:
This is one of seven 90 min sessions on principles of Catholic Social Teaching. They can be used as an individual one-off session on a particular Catholic social teaching principle or as a series of seven sessions. They are designed to be used by a group of 4-10 people, but can also be adapted for individual study and reflection. They are based on a set of seven posters and videos, available from the Caritas office and also provided on the Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand website: [www.caritas.org.nz/resources/cst](http://www.caritas.org.nz/resources/cst)

If used as a group, it is suggested that participants gather around a table with a focal point, such as a cross and candle as a centre. It will help to have facilitator to lead the sessions and encourage full participation, and a timekeeper to light the candle at the beginning, assist in keeping the group on track time-wise and set up the video.

Each session are framed around the SEE-TIROHIA – JUDGE-WĀNANGATIA – ACT-MAHIA model of reflection and action. Times are approximate only but it is important that the whole session concludes after 90 minutes.
OPENING PRAYER

Open with the sign of the cross in English, Te Reo Māori and other languages of the group:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Ki te ingoa o te Matua, o te Tamaiti, o te Wairua Tapu. Āmene.

God of Justice, thank you for the gift of our Son Jesus who taught us:
To open our eyes to see you in the face of the poor,
To open our ears to hear you in the cries of the exploited,
To open our mouths to defend you in the poor and vulnerable.
May we always remember that we find you in ‘the least of these.’
Amen

Bill Purcell

INTRODUCTIONS

If this is the first time the group has met, or if there are new people in the group, allow time for brief introductions.

SEE - TIROHIA (30 MINS)

1. Pondering the poster

Spend some time looking at the Caritas Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable poster.

Different members read out a paragraph each from the poster, pausing after each one.

- Giving preferential option for the poor – he whakaaro nui mō te hunga rawakore - compels us to think first of the needs of those who are most vulnerable.
- The poor and vulnerable have a special place in the kingdom of God. Putting into practice the preferential option for the poor means considering the impact of our own decisions and of public policy on the most vulnerable members of society.
• Christ taught that when we feed the hungry, offer hospitality to the stranger, clothe the naked, look after the sick and visit those imprisoned, we are looking after Him.
• ‘We need to engage constantly at all ends of the spectrum; responding to the immediate needs of those in hardship, and at the same time advocating for fair and just social and economic policies.’ New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference

Questions for Group reflection and discussion
- What are you drawn to or notice particularly about the picture?
- Which statement on the poster best illustrates for you the need to be concerned for the poorest and most vulnerable in our society? Why is this important?

2. Viewing the video
Watch the Caritas Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable video on the St Vincent de Paul society Full Fill Van in Rotorua.

In the whole group read out the following explanation:
Giving preferential option for the poor – he whakaaro nui mō te hunga rawakore - compels us to think first of the needs of those who are most vulnerable. Student, parish and community volunteers with the Rotorua St Vincent de Paul Full Fill van show preferential option for the poor by providing food in low socio-economic areas. The Full Fill van goes out twice a week on a Tuesday and Wednesday evening when most people are waiting for their benefit payment or wage. The van visits areas where St Vincent de Paul receives the most requests for food parcels, clothes and other basic items.

Ask each person in the group to share with their neighbour: What stood out to you most in this video? What emotion did it raise in you?

Questions for Group reflection and discussion
- Who in the video inspired you most? Why?
- How do the people helping respect the dignity of those in need?
- Who are the groups or individuals in our community who demonstrate a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable? How do they do this?

5 minute break

1. Searching the Scriptures

Social Justice teaching is founded on firm scriptural foundations. Group members take it in turns to read out quotes from Scripture from this Discussion outline or from a Bible, pausing after each one.

- You shall love the outcast as yourself, for you were once outcasts in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 19:34
- Woe to those who sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals, they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way. Amos 2:6-7
- Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Isaiah 1:16-17
- Then the righteous will answer him ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ Then the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these members of my family, you did it to me.’ Matthew 25:37-40
- If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace: keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. James 2:15-17

Questions for Group reflection and discussion

- Are there other Scriptural references which speak to you of our responsibilities to have a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable?
- Why were the Old Testament prophets so concerned about the lives of widows, orphans and outcasts in their society?
- Why are the righteous people in Matthew 25 surprised? What does this suggest about their motivation?
- What is the role of prayer in transforming our attitudes to those in greatest need?

2. Learning in the light of Catholic social teaching:

Group members take turns to read out each of the following passages, pausing after each:

- The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed, not only for the pragmatic reason of its urgency for the good order of society, but because society needs to be cured of a sickness which is weakening and frustrating it, and which can only lead to new crises. Welfare projects, which meet certain urgent needs, should be considered
merely temporary responses. As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world’s problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills.


- When a section of our society is allowed to fall into poverty and hardship, everyone is at risk from the symptoms of that economic violence. The diseases that thrive in conditions of poverty threaten the health of everyone; the violence that accompanies economic stress does not confine itself to the poorest suburbs; and the uncertainty of those living with insecure work is exposed in mental illness and suicide rates. Despite the trappings of affluence, no one really experiences prosperity when some of the members of our human family are suffering. For our society to truly prosper, we all need to embrace the understanding that the advancement of the poorest members of our society is the advancement of our whole society. The goods of the earth were created by God for all of us to share. Let us work to make that a reality.


- Poor and vulnerable people have a special place in Catholic social teaching. A basic moral test of society is how its most vulnerable members are faring. This is not a new insight; it is the lesson of the parable of the Last Judgement (cf Matthew 25). Our tradition calls us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of all our sisters and brothers, but those with the greatest needs required the greatest response.

Cardinal Thomas Williams: *We are our brother’s keeper*, 1991

Questions for Group reflection and discussion

- Why does Pope Francis see the need to resolve the structural causes of poverty?
- What do you understand that the Bishops mean by ‘economic violence’ that keeps people poor?
- Why do ‘poor and vulnerable people have a special place in Catholic social teaching’?

ACT - MAHIA (15 MINUTES)

Reflect personally on the following questions:

- When I see the face of Christ in those who do not meet my idea of ‘normal’ or ‘successful’, does that help me to ask the hard questions of why they are marginalised or excluded?
- What can I do to prevent being part of the ‘economic violence’ that keeps people poor?
• What can each of us do to ensure that ‘those with the greatest needs’ receive our greatest response?
• What is one thing I will do differently in the next week?

Choose one of these to share briefly with the whole group.

CLOSING PRAYER
Closing prayer
Open our ears
to hear you in the cries of those who are exploited,
those considered to be nothing,
those abandoned and dismissed.
Open our mouths
to defend you in all places:
in public places, at our work,
in our schools and universities,
in our workplaces and our streets,
as well as in our private deeds.
Remind us that what we do
to the least ones,
we do to you.
Amen.

Claude Mostowik msc, Australia

Close with the sign of the cross in English, Te Reo Māori and other languages of the group:
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Ki te ingoa o te Matua, o te Tamaiti, o te Wairua Tapu. Āmene.