

Definition of Key Concepts in Catholic Social Teaching

By Professor Andreas Widmer, Catholic University of America

1. Human Dignity: By the phrase human dignity, the Catholic Church means that men and women are made in the image of God and destined for eternal life.

2. Justice: To each his due.

3. Social Justice: By the phrase social justice, the Catholic Church means that groups and individuals receive what is rightly owed to them.

4. Common Good: By the phrase common good, the Catholic Church means all the conditions in society that allow individuals and groups to reach their fullest human good, both in this life and the next.

5. Solidarity: By the principle solidarity, the Catholic Church means unity arising from love of neighbor.

6. Subsidiarity: By the principle subsidiarity, the Catholic Church means that higher groups in society should not take over tasks that lower groups would like to perform, unless the lower group asks for help. In other words, social functions should occur at the lowest possible level so that individuals and groups have a true sense of purpose.

7. Universal Destination of Goods: God gave the good things of the earth to the whole human race.

8. Charity: The love of God and neighbor.

9. Preferential Option for the Poor: Charity requires us to place the needs of the poor before our own needs.

10. The purpose of Social Life: Social life should be aimed at the common good.

11. Private Property: Private property is good – through ownership we imitate God.

12. Entrepreneurship and Business: Economic initiative is a fundamental value and human right.

13. Hiring and Firing: Owners should make the dignity of employees central in their decision making, though sometimes firing is necessary.

14. Relationship between charity and operating a business: Owning and operating a business is itself an act of charity for a Christian.

15. The role of Truth in Society: A free society must affirm some truths as absolute.

16. Wages: Wages should be sufficient for families to support themselves and also save something.