

Catholic In Charity

AND IN IDENTITY

Resources to **enhance** the legacy



Catholic
Charities
USA®



Dear Friends,

With great pleasure, Catholic Charities USA presents this revised edition of ***Catholic in Charity & in Identity: Resources to Enhance the Legacy***. It is intended as a tool for those within the Catholic Charities network working to answer our individual and collective Gospel call to care for our sisters and brothers in need.

Pope Leo, in his first apostolic exhortation, *Dilexite* (2025), reminds us of the power of the Catholic Church's charitable works, as did his predecessors: "Charity has the power to change reality; it is a genuine source for change in history. It is the source that must inspire and guide every effort to 'resolve the structural causes of poverty,' and to do so with urgency."

One of my predecessors, Fr. Larry Snyder, first conceived of this collection as a resource for diocesan directors and others in need of training materials for staff, volunteers, and boards of directors. In the years since, it has proven to be a vital and living document.

As Fr. Larry wrote at the time of first publication, "Our Catholic legacy is foundational for us. We are truly Catholic in our charity and in our identity. Our Catholic identity defines and enriches us; it is our greatest treasure and also our greatest challenge."

More than a decade later, we find ourselves in a challenging moment for the Catholic Church and for the world, as we grapple with forces — growing economic inequality, rising anti-immigrant sentiment, artificial intelligence — that make the work of Catholic Charities both harder and more necessary.

It is our hope that the resources within might increase your understanding of yourself and your agency as part of the broader Catholic community — locally, nationally, and globally — and bolster your commitment to doing the work we are so urgently called to do, the work of Matthew 25: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and to welcome the stranger. Then, truly, we can say we are living up to our mission and ideals to be Catholic in charity and identity.

In mission,



Kerry Alys Robinson
President & CEO

Acknowledgements

We want to identify and thank the individuals who contributed to this second edition of *Catholic In Charity & In Identity: Resources to Enhance the Legacy*. As with the original, the second edition and its revisions were overseen by Brian Corbin, EdD, executive vice president of member services at CCUSA. The following people contributed their time and talent in updating these Catholic identity resources.

Peggy Arizzi, Regional Coordinator – Region 4, CCUSA

Father Klaus Baumann, Working Group Caritas Studies and Christian Social Work, University of Freiburg, Germany

Frankie Chevere, Senior Director of Government Affairs, CCUSA

Sister Melanie DiPietro, S.C., J.D., J.C.D., Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill

Gregory Kepferle, (former) Chief Executive Officer, Catholic Charities Santa Clara County

Deacon Paul Kipfstuhl, Catholic Charities Diocese of Cleveland

Elias Kontogiannis, Senior Designer, Photographer, CCUSA

Genevieve Mougey, Executive Director, Catholic Charities Wyoming

Paul Mulligan, President & CEO, Catholic Charities Community Services, Phoenix, AZ

Denise Ogilvie, Regional Coordinator - Region 3, CCUSA

Father Jon Pedigo, (formerly of) Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County

Deacon Tom Roberts, (formerly) President and CEO of Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada

Gevada Sims, Chief Human Resources Officer, CCUSA

Michael Smith, Chief Program Officer at Catholic Charities Maine

Sister Betsy Van Deusen, CSJ, CEO of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany

Amy Van Dyke, PhD, Ethics Manager, OSF Healthcare

Monsignor Robert Vitillo, Chief Innovation and Programs Officer, CCUSA

Christy Williams, Senior Director of Government Relations, CCUSA

Editorial Team:

Brian R. Corbin, EdD, Executive Vice President, Member Services, CCUSA

Scott Hurd, Vice President of Leadership Development and Catholic Identity, CCUSA

David Werning, Senior Director, Catholic Identity, CCUSA

Front and back covers: Details from Good Samaritan icon written for CCUSA by Janet Jaime (2017).

Using these Resources

Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) presents the second edition of *Catholic in Charity & in Identity: Resources to Enhance the Legacy*. The goal remains the same: to integrate Catholic identity more broadly throughout the network. A new introduction written by Brian R. Corbin, EdD, executive vice president of member services, offers an overview of what “Catholic identity” means for a Catholic Charities institution, including the Church’s worldview, culture, practices, and organization as an ecclesial ministry. He also provides a brief checklist of practical ideas to consider as local agencies formulate and regularly review their Catholic identity plans.

The rest of the sections, which have not changed, have been updated by a team of Catholic Charities diocesan directors to reflect the times we live in and to include content from Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV as well as new resources (See bibliography and appendices).

An Introductory Essay

Section 1:

Evaluation and Planning

Section 2:

Understanding our Identity

Section 3:

Forming Employees

Section 4:

Forming Board Members

Section 5:

Church Structures and Leadership

Section 6:

Prayer Resources

Section 7:

Glossary

Section 8:

Bibliography

Section 9:

Appendices

Each section offers concrete suggestions and helpful content for local agencies to embrace, develop, and share their perspectives on and integration of Catholic identity. In other words, what are the institutional, structural, pastoral, pedagogical, and ministerial connections of a Catholic Charities agency to the Catholic Church. A careful consideration of the resources herein can yield a Catholic identity strategy at the local agency level.

The need for a Catholic identity strategy exists because times and staff change. The resources help with onboarding new employees and renewing long-serving staff, board members, and volunteers. While everyone in the Catholic Charities family brings their personal gifts and professional skills to their jobs, most do not have a theological background that enables them to articulate how their work is connected to Catholic practice.

A spiritual formation that grounds all who represent Catholic Charities to clients, funders, and other stakeholders ensures a common foundation.

Revised Second Edition. Published by Catholic Charities USA, 2026.

Where to Start

Each agency can begin by assessing its current state of Catholic identity. The first section, Evaluation and Planning, provides a tool for reflecting on specific indicators of Catholic identity identified by Catholic Charities directors. The tool should be used as a precursor to strategic planning conversations about Catholic identity. A suggested format for planning is also provided.

After the assessment has been completed, the agency may decide to expand its training of staff and board members, from onboarding to continuing education. Section 3 offers suggested formation and training modules and a staff retreat, which can be utilized by outside trainers and internal Catholic Charities leaders. Sections 4 and 5, on forming board members and on governance, provide discussion questions for leadership and boards to explore key challenges and opportunities.

Catholic in Charity & in Identity is designed to help agencies embrace, develop, and share Catholic identity with board members, staff, and stakeholders through the implementation of these resources. CCUSA stands ready to assist through planning and training consultation.

For more information about utilizing *Catholic in Charity & in Identity*, contact CCUSA.

An Introductory Essay: What Is Catholic Identity?

Over the years, considerable discussion has been devoted to defining the essence of “Catholic identity.” In 1997, Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) published a handbook called *Who do you say we are? Perspectives on Catholic identity in Catholic Charities*, which defined the Catholic identity of a Catholic Charities agency thusly:

In the narrowest sense, it is an agency closely aligned with the diocese with the responsibility to promote, administer, and oversee human service activities which are done in the name of the local Church. ... Catholic Charities agencies tend to have a twofold personality: an ecclesial and a civic, sometimes in harmony and at others causing tension. (pp. 15–16)

The handbook also listed six markers of Catholic identity:

The connection with the Catholic community; the world vision and values which animate the agency; the particular activities in which the agency is involved; the style that marks the agency’s behavior; the structures through which the agency functions; and the people who are the agency. (pp. 19–20)

In the 2010 first edition of CCUSA’s *Catholic in Charity & in Identity*, the definition of “Catholic identity” was: “the institutional, structural, pastoral, teaching and ministerial connection of a Catholic Charities agency to the Roman Catholic Church” (p. 12).

After years of applying governance models, implementing best practices, and studying new church documents, CCUSA wishes to once more present its informed perspective on the “Catholic identity” of charitable institutions within the diocesan church. These entities are commonly known as “Catholic Charities,” “Caritas,” “Catholic Social Services,” or other similar variations. These diocesan agencies have one element in common: they provide and organize the official humanitarian work of the local (Arch)Bishop, helping him to care for the charitable and justice needs of those persons living in the (arch)diocesan region.

The local Catholic Charities agency retains the responsibility and right to develop strategies for its integration of and further reflection on Catholic identity.” This entire book, *Catholic in Charity and in Identity*, now updated in its second edition, provides useful resources to understand and implement such a process.

For this resource, we define “Catholic identity” for a Catholic Charities institution as such:

The Catholic identity of a Catholic Charities institution, agency, or organization relates to the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the local Ordinary (Archbishop/Bishop). It is defined by incorporating symbols, language, and a vibrant culture that mirrors a faith-based organization. This identity is characterized by practices rooted in the Church’s Tradition centered on principles of charity and justice.

Pope Benedict XVI argues (See *Deus caritas est* (DCE), Nos. 31–39) that Catholic Charities agencies are to be more than secular humanitarian, non-governmental institutions. Hence, the pope wrote:

...the duty of charity[is] as a responsibility incumbent upon the whole Church and upon each Bishop in his Diocese, and it emphasized that the exercise of charity is an action of the Church as such, and that, like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it too has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginning. (DCE, Nos. 25a; 32)

Pope Benedict XVI notes that:

The Church can never be exempted from practising charity as an organized activity of believers, and on the other hand, there will never be a situation where the charity of each individual Christian is unnecessary, because in addition to justice man (sic.) needs, and will always need, love. (DCE, No. 29)

The Apostolic Letter, *Motu Proprio*, *On the Service of Charity*, issued by Pope Benedict XVI (November 11, 2012) states explicitly that “the Church’s charitable activity at all levels must avoid the risk of becoming just another form of organized social assistance” (introduction). Rather, Catholic Charities, therefore, adopts “the programme of Jesus,” which is “‘a heart which sees.’ This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly” (DCE, No. 31b). This is done both through charitable works and by promoting a just social order. Pope Benedict states:

We can now determine more precisely, in the life of the Church, the relationship between commitment to the just ordering of the State and society on the one hand, and organized charitable activity on the other. We have seen that the formation of just structures is not directly the duty of the Church, but belongs to the world of politics, the sphere of the autonomous use of reason. The Church has an indirect duty here, in that she is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run. (DCE, No. 29)

Pope Francis echoes the same as he argues that an institution of the church is “not just a fine organization, another NGO” (December 1, 2014). In many ways, a Catholic Charities institution in the name of the church serves primarily as a “field hospital” (August 28, 2019) and an “engine that organizes love” (October 3, 2014). Pope Francis reminds us, in his 2020 work, *Fratelli tutti* (FT) that the work of the church and all the faithful deals with both aspects of charity and justice:

Charity, on the other hand, unites both dimensions—the abstract and the institutional—since it calls for an effective process of historical change that embraces everything: institutions, law, technology, experience, professional expertise, scientific analysis, administrative procedures, and so forth. For that matter, ‘private life cannot exist unless it is protected by public order. A domestic hearth has no real warmth unless it is safeguarded by law, by a state of tranquility founded on law, and enjoys a minimum of wellbeing ensured by the division of labour, commercial exchange, social justice and political citizenship.’ (FT, No. 164)

True charity is capable of incorporating all these elements in its concern for others. In the case of personal encounters, including those involving a distant or forgotten brother or sister, it can do so by employing all the resources that the institutions of an organized, free and creative society are capable of generating. Even the Good Samaritan, for example, needed to have a nearby inn that could provide the help that he was personally unable to offer. Love of neighbour is concrete and squanders none of the resources needed to bring about historical change that can benefit the poor and disadvantaged. (FT, No. 165).

Recognizing that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone, is not merely utopian. It demands a decisive commitment to devising effective means to this end. Any effort along these lines becomes a noble exercise of charity. For whereas individuals can help others in need, when they join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the 'field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity.' This entails working for a social and political order whose soul is social charity. Once more, I appeal for a renewed appreciation of politics as 'a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good.' (FT, No. 180)

Pope Leo XIV echoed his predecessors' teachings on charity in his 2025 apostolic exhortation *Dilexi te*: "Charity has the power to change reality; it is a genuine source for change in history. It is the source that must inspire and guide every effort to 'resolve the structural causes of poverty,' and to do so with urgency."

Catholic Charities is not just another humanitarian social welfare agency. It is an integral part of the ministry of the church to care for others and to build a just community in collaboration with the rest of society. This identity of a Catholic Charities agency, commissioned to provide both charitable help and work for social justice, is firmly rooted in its specific connection to the local (Arch)Bishop, serving as an instrument of the Gospel as an "indispensable expression of her very being" (DCE, No. 25a).

The "Catholic identity" of a Catholic Charities institution encompasses, at a minimum, four components: A) the social and moral tradition of the church or its "worldview"; B) symbols and culture; C) practices; and D) organizational relatedness and autonomy as a ministry of the church. This module will briefly delve into these elements, accompanied by a checklist for further consideration.

A. The Church's Moral and Social Tradition ('Worldview')

The Catholic Church commits itself to spread the kingdom of God, which is the reign of divine love, marked by justice, peace, and righteousness. The church's mission is to be an instrument of God's work in the world and to focus on Jesus Christ's saving mission. Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) clearly articulated that the

Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable.

For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being. (DCE, No. 25a)

Pope Benedict XVI continues:

The Church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time *caritas-agape* extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes **universal love** towards the needy whom we encounter 'by chance' (cf. Lk 10:31), whoever they may be. (DCE, No. 25b)

The expression of the church's worldview is rooted in the Catholic understanding of Scripture, the tradition of the church's moral and social teachings, and the teachings of the local Ordinary. As an illustration of the moral perspective or worldview that enhances the comprehension of the mission and identity of a Catholic Charities agency, consider a Scripture story from the Gospel of Luke: the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37; the parable is explicitly noted by Pope Benedict's *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Francis' *Fratelli tutti*, and Pope Leo XIV's *Dilexi te* as constitutive of the church's worldview). In this narrative, a compassionate outsider, a Samaritan, takes notice of a severely injured individual left on the road after an encounter with thieves. The person is being disregarded by others who might have been expected to help. The Samaritan attends to the wounded individual's injuries, transports him to an inn, and provides the innkeeper with resources for extended care until his return.

This parable, like all Scriptural passages within the Catholic worldview, offers various layers of reflection and applications. One insight drawn from this story for Catholic Charities organizations involves the dynamic between the "Samaritan" as an individual who intervenes to render aid and the role of the "innkeeper" as an institution strategically "organized" to extend hospitality and care.

The Good Samaritan parable serves to ground our moral imagination regarding the mission of Catholic Charities agencies, which entails both engaging individuals and structuring institutions to offer support along the precarious journey, analogous to the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. In contemporary terms, this means providing care and assistance in our own neighborhoods and communities.



"...the Lord has promised us: 'I am with you always' (Mt 28:20). The Risen Lord comes to instill peace in our hearts and open up paths of hope and new life, assuring us that he truly is 'making all things new.'" (Rev 21:5)

Address of Pope Leo XIV to the members of the Board of Directors of Catholic Charities USA, delivered May 4, 2026.

Key principles of the church's worldview taken from the tradition include the inherent **dignity** of each person made in the image and likeness of God, respect for the **common good**, the nature of **subsidiarity**, and the call to **solidarity**. These principles and organizing values of **truth, freedom, justice, and love**, can be found in the [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#) (2004) and in other sections of this resource book.

Pope Benedict XVI's *On the Service of Charity* (2012) explains how the Catholic identity of a Caritas agency is not just a structural aspect tucked into Bylaws and Codes of Regulation (to be discussed below in more detail). Rather, Catholic identity is a lived reality of the organization and its staff rooted in its mission and tradition. Respect, ongoing training, and formation opportunities are encouraged. *The Apostolic Letter's* Article 7 clearly notes this reality:

Art. 7. - § 1. The agencies referred to in Article 1 § 1 are required to select their personnel from among persons who share, or at least respect, the Catholic identity of these works.

§ 2. To ensure an evangelical witness in the service of charity, the diocesan Bishop is to take care that those who work in the Church's charitable apostolate, along with due professional competence, give an example of Christian life and witness to a formation of heart which testifies to a faith working through charity. To this end, he is also to provide for their theological and pastoral formation, through specific curricula agreed upon by the officers of various agencies and through suitable aids to the spiritual life.

On the Service of Charity does not say that Catholic Charities should be staffed only by Catholics. Anyone with the proper competency is welcome to work in a Catholic Charities agency to serve those in need. There is a note, however, that all employees and volunteers must "at least respect" the Catholic identity of the organization and should acknowledge that such an institution represents the local Catholic church. The local (Arch)Bishop, as well, is charged with ensuring that all staff persons and volunteers have opportunities for a "formation of the heart" by learning more about the worldview, symbols, and culture derived from being a "Catholic" institution.

Other sections of this resource book explore these elements in more detail.

B. Symbols and Culture

The Catholic faith tradition embraces symbols and rituals. The artwork chosen to decorate offices and buildings serves as a means of expressing one's Catholic identity, bridging the gap between the secular and the sacred. It is crucial for leaders of Catholic Charities to carefully choose the displayed artwork to enhance awareness of the importance of "Caritas" actively shaping our lives.

Regularly, the church encourages staff, volunteers, and others to pause for reflection and participate in personal or communal prayers. In the Catholic perspective, the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy (Mass) holds paramount significance as an embodiment of the "source and summit" of the Christian spiritual life (Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, December 4, 1963). Other official forms of prayer, such as Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer derived from the [Liturgy of the Hours](#), might be adapted for communal use.

Certain days of the calendar are considered as “holy days” or feast days celebrating an aspect of the life of Jesus. Catholic Charities agencies may celebrate these days with paid holiday times for employees, or by taking time during that day to celebrate that event. Certain dates celebrating the lives of saints are sometimes highlighted. Generally, several saints stand out for their relationship to the Catholic Charities ministry: Saint Louise de Marillac (March 15, moved to May 9); Saint Teresa of Calcutta (September 5); Saint Vincent de Paul (September 27); and Saint Martin de Porres (November 3).

Every organization maintains a culture consciously or subconsciously. One [definition of organizational culture](#) could be the set of values, beliefs, attitudes, systems, and rules that outline and influence employee behavior within an organization. The culture reflects how employees, customers, vendors, and stakeholders experience the organization and its brand. Catholic Charities agencies share the commonality that organizational culture molds and impacts the conduct of both employees and stakeholder interactions. This encompasses the application of human resource policies, both formal and informal relationships, dress codes, and other protocols.

It is crucial for Catholic Charities agencies to enhance their organizational culture, firmly rooted in their “Catholic identity,” as articulated in their worldview and moral perspective. This involves integrating widely acknowledged best practices for organizational operations and standard operating policies. A significant aspect for Catholic Charities agencies to ponder is the imperative to emulate the innkeeper depicted in the Good Samaritan story (Luke 10) and be recognized as centers of hospitality, compassion, and accompaniment.

C. Practices

Catholic Charities’ practices promote integral human development, which deals with the whole person and family is concerned for their social, economic, mental, bodily, intellectual, and spiritual wellness (see Pope Paul VI, [Populorum progressio](#), 1967, No. 14). Catholic Charities organizations also work to improve communities so that persons and families can flourish. In other words, Catholic Charities agencies improve the social determinants of health and well-being, as they are known in other circles.

The Catholic Charities USA Charter of 1910 declared that one of the major purposes of the national organization is to professionalize social work. Catholic Charities agencies are leaders integrating evidence-based best practices in social work and administration to promote integral human development. The *Catholic Charities USA Code of Ethics* (or its local adaption), [The Ethical and Religious Directives of Catholic Health Services](#) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and other moral teachings of the church, shape the actual practices of Catholic Charities agencies.

Grounded in the Gospel directive found in Matthew 25 (31–46), Catholic Charities agencies extend assistance to every person at their doorstep as an expression of faith and respond by recognizing Jesus himself as one who assists those who hunger, thirst, are sick, in prison, strangers, or in need of clothing. These social work practices – ranging from direct assistance to case management, counseling, administration, mentoring, and community development – are not mere humanitarian acts for Catholic Charities. These practices are inspired and propelled by faith.

In the U.S. Supreme Court case of *Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor and Industry Review Commission*, the state of Wisconsin argued that Catholic Charities' work was not primarily religious because it served all clients, regardless of a client's faith. However, CCUSA argued and the Supreme Court agreed that:

In short, the charitable works of the Catholic Church are fundamental to and inseparable from the core of the Catholic faith. Overseen by our Bishops, they are, in all respects, carried out for 'religious purposes.' Charitable works in the Catholic tradition are not merely examples of faith, they are the essence of the faith. (p. 12)

D. Organizational Relatedness and Autonomy as a Ministry of the Church

To understand the organizational relatedness and appropriate autonomy of a Catholic Charities agency to the church, one must examine key teachings of the church. Furthermore, how these theological teachings and canonical rules align with general civil corporate law principles, as practiced in many US States and territories, must be explored. Generally, as noted above, the church maintains that:

The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being. (DCE, 2005, No. 25a)

The Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church asserts that the (Arch)Bishop – also known as the "Ordinary" – is responsible for all ministries in his (Arch)Diocese (see canon 394) and remains the sole authority for determining the "Catholicity" of any organization operating in his region (see canons 300 and 312). *On the Service of Charity* (2012) provides specific details about the role and responsibility of the Ordinary in the work of Caritas in his region. Articles 4 through 6 and 8 provide clarity and deserve full quotation:

Art. 4. § 1. The diocesan Bishop (cf. canon 134 § 3 CIC and canon 987 CCEO) exercises his proper pastoral solicitude for the service of charity in the particular Church entrusted to him as its Pastor, guide and the one primarily responsible for that service.

§ 2. The diocesan Bishop encourages and supports the initiatives and works of service to neighbour in his particular Church, and encourages in the faithful the spirit of practical charity as an expression of the Christian life and sharing in the mission of the Church, as indicated in canons 215 and 222 CIC and 25 and 18 CCEO.

§ 3. It is the responsibility of the diocesan Bishop to ensure that in the activities and management of these agencies the norms of the Church's universal and particular law are respected, as well as the intentions of the faithful who made donations or bequests for these specific purposes (cf. canons 1300 CIC and 1044 CCEO).

Art. 5. The diocesan Bishop is to ensure that the Church enjoys the right to carry out charitable activities, and he is to take care that the faithful and the institutions under his supervision comply with the legitimate civil legislation in this area.

Art. 6. It is the responsibility of the diocesan Bishop, as indicated by canons 394 § 1 CIC and 203 § 1 CCEO, to coordinate within his territory the different works of charitable service, both those promoted by the Hierarchy itself and those arising from initiatives of the faithful, without prejudice to their proper autonomy in accordance with their respective Statutes. In particular, he is to take care that their activities keep alive the spirit of the Gospel.

Art. 8. Wherever necessary, due to the number and variety of initiatives, the diocesan Bishop is to establish in the Church entrusted to his care an Office to direct and coordinate the service of charity in his name.

The corporate structure of Catholic Charities' agencies, for the most part, should provide a means for the local (Arch)Bishop (Ordinary) to fulfill his theological, pastoral, and canonical leadership within a civil organization. Civil nonprofit law in many states provides a model for the local Ordinary to implement this 2012 Apostolic Letter, *On the Service of Charity*. This is typically accomplished through the means of a distinction between "Member(s)" and "Directors" as determined by state regulations. Oftentimes, typical nonprofits recognize that all their directors are simultaneously the members of the corporation. Yet this distinction can be used to assign specific roles for the member(s) and the directors. This model suggests using this distinction so that the Ordinary could serve as a "Member." There may be more than one Member if the local (Arch)Bishop desires to include others in that role. Then laypersons and others of good will can serve as Directors. It is essential for the corporate counsel(s) representing the Catholic Charities agency and the (Arch)Diocese, in conjunction with the canonical advisors to the (Arch)Bishop, to participate actively in discussions regarding the appropriate corporate structures. These discussions should aim to best align with the nature of appropriate relatedness and autonomy in line with the interests of the (Arch)Bishop while considering relevant state law. (For more information, see DiPietro, 2017)

A Catholic Charities agency might seek to establish an autonomous corporation that remains related to the church primarily for reasons of legal and financial protection and operational flexibility. By forming a separate, nonprofit corporate entity, the agency can shield the assets and resources of the wider church from potential legal liability arising from the agency's extensive social service operations, which often involve complex government contracts and public programs. Furthermore, a distinct corporation can offer greater agility in managing finances, pursuing diverse funding streams (like federal and state contracts and foundation grants that may have specific regulatory and compliance requirements), and entering into operational agreements. This autonomy allows the organization to function effectively in the secular world of social services while still upholding its mission, values, and identity, ensuring it remains faithful to the teachings and moral authority of the Catholic Church and maintains its essential Catholic identity through a formal relationship, often outlined in its bylaws and with oversight from the local bishop, especially with the inclusion of "reserved powers" to him as a Member. Directors are designated to manage the general governance of the corporation subject to those reserved powers. Such reserved powers might include:

1. approval of the original Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws/Code of Regulations, Philosophy, Mission, and Purpose and any amendments thereafter;
2. approval of appointment of directors of the board;
3. dismissal of any director of the board;
4. approval of the President/CEO or Executive Director of the corporation;
5. approval or acceptance of the agency's Annual Report, Catholic identity plan/Mission plan, and/or budget;
6. approval of the expenditure, acceptance, encumbrance, loan, or transfer of any amount over a certain limit chosen by the Member;
7. approval of partnerships or mergers; and
8. approval of dissolution.

These reserved powers provide the means for the Ordinary to maintain the “Catholic identity” of the Catholic Charities agency, as well as shape the charitable work being done in the name of the local church. Other powers can be added and may be provided in various state laws. In this manner the (Arch)Bishop, as a Member, acts as an official within the corporation exercising his reserved powers while fulfilling his canonical rights and duties.

On the Service of Charity further notes that “the faithful have the right to join in associations and to establish agencies to carry out specific charitable services, especially on behalf of the poor and suffering” (Art. 1. – § 1). This assertion echoes the church’s teaching articulated in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium (LG)*, that the baptized faithful have a direct role in church and society (No.s 11, 31). The Council Fathers wrote in that critical document:

The holy people of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise. . .” (LG, No. 12); and,

They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. (LG, No. 31)

This call for lay persons to be involved in the works of the church as lived in society empowers them to collaborate with the local (Arch)Bishop to serve those in need through the corporal works of mercy, organized in each (Arch)Diocese through a Catholic Charities agency. Thus, as the Member of a Catholic Charities agency, the (Arch)Bishop acts to appoint lay persons to serve as Directors of such corporations to fulfill his duties to care for the well-being of the persons living in his (Arch)Diocese. Other persons of goodwill may also serve in the capacity as a Board Director if they respect the Catholic identity of that organization (see *On the Service of Charity*, Art. 7. – § 1 discussed below).

The (Arch)Bishop can decide on the number and scope of organizations in his official (Arch) Diocesan Caritas ministry and how they are structured. The (Arch)Bishop also retains the right to approve other associations of the faithful who serve persons, families, and communities that are poor or vulnerable in his region (such as those organizations formed by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and/or religious orders). In these ways, the church fulfills its obligation of charity or service to all persons living in the local communities of the (Arch)Diocese, regardless of their religious identity and situation, rooted in the theological belief that each person is made in God's image and likeness.

In conclusion, Catholic Charities agencies stand distinct from being merely "another NGO" or "just another form of organized social assistance." As a manifestation of our faith and an official institution of the church, intricately linked to the local Ordinary, our charitable endeavors constitute an expression of deeply held beliefs underlying religious liberty. More importantly, this foundational connection is a source of pride, underscored by our steadfast conviction that every person is created in the image and likeness of God, making each encounter a moment infused with grace.

Checklist for an Agency Catholic Identity Plan

CCUSA is prepared to support member agencies in enhancing, assessing, and refining their plans and processes related to Catholic identity. Based on the working definition offered above,

The Catholic identity of a Catholic Charities institution, agency, or organization is closely tied to its organization's relatedness and proper autonomy with the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the local Ordinary (Archbishop/Bishop). It is defined by the incorporation of **symbols** and a vibrant **culture** that mirrors a faith-based organization. This identity is characterized by **practices** rooted in the Church's moral tradition and a **worldview** centered on principles of charity and justice.

CCUSA offers below a brief checklist of practical ideas to consider as local agencies formulate and regularly review their Catholic identity plans.

Worldview, Symbols, and Culture

- ☐ Engage in continuous formation of hearts of staff and volunteers, including board members, in the church's moral imagination or worldview.
- ☐ Offer ongoing educational and formation processes on the church's social and moral tradition. Consider a focus on *Deus Caritas Est*, *Fratelli tutti*, and *Dilexi te* as core reflection documents for staff and board.
- ☐ Create a prayerful work environment, including prayer before meetings.
- ☐ Make available prayer rooms/chapels in administrative offices of the agency.

- ☐ Design physical space to reflect religious art.
- ☐ Engage Diocesan Offices of Religious Education, Worship/Liturgy, Interfaith and Ecumenical Affairs, Canonical Services and others to develop curricula, serve as consultants for various programs in the “formation of the heart” (Apostolic Letter 2012, Art. 7. – § 2) or provide resources to articulate the church’s worldview and moral teachings.
- ☐ Promote Catholic identity in all staff recruitment, interviewing, and hiring.
- ☐ Provide staff retreat opportunities to develop their own spirituality and integrate that spirituality with job responsibilities.
- ☐ Celebrate at least one feast day of a saint related to Catholic Charities (Saint Louise de Marillac is the patron saint for social workers whose feast day is now May 9).

Practices

- ☐ Adopt, distribute, educate on, and implement the *CCUSA Code of Ethics*.
- ☐ Adopt and implement *The USCCB Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Services*, as amended from time to time.
- ☐ Create an Ethics Consultation committee of board/staff.
- ☐ Review all programs, periodically, for mission alignment and ethical considerations.
- ☐ Form partnerships with local parishes.
- ☐ Explore possible development of parish social ministry outreaches.
- ☐ In communications and marketing efforts, explicitly promote mission, vision and core values of the agency.
- ☐ Review for mission alignment of all new and existing contracts, grants and other sources of funding.

Organizational Relatedness and Proper Autonomy

- ☐ Review Code of Regulations/Bylaws to ensure proper role of the Ordinary to execute canonical responsibilities related to canon 300 and the [Motu Proprio “On the Service of Charity” \(November 11, 2012\)](#) within the civil corporation, with or without reserved powers.
- ☐ Orient new board directors on Catholic identity.
- ☐ Conduct annual retreats for board directors to engage in theological reflection on mission and strategies.

- ☐ Board of directors should develop an annual Catholic identity implementation plan to be shared with the Ordinary (with or without any requirement due to a reserved power).
- ☐ Annually, meet with or provide a document to the Arch/Bishop to report and reflect on the work of Catholic Charities fulfilling his mandate to care for the persons residing in his region.
- ☐ Orient new staff and volunteers to learn about the Catholic ministerial and theological underpinnings of Catholic Charities work in charity and justice.

Resources

Catholic Charities USA. (July 14, 2023). *Non-party amicus curiae brief in support of petitioners-respondents-petitioners, Catholic Charities Bureau, et al. v. State of Wisconsin Industry and Labor Commission et al.*, Supreme Court of the State of Wisconsin.

Catholic Charities USA. (2018). *Code of Ethics*. <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Catholic-Charities-USA-Code-of-Ethics-2.22.pdf>

Catholic Charities USA. (2010). *Catholic in Charity & in Identity. Resources to Enhance the Legacy*. First edition.

DiPietro, M. (2017). A corporation's exercise of religion: A practitioner's experience. In Lynch, H.F., Cohen, I.G, and Sepper, E. *Law, Religion, and Health in the United States*. Cambridge University Press, NY.

Pope Benedict XVI. (November 11, 2012). Apostolic Letter, Motu Proprio *On the Service of Charity* https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20121111_caritas.html

Pope Benedict XVI. (December 25, 2005). *Deus caritas est*. (DCE) https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html

Pope Francis. (October 3, 2020). *Fratelli tutti*. (FT) https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

Pope Francis. (August 28, 2019) *General Audience*. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190828_udienza-generale.html

Pope Francis. (December 1, 2014). *Address to Episcopal Conference of Switzerland*. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco_20141201_ad-limina-svizzera.html

Pope Francis. (October 3, 2014). *Address to the 2014 Annual Gathering of Catholic Charities USA*. Charlotte, NC. <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/2014-ccusa-annual-gathering-pope-francis-address/>

Pope Paul VI. (March 26, 1967). *Populorum progressio. On the Development of Peoples*. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html

Pope Leo XIV. (October 4, 2025). *Dilexi te*. Apostolic Exhortation to All Christians on Love for the Poor. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html

Pope Leo XIV. (October 4, 2025). Letter to the Participants in the 115th Annual Meeting of the Catholic Charities USA Network. <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/letter-pope-leo-xiv-115-annual-gathering-ccusa.pdf>

Second Vatican Council. (November 21, 1964). *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

Second Vatican Council. (December 4, 1963). *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (November 12, 2025, seventh edition). *The Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Services*. <https://www.usccb.org/resources/ethical-and-religious-directives-catholic-health-care-services-seventh-edition>

Vatican Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. (June 29, 2004). *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

SECTION 1

Evaluation and Planning



Resource 1: Agency Catholic Identity Evaluation

Catholic Identity Evaluation

Within a Catholic organization or agency, certain values or priorities help establish and shape the organization's identity. Sacred Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the [Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), the [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#), [papal social encyclicals](#), and statements of national and regional bishops' conferences help in building a fundamental framework as it relates to Catholic Social Doctrine, as well as articulate and explain the cornerstone themes of Catholic identity as they relate to the work of Catholic Charities organizations.

Catholic Charities agencies that aim to enhance Catholic identity may consider evaluating their current efforts and developing a plan according to their needs and local vision. By raising key questions and seeking input from a wide cross section of members within the organizational structure (e.g., staff, volunteers, board members), leaders will be aided in establishing a plan that works to infuse the principles of Catholic Social Doctrine into the organization's mission, service delivery, and overall organizational culture.

We have developed this evaluation tool to include both qualitative and quantitative responses. By encouraging participants to expand upon their rating, it is our belief that the organization will gain a more thorough understanding of how Catholic Identity is understood and demonstrated within their organization.

It is important to note that most organizations will not score perfect "5s" on all of the assessment questions. This is especially true of organizations that have not taken purposeful steps to communicate their Catholic identity broadly across all levels of the organization. For that reason, this assessment is intended to provide a starting point—a baseline to aid the agency's leaders in establishing where to begin the conversation about Catholic identity within their organization.

Rating Questions Key

1=Strongly Disagree

The topic has not been discussed and there is no defined action related to this. Little or nothing has changed in this area in at least three years.

2=Disagree

The topic comes up once or twice a year, but there is very little follow-through or organized conversation. Very little has been accomplished in this area.

3=Unsure

I do not have enough information or do not fully understand the question.

4=Agree

A formal discussion has occurred, and each year the agency moves a little closer to the ideal.

5=Strongly Agree

A formal discussion has occurred, and the agency is seen as a leader in this area.

The organization publicly promotes its Catholic Identity, incorporating that identity into its mission statement and branding, and infusing it into key messages, including both internal and external communications.



Provide an example of how this messaging is completed or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

The agency strives to incorporate Catholic identity into all policies and practices guiding its operations, including employment practices and training, financial practices, general administration, and oversight.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

A prayerful environment is supported, with prayer incorporated into meetings and agency gatherings, religious imagery and symbols displayed throughout the organization, and communications that identify the services of the organization as rooted in scripture.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

Programs and services are delivered in a manner that is consistent with Catholic Social Doctrine and reflect our commitment to a preferential option for the poor, the sanctity of life, and the understanding of the importance of the family as a key unit of society.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

The agency upholds the inherent dignity of every human being and opposes all discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, social conditions, or sex/gender.



How does the agency demonstrate this commitment, or how does it fail to do so?

The agency's employment practices are fair and just and include opportunities for employees who are not of the Catholic faith to become effective stewards of the Catholic tradition within the organization and in the broader community.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

The agency engages in ethical and environmentally sustainable business practices and encourages those practices among its vendors and community partners.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

The agency not only responds to critical conditions with compassion but also works to play an important role in the development of policy impacting the poor and vulnerable at both the local and broader state-wide and national levels, working to address those conditions that threaten the common good.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

The agency serves all people in need, regardless of their faith affiliation, and encourages the voice of those served to be represented in decision-making within the organization. Agency staff do not proselytize those they serve.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

The agency initiates and participates in dialogues with diverse faith communities, and encourages inclusion of the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized in local, statewide, and global decision-making.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

The agency handles disagreements on faith matters among staff/volunteers with charity and clarity.



What response should be given to an employee/volunteer who disagrees with a church teaching?

A strong relationship with the local bishop exists and is demonstrated by financial support, engagement with programs, regular communication, and collaboration on matters of policy and communications.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

The agency develops and maintains a strong relationship with local parishes, and it seeks to partner with them in terms of parish social ministry and the general vitality of the local church.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

The on-boarding process for new employees, volunteers, and board members includes orientation to Catholic Social Doctrine and its application within the organization and informs new members of the organization's roots in the church and in scripture.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

Employees, volunteers, and board members can communicate the key elements of Catholic Social Doctrine that frame the organization's Catholic Identity.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

Employees, volunteers, and board members understand the organization in relation to its position within the local community, the diocese, and the worldwide church focused on fighting poverty and serving the needs of the poor and vulnerable.



Provide an example of where this is best demonstrated or where you believe it to be missing or requiring improvement.

Resource 2: Agency Catholic Identity Plan

Workshop Model

The following workshop model is provided to assist an agency in reflecting on its Catholic identity. Using the results of the Agency Catholic Identity Evaluation and other readings from this manual, the workshop is intended to stimulate conversation among staff on the Catholic identity of the agency (made up, again, of board members, management, staff, and volunteers). This is a suggested workshop to be adapted for local agency use.

Objectives:

Review and evaluate responses to the Agency Catholic Identity Evaluation.
Establish priorities for more fully integrating Catholic identity into the life of the agency.
Complete a Catholic Identity Plan.

Preparation

Materials:

Easel, paper, and pen

Distribute copies of the following to workshop participants:

Understanding Our Identity articles (see Section 2)
Governance articles
Brief history of Catholic Charities in your area
Completed Agency Catholic Identity Evaluation
An [abridged excerpt from the Compendium specific to Catholic Social Doctrine Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services](#)
Planning worksheet
Example of sample planning workshop

Workshop Guidelines

Prior to the meeting, each participant should read the introduction by Brian Corbin and the articles on Catholic identity in section two and on governance in section five of this toolkit. If you wish to shorten the assignment, select the articles you believe to be the most pertinent to your situation.

Open the meeting with a prayer or prayer service. Consider using the prayers and prayer services provided in this toolkit.

Discussion Guidelines

The participants can work in small groups or as a whole. It is best to work in a way that allows all participants to be engaged. If the group is large, it is best to break it into groups, allowing everyone an opportunity to speak.

Both large and small groups need to choose a facilitator as well as a scribe from among the participants. For small groups, someone from the group needs to be responsible for reporting the work of the group to the plenary.

Process

Discussion of Agency Evaluation

Review the responses to the questions in the agency evaluation.

Discuss the following questions:

Was there uniform agreement among all raters? Which questions elicited the most consensus? The most disagreement?

In which areas do you feel satisfied with the agency's accomplishment?

What additional questions or concerns did the evaluation raise?

Which areas need the most attention?

Develop a Catholic Identity Plan

Review the categories of the Catholic Identity Planning Grid.

Review and discuss Cynthia Goodheart's sample plan for Heartland Catholic Charities. What do you like about her plan? What would you change?

Use the worksheet provided to organize your own Catholic Identity Plan. Be sure to designate a person or persons responsible and a reasonable time frame in which to complete the task.

Catholic Identity Planning Worksheet

Categories:

1. Evaluation: Conversations held at regular intervals to reflect on the state of Catholic identity within the agency.
2. Forming Board Members: Trainings, retreats, and other opportunities for board members to learn about the Catholic dimensions of Catholic Charities.
3. Forming Staff: Trainings, retreats, and other opportunities for employees to learn about the Catholic dimensions of Catholic Charities.
4. Physical Space: Facilities that reflect, through design, art, and environment, the Catholic identity of Catholic Charities.
5. Prayer Life: Efforts to promote a prayerful work environment.
6. Policies and Procedures.

Your Catholic Identity Plan

Name of Agency

Name of (Arch)Diocese

Category

Action

Time Frame

Person Responsible

A Sample Catholic Identity Plan

Cynthia Goodheart is the executive director of Heartland Catholic Charities, a diocesan agency employing 100 staff. Cynthia decided to utilize the Catholic identity toolkit after observing that Catholic identity in Heartland Catholic Charities simply consisted of crucifixes in selected conference rooms, a five-minute explanation of the relationship between the church and Catholic Charities in employee orientations, and annual appeals for parish support. Cynthia completed the Agency Self-Evaluation with four senior staff. At the end of a one-day senior staff meeting, they reached consensus on the following plan.

Category	Action	Time Frame	Person Responsible
Evaluation	Time for evaluating progress included in annual planning day for board and senior staff	9 months	Cynthia
Forming Board Members	Catholic Identity Orientation for board members	3 months	Cynthia
Forming Board Members	Spirituality retreat scheduled for board members	12 months	Cynthia
Forming Staff	Catholic Identity Orientation for staff	Begins in 6 months; continues monthly for 4 months	Cynthia
Forming Staff	Spirituality retreat scheduled for board and staff members	12 months	Personnel Director
Physical Space	Crucifixes, pictures of the bishop, and Catholic art placed in all public areas of the building and major workplaces	9 months	Operations Director
Physical Space	Feasibility study conducted on building a chapel at headquarters	9 months	Operations Director
Prayer Life	Department heads include prayers at all major meetings	6 months	Parish Social Ministry Director (has degree in pastoral ministry)
Prayer Life	Agency utilizes Catholic Charities prayer resources for Thanksgiving, Advent, and Lent	3 months (beginning with Thanksgiving)	Parish Social Ministry Director
Policies and Procedures	Code of Ethics, EARD's training provided to all staff	Begins in 6 months; continues monthly for 4 months	Personnel Director

SECTION 2

Understanding Our Identity



By its title, a Catholic Charities agency declares its intimate connection to the Catholic Church and the church's mission mandated by Jesus: to bring the gospel and God's saving love to all people.ⁱ The title also distinguishes Catholic Charities from secular and other faith-based human service providers. To assist Catholic Charities leaders, boards, and staff in understanding the Catholic identity of Catholic Charities, a number of foundational resources have been provided here for reflection and to foster conversation. The resources include:

1. Foundations in Scripture
2. Foundations in Theology
3. Foundations in Church History
4. Foundations in Catholic Social Doctrine
5. Foundations in Christian Moral Living
6. Foundations in the Gospel of Life
7. Foundations in Catholic Customs and Spirituality
8. The History of U.S. Catholic Charitable Activities
9. Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) Foundational Documents
10. Global Church, Global Charity
11. Understanding Poverty and Racism

Each foundational resource includes questions for discussion that can be used in staff meetings and other gatherings. These conversations can begin to answer the questions:

How does Catholic Charities see itself as a ministry of the church?

What does it mean to be a Catholic organization?

ⁱ Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 849-850.

Resource 1: Foundations in Scripture

The four gospels of the New Testament provide the primary source for the identity of Catholic Charities, for each of them from its own perspective portrays the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, who is not only the Savior of the world but also the master teacher of the Christian life. In the gospel according to Matthew (25:35–36), Jesus declares the central mission of his followers:

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

Jesus identifies his very self with poor and vulnerable people. In effect, he says to humanity, “I am the poor.” The meaning for Catholic Charities is clear: human beings—especially those who are poor and vulnerable—share a dignity in Christ that must be respected through love and service.

In the Old Testament

The gospels may offer Catholic Charities the perfect model in Jesus for its ministry, but the rest of the Bible provides stories and wisdom to draw from as well. Jesus often cited the Old Testament, bringing forth from them a deeper significance through his words and deeds. From Abraham and Sarah’s hospitality to three strangers by the terebinth of Mamre (Gen 18:1–10) to the frequent reminders to care for and do justice for widows and orphans, the Old Testament manifests God’s special love of poor and vulnerable people. They also establish a firm foundation for the ministry of Jesus, and Catholic Charities too.

God’s Law Protects the Poor and Vulnerable

In the first books of the Bible, readers learn that God is the Creator. God created everything and called it “very good” (Gen 1:31). God also brought man and woman into existence, bestowing upon them an inherent dignity: “Let us make human beings in our image” (Gen 1:26). Page after page demonstrates God’s special care and concern for human life, especially among the poorest and most vulnerable populations.

Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.” (Deut 15:10–11)

The Voice of the Prophets

God hears the cry of the poor and answers through the voices of the prophets, who point out the evil of their times and show the way back to God. Prophets like Isaiah speak for the Lord in condemning people who teach rigid and scrupulous religious practices but ignore social injustices:

What do I care for the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord. Your new moons and festivals I detest: they weigh me down, I tire of the load. ...cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow. (Isaiah 1:11, 14, 16–17)

Similarly, Amos decries the religious festivals of his time with their "noisy songs." He tells the people: "[L]et justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (5:23–24).

The prophets also issue condemnations and exhortations regarding human evil, the good people fail to do, and what can be accomplished if God's ways are followed. Ezekiel reminds us that we belong to God: "You shall be my people and I shall be your God" (36:28). Micah sums up much prophetic teaching with his exhortation "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8).

In the Teachings of Christ

Jesus knew well the concern for poor and vulnerable people articulated in the law and prophets. At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus proclaims in his hometown synagogue:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free. (Luke 4:18)

In this "mission statement," launching the ministry that will lead to his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus makes it clear that his disciples must care for those who most need it: the poor, the widow, the prisoner, the stranger, and the disabled.

With Jesus, words of love are always complemented by deeds of love: "He went about doing good," as the Acts of the Apostles attests (10:38). In many ways, Jesus embodies one of his most famous parables, the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37), which also informs Catholic Charities' understanding of itself. A scholar of the law asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit everlasting life?" Jesus responds, love God and neighbor. But the scholar presses the point: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers with the well-known parable that shows two seemingly pious Jewish men ignoring the needs of a badly wounded victim lying on the side of a road, while a Samaritan (considered an enemy by the Jews) not only cares for the victim's immediate needs but also provides for future needs. Jesus asks the scholar, "Who was neighbor to the man?" The scholar replies, "The one who showed him mercy."

The parable contains a powerful lesson: love and compassion are the supreme law, and love brings with it certain obligations. It's a lesson that the Catholic Church and Catholic Charities have sought to pass on and practice.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Deus caritas est* (2005), teaches that this parable establishes “a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter ‘by chance’” (No. 25), meaning we must love the neighbor we do not know as much as the one we do.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical on universal love, *Fratelli tutti* (2020), confirms the teaching of *Deus caritas est* about the Good Samaritan and encourages everyone to adopt an even bolder approach: “not to decide who is close enough to be our neighbor, but rather that we ourselves become neighbors to all” (No. 80).

Pope Leo XIV follows the same line of teaching as his predecessors when he writes in his first apostolic exhortation, *Dilexi te* (2025), “It is important for us to realize that the story of the Good Samaritan remains timely even today.” He asks that everyone keep in mind the parable when encountering someone in need, especially people struggling with poverty. Pope Leo tells us all to ask ourselves, “What did the Good Samaritan do?” (No. 106).

CCUSA and Catholic Charities agencies across the United States have also reflected on the parable of the Good Samaritan and its implications for the Catholic Charities ministry. One grace to come from this reflection was a renewed commitment “to encounter and to minister to those along our roadsides.” The commitment was articulated in a CCUSA document—*A New Moment: Envisioning the Ministry of Catholic Charities, 2017-2022*—which stated this:

We refuse to be satisfied with emergency measures alone but also commit to accompany persons, families and communities—“dignified agents of their own destinies”—in their long-term journeys toward hope and continued healing. We continue the work of humanizing our society by caring for the “least of these” as we commit to transforming the very structures that divide and marginalize our neighbors.

Speaking to a CCUSA gathering in San Antonio, Texas, Pope St. John Paul II told those assembled, “You carry on a tradition and you live out a teaching grounded in Sacred Scripture, proclaimed by the Church and relevant to every age. Service to the needy not only builds up social harmony, it reveals God, our Father, the rescuer of the oppressed.” Therefore, the church—in part through the ministries of Catholic Charities—must make every effort to organize care for everyone in need, in the short and long term, until Jesus brings his kingdom to fulfillment.

From the story of creation to the paschal mystery of Christ, biblical themes underlie the ministries of Catholic Charities. They provide the inspiration and impetus for the earliest church ministries with poor and vulnerable people, documented in the New Testament and discussed in more detail in the resource on Theology. The scriptures referenced in this short introduction are only the beginning. For further study, consider some of the resources cited in the appendix.

Questions for Discussion

1. What scriptures does our agency find most inspirational to the mission of Catholic Charities?
2. How do the scriptures inspire and challenge agency staff and volunteers?
3. How might the agency integrate scriptural reflection into its work?

For Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church. www.vatican.va. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994.

Pope Benedict XVI. *Deus caritas est*. www.vatican.va, December 25, 2005.

Pope Francis. *Fratelli tutti*. www.vatican.va. October 3, 2020.

Kammer, Fred. *Doing Faithjustice: An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought and Action*, Fourth Edition. New York: Paulist Press, 2023.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 849-850

Resource 2: Foundations in Theology

In almost every corner of the earth, the Catholic Church is present. Institutionally, the Catholic Church includes parishes and dioceses, schools and hospitals, missions and religious orders, and many different organizations dedicated to living the gospel of Jesus Christ. Catholic Charities is part of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church, however, is more than the organizations that bear its name. Fundamentally, it is the people of God or the body of Christ: the laity, religious, and clergy who are members united through Baptism to Christ, the head of the Body. For 2,000 years, the church has attempted to respond to the signs of the times, discern the movement of the Holy Spirit, and remain faithful to Jesus and his gospel by works of charity and justice. Each member is called to holiness and to participate in Jesus' mission of salvation for all people.

Christ's mission involves active love for one's neighbors on earth, with special concern for those who are poor, but it is focused on drawing people to the fullness of life in God's kingdom, humanity's ultimate end. Jesus says, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be" (John 14:3).

Jesus provides his church with the grace and gifts necessary to join his mission. He promises the apostles the gift of the Holy Spirit: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always" (John 14:16). The Holy Spirit, who is one with the Father and the Son, not only remains with the church but also guides the church in understanding divine revelation, which comes from two fonts: Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

"Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit." It includes the 46 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. Sacred Tradition is the unwritten revelation of God, "entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit." The apostles and the early church passed on important truths orally as well as in writing. Many of these teachings (like the Apostles' Creed) overlap with Scripture.¹

The teaching authority of the church, the Magisterium, has the responsibility of handing on divine revelation to the people of God today. The Magisterium includes the pope and bishops, who help the church understand divine revelation in the present moment. They also defend Sacred Scripture and Tradition from misinterpretation and error. "Whoever teaches something different and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the religious teaching is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid disposition for arguments and verbal disputes" (1 Tim 6:3–4). The laity, for their part, are able to receive and understand Scripture and Tradition because they, too, have received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Within the church, Catholic Charities participates in the mission of Jesus as a “ministry of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way” (as contrasted with the individual responsibility to love one’s neighbor; *Deus caritas est*, Nos. 20–21). Since Jesus’ mission is sharing God’s salvific love with all, Catholic Charities understands that “there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life” (*Deus caritas est*, No. 20). Salvation and love are not simply future expectations; they should be anticipated here and now in the way the human community lives together. Listening to the Holy Spirit and serving people in need daily, Catholic Charities organizes its charitable activities as “an ordered service to the community” (*Deus caritas est*, No. 20).

Pope Francis emphasizes that the church as a community of believers, including Catholic Charities, works for

“the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity.” ...The Church is a home with open doors, because she is a mother. And in imitation of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, “we want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, goes forth from its sacristies, in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity...to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation.” (*Fratelli tutti*, No. 276)

When words and deeds come together in the love practiced by Catholic Charities, the beliefs of the Catholic faith often stand out in bold relief against situations that are ignorant or antagonistic toward God. The beliefs that God loves every human person and that each person possesses inherent dignity come alive for the person who is fed or who is taught an employable skill. When Catholic Charities organizes a network to decrease homelessness, communities see God’s love in action. Even the staff and volunteers of Catholic Charities, through their service, can experience God in the people and situations they encounter. Pope Leo XIV makes the point vividly: “When we serve those who are poor and vulnerable, we touch “the very ‘flesh’ of Christ” (*Dilexi te*, No. 110). As God’s love is given and received, those who take part catch a glimpse of eternal life with God.

Catholic Charities Upholds Catholic Faith	
We believe in God’s unconditional love for every person. We believe that all of creation is good. We believe that all human beings are created in God’s image and possess an inherent dignity. We believe in the value of all human life.	We believe that God is present and active throughout history and in individual lives. We believe that people and societies can be transformed through the Holy Spirit. We believe that it is within community that we come to know God’s love. We believe in Jesus’ resurrection, which gives hope for the present and the future.

Pope Francis addressed the Catholic Charities ministry at the 2014 CCUSA Annual Gathering in Charlotte, NC. He said he wished for a “poor church for the poor,” something like a field hospital to treat a wounded and hurting humanity. He added that Catholic Charities, at the nexus of faith and love, was in a unique position:

You are the salt, leaven, and light that provides a beacon of hope to those in need. You as Catholic Charities...help to change the course of your local communities, your states, your country and the world by your witness to that encounter with the Lord Jesus, who gives us abundant life and joy.

Questions for Discussion

1. How are the fundamental beliefs of the Catholic Church lived out in the work of Catholic Charities?
2. How have you seen God’s loving presence in your work with Catholic Charities?
3. How have you observed the Holy Spirit foster individual and societal change?

For Further Reading

The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

Pope Benedict XVI. *Deus caritas est*. (Washington DC: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006).

Pope Francis. *Fratelli tutti*. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html (Oct. 3, 2020).

Catechism of the Catholic Church. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994).

Cadre Study: Toward a Renewed Catholic Charities Movement. (Alexandria, Va.: Catholic Charities USA, 1992).

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Resources on *Dilexi te* <https://www.usccb.org/dilexi-te>

¹Sacred Tradition is “to be distinguished from the various theological, liturgical, or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 81-83)

Resource 3: Foundations in Church History

After Jesus' ascension into heaven, the apostles cared for widows and orphans, the hungry, the sick, and those in prison, institutionalizing these ministries with the foundation of the diaconate, as described in St. Luke's history of the early Church, "The Acts of the Apostles."

Chapter six of Acts relates a dispute over the daily distribution of food to widows. The apostles were called in to mediate. Concerned that administering what is presently called social ministry programs would preclude their efforts to spread the Word of God, the apostles ordained seven men of good character to lead ministries of charity. These individuals are considered the first deacons. Deacons serve the needy, proclaim the word, and assist priests at the altar during Mass. The apostles designated deacons to serve the same populations that Catholic Charities serves today.

Noting that those in need were cared for, St. Luke describes in the Acts of the Apostles an early Christian culture where poverty is eliminated:

The community of believers were of one heart and one mind. None of them ever claimed anything as his own; rather everything was held in common...(N)or was there anyone needy among them, for all who owned property or houses sold them and donated their proceeds. They used to lay them at the feet of the apostles to be distributed to everyone according to his need. (Acts 4:32–35)

St. Luke also documents a special collection for famine victims in Judea, administered by Paul himself (Acts 11:27–30). Paul's general collection for the church in Jerusalem, which funded ministries of charity as well as ministries proclaiming Christ's message, is mentioned in his first and second letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:1–2; 2 Cor 8:3–5) and in his letter to the Romans (Rom 15:28).

Other texts outside of Scripture that have survived from the earliest years of the church also indicate the Christian community's deep concern for poor and vulnerable people. The second century Christian, Justin Martyr, writing to the Roman Emperor Antonius Pius, described his own experience of the early church: "We, who loved above all else the ways of acquiring riches and possessions, now hand over to a community fund what we possess and share it with every needy person" (Apology, 1, 14).

Tertullian, another early Christian writer, celebrated the way early Christians applied themselves to works of charity: "Our care for the derelict and our active love have become our distinctive sign before the enemy... See, they say, how they love one another and see how ready they are to die for one another" (Apology, 39).

Some scholars, such as W.A. Meeks in his book *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries*, believe that the need to coordinate ministries of charity was one of the primary reasons for the institutionalization of the church (108). Others note that loosely organized Christian ministries of hospitality evolved into organized hostels and hospitals—frequently sponsored by monasteries—to serve travelers, lepers, and those suffering from illnesses of mind and body.

Pope Benedict XVI, in the encyclical *Deus caritas est*, traced the church’s official ministries of charity from Acts 6 to the fourth century, culminating in organizations within monasteries responsible for care of the poor. From AD 600 to 800, the pope says these charitable “corporations”—called “diaconia”—spread “East and West,” becoming essential to the mission of the church in every part of the world. Even the civil government at the time entrusted these diaconiae with distributing grain to the public, something akin to modern day block grants (*Deus caritas est*, No. 23). Bishops, too, began to take on a greater role in overseeing charitable ministries. By the twelfth century, Catholic dioceses and religious orders were the main provider of services to poor and vulnerable people.

The role of religious orders in extending hospitality to the poor cannot be overstated. Most hospitals established in the Middle Ages were affiliated with a religious community. One of the most famous, the Hotel-Dieu of Lyon, is illustrative of the trend. Founded in the sixth century by Augustinian nuns, the Hotel-Dieu took care of the sick but also served as an almshouse, an orphanage, and a hostel for weary pilgrims. Such multi-service institutions were the rule during this period, through the end of the first millennium. The Crusades enlarged the population of the poor during the next 300 years, as battle-scarred veterans returned home or stayed near battle sites. In response, new religious orders sprang up to care for those wounded.

But this proliferation of care institutions began to wane in Europe by the fourteenth century. The plague, internal church problems, and a lack of capacity to develop structures adequate for the changing times played into this decline. In the fifteenth century, an increasing emphasis on state responses to poverty led to the establishment of the Elizabethan Poor Laws in England, which provide the legal foundation for government-funded services to the poor.

Later religious orders, such as the Franciscans and the Congregation of the Mission founded by St. Vincent de Paul, played an important role in the expansion of the care of the poor. St. Vincent de Paul also founded the Ladies of Charity, who continue to help people living in poverty through the work of lay volunteers. St. Vincent’s charism continues in the society that bears his name, the St. Vincent de Paul Society founded by Blessed Frederick Ozanam and five other French university students in 1833.

In the United States today, the church continues to provide and fund services to people who are poor and vulnerable through the work of Catholic Charities. Support from local dioceses, parishes, and individuals provides significant funding for Catholic Charities agencies across the country. Many of the agencies also accept tax dollars in the form of grants and contracts from the federal government, as well as state and local municipal bodies.

The church's commitment to people who are poor and vulnerable is also present in its modern advocacy role. The church takes a stance on a multitude of public policy issues, but never with the idea of replacing the state. Rather, the church as one of the "social forces" in society considers itself "duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically" (*Deus caritas est*, No. 28a). Through its social and moral teaching, the church participates in shaping the popular debate and informing the political choices of its members.

For its part, Catholic Charities has identified itself as the "attorney for the poor," giving a voice to the voiceless, while examining social policy from the perspective of the Christian faith and advocating for laws and policies that uphold the dignity and integral development of the human person. Catholic Charities even uses a specific method in its public policy advocacy called "See-Judge-Act," which was first developed by Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardigan in 1925. It involves examining the specific event or movement, considering it from the perspective of Christian faith, and then discerning the appropriate actions to take. Pope St. John Paul II recommended this method "as a lasting paradigm for the Church," a tool to be used in order to weigh in on "specific human situations, both individual and communal, national and international" (*Centesimus Annus*, No. 5). See-Judge-Act is one way to integrate the fruit of Catholic faith into public life and serve the common good.

Service to one's neighbor and society is essential to church life and has been present at every stage of the church's history. Pope Benedict XVI wrote that the church has three essential functions: "proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity" (*Deus caritas est*, No. 25a). The functions are inseparable and move the people of God to go out to the peripheries to actively share God's love. Pope Francis underscored Pope Benedict's words by stating that the church by her nature "is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes" (*Evangelii gaudium*, No. 179). Pope Leo XIV, for his part, said:

We must never forget that religion, especially the Christian religion, cannot be limited to the private sphere, as if believers had no business making their voice heard with regard to problems affecting civil society and issues of concern to its members. (*Dilexi te*, No. 112)

The brief history outlined in this resource highlights the importance of the church's charitable ministries—present since the time of the apostles. Just as God the Father sent his son into the world to redeem humanity, the church must make its teachings fully present in the material world through organizations like Catholic Charities. Over 2,000 years after the birth of Christ, Catholic Charities makes God's special love of those who are poor and vulnerable present in the United States the same way that the early Christians did in their communities.

Questions for Discussion

1. How do we see the history of the church being lived out in our agency?
2. What is the history of our agency working in the communities we serve?
3. Who were the founders, leaders, and/or heroes of our agency's history?
4. How do we celebrate the history of our agency?

For Further Reading

Pope Leo XIV. *Dilexi te*. On Love for the Poor. October 4, 2025.

Catholic Charities USA: 100 Years at the Intersection of Charity and Justice, ed. J. Bryan Hehir (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

Fred Kammer, SJ. *Faith. Works. Wonders. An Insider's Guide to Catholic Charities*. (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

Dorothy M. Brown and Elizabeth McKeown. *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1997).

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *In All Things Charity: A Pastoral Challenge for the New Millennium*," 1999. <https://www.usccb.org/committees/catholic-campaign-human-development/all-things-charity-pastoral-challenge-new-millennium>

Resource 4: Foundations in Catholic Social Doctrine

The Catholic Church's social mission originates in the person of Jesus, who fulfills the Jewish tradition of concern for the world and makes it a mandate for his followers ("Go and do likewise," Lk 10:37). However, church doctrine associated with modern social concerns—known as Catholic Social Doctrine (CSD)—is commonly traced back to the end of the nineteenth century.

Although the church has spoken out on public issues for centuries, many historians link the origin of modern CSD with the promulgation of Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum* (*On the condition of labor*), which concerns the social consequences of the Industrial Revolution. From Pope Leo XIII to Pope Leo XIV, numerous encyclicals and other documents have been written on social concerns (see list of documents at the end of this resource). This body of teaching has shaped church ministries like Catholic Charities in a fundamental way.

CSD has been summarized into seven key principles by the bishops of the United States and condensed into the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, a book-length Vatican document that distills CSD to four principles. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* organizes CSD into its own structure without declaring a particular number of principles.

Regardless of how it's organized, CSD retains the same source: the authoritative teaching of the church found in papal and Vatican documents, such as those published by the Second Vatican Council. Because of their wide use in the United States, the seven key principles of CSD articulated by the U.S. bishops are used here, along with commentary on CSD's application within Catholic Charities agencies.

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 CSD. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion, euthanasia, and war. The value of human life is being threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. Even newer technologies, like artificial intelligence, could be misused to gain power over human beings or reduce people to the status of objects. The church holds 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.

Pope St. John Paul II articulated Catholic teaching on human life and human dignity in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (*On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life*). From conception until natural death, human life at every stage is to be defended and developed. Pope Francis, in *Laudato si'* (*On Care for Our Common Home*), cautions that technological development, as beneficial as it may be, must be "accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience" (No. 105). Catholic Charities believes in the sacredness of every life, no matter how challenged by poverty, abuse, disease, or disability. Every person, regardless of race, sex, and social class, born and unborn, has dignity and potential that flows from being created in the image and likeness of God.

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 the 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 those who are poor and vulnerable.

Catholic Charities believes that the common good, the full flourishing of all people, is best served by the promotion of strong marriages and responsible parenthood. As the smallest social unit in society, the family's protection and strengthening is essential to the flourishing of larger social units. As an organization, Catholic Charities practices subsidiarity, the principle that larger social entities should not take on roles that smaller social entities can successfully perform on their own (unless the smaller entity becomes incapable of performing the role). As a result, Catholic Charities encourages client participation in the decisions that affect their lives.

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.

Many of the specific programs Catholic Charities implements flow from human rights, that is, what a person is due simply by being made in the image and likeness of God: food, clothing, housing, and medical care, to name a few. At the same time, many Catholic Charities staff members work with clients to help them take ownership of their own responsibilities: to work, to care for children, to heal broken relationships. A person should be helped to develop himself or herself, not hindered. Wisdom gained through prayer and experience help to discern which approach is needed at a given moment.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

A basic moral test is how vulnerable members of a community are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, the Christian tradition points to the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31–46) and calls people to put the needs of those who are poor and vulnerable first.

Through its education, advocacy, and public policy work, Catholic Charities analyzes how the most vulnerable members of our nation are faring and proposes vehicles for action for Catholics and other agencies, groups, and associations. These efforts at times require a prophetic stance, as well as a convening role, bringing people of differing views to the table to discern an appropriate response. An example is [CCUSA's Healthy Housing Initiative](#), which provides comprehensive care and safe shelter to persons formerly living on the streets. The initiative involves Catholic Charities agencies, Catholic health systems, financial institutions, and government agencies, all working together to address homelessness.

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 participation in God's continuing creation of the world. 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.

Catholic Charities promotes the dignity of work and the rights of workers in many parts of the country by removing barriers to work for those who are poor and vulnerable. As an employer, Catholic Charities is equally committed to its own workforce, as stated in the CCUSA Code of Ethics: "...we ensure just, dignified and sustainable working conditions for all our staff and fulfil our duty to care for staff" (No. 14).

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. Pope Paul VI taught, "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.

For Catholic Charities, the principle of solidarity points us in four important directions. First, the realization that solidarity involves engaging with those who are poor and marginalized, affording them the opportunity to share input on decisions, policies, and programs that will affect them. Second, the principle of solidarity animates Catholic Charities' efforts to fight racism, particularly as it relates to poverty in America. Third, exercising its convening role, Catholic Charities works to build strong relationships of solidarity between the non-poor and people living in poverty. Finally, as an agency of a global church, Catholic Charities ministers in solidarity with sister agencies throughout the world in the network of Caritas Internationalis.

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.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudat si'*, challenges everyone to a radical change of heart that turns away from exploitation and undisciplined use of the world's natural resources. We are called to be good stewards of creation, mindful of how our actions affect present and future generations. The key is to discern our actions, keeping in mind three fundamental relationships that must be respected: with God, with each other, and with the Earth.

Catholic Charities recognizes both the interdependence of all of God's creation and the disproportionate health effects that people living in poverty experience from environmental degradation. The environmental justice dimensions of Catholic Charities ministries cannot be overlooked. Indeed, CCUSA and its network must practice good stewardship of God's creation by engaging in sustainable environmental practices.

Questions for Discussion

1. What principle of Catholic Social Doctrine is most relevant to our work?
2. As an agency, how do we live out these principles? How could we live them out more fully?
3. How do the principles of Catholic Social Doctrine inspire or challenge the work of the agency?

For Further Reading

Anna Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times*, (London: T&T Clark, 2021).

Kevin E. McKenna, *A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching*, 3rd Ed., (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 2019).

Our Best Kept Secret: The Rich Heritage of Catholic Social Teaching, ed. Peter J. Henriot, James E. Hug, Edward P. DeBerri, and Michael J. Schultheis (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books and Center of Concern, 2003).

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005).

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?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Matthew 25:31–46

Principles of CSD from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace:

- Human dignity
- Common good
- Subsidiarity
- Solidarity with the poor

Papal and Vatican Documents

- *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labor), Pope Leo XIII, 1891
- *Quadragesimo Anno* (After Forty Years), Pope Pius XI, 1931
- *Mater et Magistra* (Christianity and Social Progress), St. John XXIII, 1961
- *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), St. John XXIII, 1963
- *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), Second Vatican Council, 1965
- *Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration on Religious Freedom), Second Vatican Council, 1965
- *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples), Blessed Paul VI, 1967
- *Octogesima Adveniens* (A Call to Action), Blessed Pope Paul VI, 1971
- *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelization in the Modern World), Blessed Paul VI, 1975
- *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), St. John Paul II, 1981
- *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern), St. John Paul II, 1987
- *The Church and Racism: Towards a more fraternal society*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 1989
- *Centesimus Annus* (The Hundredth Year), St. John Paul II, 1991
- *Veritatis splendor* (The Splendor of Truth), St. John Paul II, 1993
- *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), St. John Paul II, 1995
- *Dignitas Personae* (The Dignity of a Person), Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1998
- *Ecclesia in America* (The Church in America), St. John Paul II, 1999
- *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason), St. John Paul II, 1998
- *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2002
- *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004
- *Deus Caritas Est* (God Is Love), Pope Benedict XVI, 2005
- *Sacramentum Caritatis* (The Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission), Pope Benedict XVI, 2007 (especially paragraphs 47, 49, 82 to 84, and 88 to 92)
- *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), Pope Benedict XVI, 2009
- *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), Pope Francis, 2013
- *Laudato Si'* (On Care for Our Common Home), Pope Francis, 2015
- *Querida Amazonia* (Beloved Amazon), Pope Francis, 2020
- *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship), Pope Francis, 2020
- *Dilexi te* (On love for the poor), Pope Leo XIV, 2025
- *Magnifica humanitas* (Safeguarding the human person in the time of AI), Pope Leo XIV, 2026

Resource 5: Foundations in Christian Moral Living

We are challenged by moral choices each day. The Catholic Church teaches and forms people concerning moral decision-making. The focus of the church's efforts has been helping people to develop their conscience in accord with objective truth, which comes to us from God and his law.

Gaudium et Spes (The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World), a key document of the Second Vatican Council, defines conscience in this manner:

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor. In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships. Hence the more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality. Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for a man who cares but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin. (No. 16)

Conscience formation requires that an individual be open to and search for the truth. It involves answering some critical questions of oneself: What habits have I formed? What type of person does God want me to be? Have the fundamental choices I have made in life been the right ones? Have I said “yes” to God’s challenge to become a fully flourishing and happy human person? Am I open to discovering God’s will for me? All critical questions are posed and answered in the conscience, the place wherein we judge whether our thoughts and actions are in conformity with the truth of God.

In the Catholic faith, we believe that Jesus is the truth and the perfect model for living as a child of God (Jn 14:6). The life of Jesus, made known to us in the gospel, and our own experience of him who became human like us, help us to frame our worldview and reflect critically on our own lives, thoughts, and actions. Jesus also promised us the gift of the Holy Spirit, who “will guide you to all truth” (John 16:13). In the process of moral decision-making, yielding to Jesus and his Spirit leads us to consider how important his words and deeds are in forming our own conscience.

In addition to a relationship with Jesus, there are four sources of moral wisdom that aid us in the formation of conscience.

Sacred Scripture

The first source of moral wisdom is sacred Scripture, authored by God, who used human beings to consign “to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more” (*Dei verbum*, No. 11). The Bible reveals God to God’s people, how God has interacted with people, and how God continues to be present among us. The Bible helps us to put on the mind of Christ, modeling our lives after his as we make choices: “we must assimilate [the Word of God] in faith and prayer and put it into practice” (*Catechism*, No. 1785). Intimately connected to Scripture is Holy Tradition, the Word of God given to the apostles by Jesus but not written down, as opposed to “the various theological, disciplinary, liturgical, or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time” (*Catechism*, No. 81, 83). Nevertheless, this latter sense of tradition aids in the formation of conscience as well.

Church Tradition

The second source of moral wisdom is church tradition, which is articulated through papal works (encyclicals, exhortations, statements), the teachings of local bishops (pastoral letters), the collective reflections of bodies of bishops such as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (pastoral letters, statements), theologians, and the sense of the community of faith itself. Church teachings have different levels of authority in terms of the formation of conscience. Papal encyclicals, local bishops’ pastoral letters, and the consensus works of bodies of bishops provide more directives than the reflections of theologians, for example. Church tradition, especially through the teachings of the pope and bishops, offers guidance for action on current social and moral issues that have been considered in the light of faith. When faced with a moral decision, and in order to search properly for the objective moral truth, it is imperative that one seeks out, thoroughly reads and reflects upon, and then acts upon the teachings of the church regarding that issue or concern. The church’s moral wisdom through its tradition provides critical insights into the nature of the moral life and the Christian response. The church’s tradition is not just one of many voices. As leaders and staff in Catholic Charities, we must strive to understand and adhere to these teachings.

Human Reason

A third source of moral wisdom is human reason. God made human beings with the ability to use reason: to reflect, analyze, and judge. In the Catholic tradition, we believe that each person has inscribed on his or her heart the natural law. “The natural law states the first and essential precepts which govern the moral life. It hinges upon the desire for God and submission to him... Its principal precepts are [the Ten Commandments]” (*Catechism*, No. 1955). The natural law can be summarized as “do good; avoid evil.” A concise teaching on the morality of human acts, based in freedom and reason, can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 1749–1761. Human reason can be applied in developing virtues, choosing and doing the good over time. It also helps people to avoid evil, thereby not developing vices or bad habits. The Catholic community affirms that human persons can use their reason to search for truth and come to agreement on virtuous ends and means toward that truth.

Experience

The fourth source of moral wisdom is experience. We must evaluate and learn from our own lived experiences in past decision-making processes, judgments, and actions. However, we must not stop at our own individual experience. We need to review and analyze the experience of others facing similar situations. The social sciences can help us to understand the processes and elements that led to individual and community decisions, thereby helping us to better understand causes and trends.

The focus up to this point has been individual moral decision-making, but organizations like Catholic Charities also make decisions together with their employees. The sources of moral wisdom that guide individuals in choices can aid organizations as well. In fact, there is a theological method called “See-Judge-Act” that has been used by church organizations in coming to decisions. The method became popular after it was used by Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical *Rerum novarum*, which guided the church’s response to the industrial revolution. The first step considers what is happening in reality: What is the situation at hand? The second step considers the situation from the lens of the Catholic faith: What does revelation and church teaching tell us about the situation? The third step discerns an appropriate action that deals with the reality of the situation in conformity with the faith.

Ethical decision-making is always required in our personal and professional lives. The formation of conscience is an essential dimension of the Catholic faith and our ability to make good, moral choices. We are called to be open to the Spirit of God in our reflections, judgments, and actions. We are called to be open to discovering the truth about how we as humans can flourish and find happiness. The four sources of moral wisdom provide us with key insights and frameworks in order to encounter faithfully the hard and sometimes difficult choices we must make. Jesus promised us the guidance of the Holy Spirit, along with human intelligence, in order to reflect, analyze, and act.

Questions for Discussion

1. How comfortable am I discussing the church’s tradition and Scripture in moral decision-making with those with whom I work?
2. What would help me better understand the church’s moral positions on issues?
3. What other topics in moral decision-making should we discuss at future events?

For Further Reading

John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor: The Splendor of Truth* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1993).

John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae: On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1995).

The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007).

The Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Services, Seventh Edition (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2025).

Resource 6: Foundations in the Gospel of Life

The Word of God proclaims the truth that undergirds the Catholic Church's teaching on the dignity of human life. "God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* expands on the biblical verse:

Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being. (*Catechism*, No. 2258)

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of its existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life. (*Catechism*, No. 2270)

The church's teaching on the dignity of human life is a focal point of our Catholic identity, which shapes all of the activities of Catholic Charities agencies. We hold above all the value of every human life, of each individual person, from conception to natural death.

Catholic Charities agencies embrace the duty to respect the dignity of every human life in all of our programs and services. In his 1988 apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*, Pope St. John Paul II elaborated on this responsibility, specifically to our nation:

The common outcry... of human rights—for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture—is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition of all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination ... whether healthy or sick, whole or handicapped, rich or poor . . . Some lay faithful are given particular title to this task: such as parents, teachers, health workers and the many who hold economic and political power (No. 38).

Catholic Charities agencies make every effort to respond to the task of defending the poorest of the poor, those who are considered to have little to offer to our society, such as the unborn and elderly. Through our direct services, legislative advocacy, and convening, we witness to the individual's dignity from conception until natural death and commit our efforts and resources to their well-being and care.

Since the right to life is fundamental, the church prioritizes the protection of the unborn from the threat of abortion, not to the dismissal of other threats but as the chief threat that would deny a person his or her God-given right to live.

Abortion

There can be no question or doubt concerning where Catholic Charities stands on the fundamental social, moral, and personal topic of abortion. Catholic Charities embraces church teaching, which has been consistent regarding the evil of abortion, up to and including the papacy of Pope Leo XIV, who not only condemns abortion but also demands care for expectant mothers:

In light of this profound vision of life as a gift to be cherished, and of the family as its responsible guardian, we categorically reject any practice that denies or exploits the origin of life and its development. Among these is abortion, which cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life. In this regard, the Holy See expresses deep concern about projects aimed at financing cross-border mobility for the purpose of accessing the so-called “right to safe abortion.” It also considers it deplorable that public resources are allocated to suppress life, rather than being invested to support mothers and families. The primary objective must remain the protection of every unborn child and the effective and concrete support of every woman so that she is able to welcome life. *Address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, January 9, 2026*

Each baby is a living human person at the moment of conception. Despite the often-difficult circumstances of pregnancy surrounding mothers, parents, and families—who also deserve care—nothing can ever justify an abortion. As stated above, the right to life must be part of the foundation of all charitable works. It can never be set aside.

Catholic Charities is committed to offering services and support for women in crisis pregnancies. From personal counseling, financial assistance, job training and newborn care, Catholic Charities agencies serve the child, the mother, and the family in the times of greatest need.

Responses that Respect Life: Post-Abortion Care and Adoption

Post-Abortion Care

For those who have experienced or have been affected by an abortion, the church offers reconciliation as well as spiritual and psychological care. This help can be found primarily through diocesan-based programs, such as Project Rachel. Such programs utilize specially trained priests and professional counselors who provide one-on-one care. Other post-abortion ministries that involve support groups and retreats are also available in many areas.

Catholic Charities agencies participate in this important social service of healing and support for women, men, and families that have been wounded by an abortion experience. Post-abortion healing is not just for the mother who has had an abortion, for, as the U.S. bishops explain, “It is important to remember that for every abortion there is also a father and an extended family... Anyone in this circle may seek help.”

Catholic Charities agencies in many regions of the country support diocesan post-abortion counseling programs. In some cases, the agency hosts a program. Professional counselors and staff, committed to the church's teachings on life and the compassionate care of those who have been affected by abortion, communicate God's mercy and healing to a vulnerable population at a time of great need.

Adoption

The church recognizes that, at times, individuals may not be ready or able to take on the responsibility of parenthood. The response should not be to destroy a new life but to welcome it "by way of adoption," as Pope Francis urges. "This kind of choice is among the highest forms of love, and of fatherhood and motherhood... We should not be afraid to choose the path of adoption" (General Audience, Jan. 5, 2022).

In a 2000 address to adoptive families, Pope St. John Paul II described the validity and value of people choosing to adopt a child:

The resulting relationship is so intimate and enduring that it is in no way inferior to one based on a biological connection. When this is also juridically protected, as it is in adoption, in a family united by the stable bond of marriage, it assures the child that peaceful atmosphere and that paternal and maternal love which he needs for his full human development.

Catholic Charities recognizes the dignity, importance, and value of every person as a child of God and the value of growing up in a stable family environment. Parents, therefore, need care and support, especially when faced with unplanned pregnancies and sufferings that come from social pressures, insecurity, and doubts about their ability to care for a child. While some Catholic Charities agencies offer adoption services, many more provide services to help expectant mothers and families achieve health and stability, such as pregnancy counseling, pre-natal and parenting education, labor and delivery counseling, follow-up services, and outreach to expectant fathers.

The work of Catholic Charities in promoting adoption can be summed up simply in the words of the U.S. bishops in the *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities*:

With the support of the faith community, Catholic organizations and agencies provide pastoral services and care for pregnant women, especially those who are vulnerable to abortion and who would otherwise find it difficult or impossible to obtain high-quality medical care. Ideally such programs include...factual and educational information on alternatives to abortion,...agency-sponsored adoption and foster care services to all who want them, as well as an educational effort presenting adoption in a positive light.

In every circumstance, Catholic Charities agencies represent the church with welcoming love and service to all in need, at every stage of human life. Within the context of a society that does not legally protect unborn children and undervalues other vulnerable populations, Catholic Charities is a witness to God's love for all people.

Catholic Charities strives continually to uphold the teaching Pope John Paul II expressed in *Evangelium Vitae*, "Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good" (No. 87).

"How can an action that ends an innocent and defenseless life in its blossoming stage be therapeutic, civilized or simply human? I ask you: Is it right to 'do away with' a human life in order to solve a problem? Is it right to hire a hitman in order to solve a problem? One cannot. It is not right to 'do away with' a human being, however small, in order to solve a problem. It is like hiring a hitman." [Pope Francis](#), Weekly Catechesis, Oct. 10, 2018

Questions for Discussion

1. How does our agency support and promote the life issues mentioned in this resource?
2. What are the challenges our agency faces in responding to life issues?
3. How might an individual or an organization prioritize what many popes have called the consistent ethic of life, which defends the unborn, migrants, the vulnerable, etc., and fosters the common good?

For Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994).

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*: The joy of the gospel, Nov. 24, 2013.

John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae: On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1995).

Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Campaign in Support of Life (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001).

Resource 7: Foundations in Catholic Customs and Spirituality

Since its founding more than 2,000 years ago, the Catholic Church has exhibited a great variety of customs and schools of spirituality, all of which have waxed and waned over the years. The development and expression of these movements were influenced heavily by the historical context and, in many cases, by individual founders.

The early church believed that Jesus would return at any moment. This anticipation oriented the prayer and communal life of the first Christians toward Jesus' imminent arrival. In the Middle Ages, many Christians feared succumbing to the plague. As a result, they turned to relics for protection. And during the crusades, great fervor for recapturing the Holy Land from the Muslims pulsed throughout Catholic Europe, leading Catholics to take up arms. Being an aggressor, even to the point of killing, is one example of an expression of faith that has been renounced.

Different schools and movements of spirituality have also appeared throughout the church's history through the vision and example of holy men and women. Religious orders, such as the Benedictines, Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, Little Sisters of the Poor, and the Missionaries of Charity received their charisms from a particular founder. Popular lay movements began over the years as well, such as the Catholic Worker, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and Catholic Action.

Still, some constants in customs and spirituality have been noted across Catholic history. The Eucharist stands out among everything else; it is "the source and summit of the Christian life" (*Lumen gentium*, No. 11). Since Catholics are obligated to attend Mass every Sunday (*Catechism*, No. 2042), their lives become attuned to the celebration of the Eucharist. If their participation is active, the entire assembly—presider and people—adopt attitudes and actions that inform daily life. The Eucharist is a prayer of adoration and thanksgiving to God the Father offered by Christ the head and his body united in the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist deepens the communion among the members of the church and sends them to share Christ with the world through active charity.

Another constant in Catholic customs and spirituality has been the veneration and imitation of the saints, those holy men and women recommended to the faithful as models of Christian living. The assembly of declared saints includes many people. Pope St. John Paul II alone [canonized 482 saints](#). Churchgoers over time have followed certain saints based on a saint's spirituality. For example, Saint Francis of Assisi attracts those who have a special love for nature and concern for the environment. St. Thérèse of Lisieux appeals to people who seek to flood the world with God's love through small, consistent acts of kindness.

Among the saints, Mary stands out. She, more than any other, has inspired countless customs and schools of spirituality, including religious orders, lay movements, prayers, songs, and poems. Mary is venerated because as a human being, docile to God's grace, she always said yes to God and never sinned ("May it be done to me according to your word," Luke 1:38). She is imitated because she always pondered and acted on God's will, thus becoming the first disciple of Jesus. In fact, the spirituality of the rosary—one of the most popular prayers in the Catholic Church—springs from Mary. Pope St. John Paul II recommended the rosary to all the faithful because it immerses one in the life of Christ through the eyes of his mother, who witnessed firsthand the events of his life (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, No. 11).

As demonstrated in the example of Mary and the rosary, Catholic spirituality and customs have been expressed in the varied ways Catholics pray. The simple gesture of the sign of the cross, which Catholics make every day, carries a wealth of meaning. It reminds us of our Baptism in Christ, the duty we have to share in Jesus' sacrifice, and our invitation to union with the Trinity. The Divine Office is another daily prayer form, associated mostly with vowed religious, but practiced by many lay faithful, too. The Office is a response to God's command to pray always, and it involves meditating on Scripture and church texts at different hours throughout the day. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers a comprehensive summary of Christian prayer, including an explication of the Our Father (Nos. 2558-2865).

Whether it is by the rosary or the Sunday Eucharist, Catholics seek to discover the presence of God in life and to know the fullness of God's love. In this life with Christ, we recognize we are called to holiness. "All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (*Catechism*, No. 2013). Catholic spirituality is a guide to ever more intimate union with Christ here and now, even as it keeps us fixed on our eternal destiny.

Indeed, since we are made for life in heaven, the work of Catholic Charities can never be merely about a social service divorced from our ultimate end. "Consequently," as Pope Benedict XVI states in *Deus caritas est*,

in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a "formation of the heart": they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbor will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (No. 31a).

The Catholic Church is blessed to have a whole company of saints who model a life of discipleship to Jesus Christ, following the Lord's example of loving God and neighbor in anticipation of eternal life. Pope Francis recommends St. Charles de Foucauld as an example of being a universal brother. Charles lived among the Tuareg tribe in Algeria, treating them as brothers and sisters at a time when colonists were interested in gaining more resources. And Pope Leo XIV in *Dilexi te* highlighted several saints who spent their lives in service to the poor: St. Francis of Assisi, St. Lawrence, and St. Camillus de Lellis, to name a few.

Each expression of Catholic spirituality offers the staff and volunteers of Catholic Charities agencies the opportunity to enter into prayer and to respond in love for those they serve, anticipating the fullness of communion in Christ forever. This brief overview has introduced some of the ways in which Catholic identity manifests itself through Catholic customs and spirituality. As a Catholic agency, Catholic Charities embraces and encourages these expressions of God's presence in the world.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways does our agency promote the expression of spirituality among clients and staff? For Catholics? For others?
2. How might we as an agency increase our awareness and appreciation of client and staff spirituality?
3. Which dimensions of Catholic spirituality do you wish to learn more about?

For Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Part Four: Christian Prayer. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994).

St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

Greg Dues, *Catholic Customs & Traditions: A Popular Guide* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994).

Michael D. Whalen, *Seasons & Feasts of the Church Year: An Introduction* (New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993).

Dilexit nos (On the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus Christ) Pope Francis, 24 October 2024 <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20241024-enciclica-dilexit-nos.html>

Dilexi te (On love for the poor) Pope Leo XIV, 4 October 2025 https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html

Resource 8: The History of U.S. Catholic Charitable Activities

Catholic charitable organizations in the United States are older than the nation itself. In 1727, French Ursuline Sisters stepped into what is now the Ninth Ward of New Orleans to offer shelter to widows and orphans. At the time, the church's charitable activities were confined to the French and Spanish "New World" colonies until Catholic immigrants in Protestant English colonies grew to significant numbers.

The first Catholic orphanages began to appear in the United States in 1779, with the founding of the Philadelphia Roman Catholic Society for Educating and Maintaining Poor Children. Shortly thereafter, in 1789, Pope Pius VI established the Diocese of Baltimore, encompassing the entire length and breadth of the new American nation. The Catholic population of the 13 states stood at 30,000.

The numbers of Catholics in the United States continued to grow, fed by waves of European immigration, reaching 195,000 by 1820. This first generation of American Catholics lived mainly in Maryland and Kentucky. But the Catholic population exploded over the next 40 years, as Irish and German immigrants arrived after escaping famine and poverty back home. By 1860, 3.1 million Catholics lived in the United States, mostly in cities, and attended 2,385 parishes spread over every state in the union.

Rooted in Poverty

Catholic immigrants fleeing poverty in Europe tended to remain poor in the United States, and poverty began to be equated in the popular imagination with Catholicism. Most organizations responding to urban poverty were Protestant in origin, and many expressed anti-Catholic biases quite openly. For example, according to Dorothy Brown and Elizabeth McKeown's landmark history of Catholic Charities, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare*, New York's Protestant Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP) noted in 1852 that 75 percent of its budget aided Catholics. In 1862, AICP leadership went so far as to speculate that 70 percent of inmates in public almshouses and half of New York City's criminals were born in Ireland. The remainder, they suggested, were likely tainted by "Irish blood," even if they were born in the U.S. Such sentiments were common at the time.

In cities throughout the nation, Catholics applied for assistance and were involved in the criminal justice system at a level far exceeding their proportion of the population. Even the bishops of the United States issued a statement in 1866 noting, "It is a melancholy fact, and a very humiliating avowal for us to make, that a very large portion of the vicious and idle youth of our principle cities are the children of Catholic parents" (Pastoral Letter of the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, October 1866).

Catholic stereotypes tended to feed off these realities, and some Protestant “child savers” involved in relief organizations worked to wrest children from troubled Catholic families and place them with Protestant families. After the Civil War, the church responded to the bishops’ concerns (and to the “child savers”) with a burst of foundling homes, orphanages, settlement houses, women’s shelters, and programs for employment services, youth services, and family casework. These organizations were not centralized but rather were founded by a diverse mix of religious orders (particularly women’s communities) and lay volunteers.

Catholics began to take charge of poverty as a problem of “our own” and successfully advocated for laws that prioritized service providers of the same religion as the dependent children in need of services. This resulted in a new stream of public funding for Catholic charitable activity that led to a dramatic expansion of these organizations over the next 50 years. The beneficiaries included the New York City Orphan Asylum (later St. Patrick’s Orphan Asylum), founded by St. Elizabeth Ann Seton’s Sisters of Charity in 1869.

Professionalizing Social Services

In the early 20th century, efforts to consolidate and professionalize Catholic charitable activities began to crystallize throughout the country. Catholic University of America (CUA) began to train priest-students in the new social sciences, and the priests spread ideas of professionalism, cooperation, and consolidation throughout the country. Leaders of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in major cities began to build relationships with non-Catholic social welfare organizations. Catholic laywomen entered the new profession of social work, replacing the lay volunteers who founded many Catholic charitable organizations. Jesuit universities in Chicago, Boston, and St. Louis opened advanced degree programs in social service.

At the same time, a few local bishops around the country began to pursue a model of consolidation, assuming direct leadership of all diocesan charitable institutions, programs, and funding, creating new bureaus of charity, typically led by a priest. Bishops appointed financial advisory boards composed of mostly business and political leaders and began to express a hiring preference for professional social workers to staff these centralized charities.

One of the most significant new developments of the early 20th century was the 1910 founding of the National Conference of Catholic Charities (NCCC), known today as Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA). In 1909 Brother Barnabas McDonald, F.S.C., known worldwide for his work with orphans and delinquent children, asked the president of CUA, Rev. Thomas Shahan, to convene a meeting of all involved with Catholic charitable activity. Four hundred clergy and laity from 38 cities in 24 states attended. The founding of the NCCC came 13 years after the first national Caritas (or “Charity”) organization was started in Freiburg, Germany. Not long after the NCCC was founded, the Catholic Hospital Association (now Catholic Health Association (CHA) was formed in 1914 to respond to technological changes affecting healthcare delivery in the United States. CHA provides programs, services, and resources to help its members make Jesus’ healing ministry present today.

The mission of the NCCC was to help infuse local charitable efforts with what was then called “scientific charity,” or, in other words, to apply the new social sciences and the professional discipline of social work. The new organization declared its intention “to become... the attorney of the Poor in modern Society, to present their point of view and to defend them unto the days when social justice may secure to them their rights.” The NCCC also endorsed and encouraged the speedy consolidation of diocesan Catholic charities into one organization or “bureau” per diocese. An executive committee composed of 22 representatives governed the new organization. Catholic University’s Msgr. William J. Kerby was selected to become the executive secretary. The new national organization was to prove increasingly important as the federal government’s role in fighting poverty grew in the coming decades.

In 1920, Msgr. John O’Grady was appointed as Msgr. Kerby’s successor. O’Grady was a sociology professor at CUA and had served on the Committee on Reconstruction of the National Catholic War Council, preparing for the return of veterans from the battlefields of Europe and anticipating the social dislocation that would result. He brought a commitment to professionalism and a tough but visionary style. Under O’Grady’s leadership, the number of diocesan Catholic Charities bureaus (or federations) grew from 14 in 1916, to 35 in 1922, to 68 in 1937. These new bureaus incorporated O’Grady’s notions of professionalism, adopting the practice of family casework and an organizational structure that placed professionally trained caseworkers and supervisors under the administrative leadership of the clergy who headed these bureaus.

Msgr. Kerby, Msgr. John A. Ryan (first editor of *Catholic Charities Review* and the author of the seminal U.S. social justice document “Bishops’ Program for Social Reconstruction”), and O’Grady were all prominent leaders, representing Catholic charitable organizations in the public arena. O’Grady played an important role in the passage of the Social Security Act in 1935 and the inclusion of child welfare provisions in Social Security. He would also help in the passage of housing legislation and become an advocate of immigration reform. Under O’Grady’s leadership, the NCCC helped resettle displaced persons following World War II. O’Grady visited a number of internment camps and urged the government to replace its quota system for immigration with a far less restrictive policy. O’Grady was the longest-serving executive secretary in the history of the national network.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the U.S. also grew, from two conferences immediately before the Civil War to 730 in 1910, in cities and rural areas throughout the nation. In the year the NCCC was founded, the St. Vincent de Paul Society disbursed \$387,849 in aid, serving many of the same populations as Catholic Charities, albeit in a different way, promoting face-to-face contact between lay volunteers and people living in poverty.

Another development that influenced Catholic Charities in the United States was the founding of Caritas Catholica in 1924. This organization of 22 national Catholic Charities conferences met bi-annually until the outbreak of World War II, when all activities ceased. In 1951, the organization was re-established as Caritas Internationalis, with 13 founding members, including the NCCC. O’Grady was the first vice president of Caritas Internationalis. Today, its membership includes 162 members working in over 200 countries and territories of the world.

Legislative Advocacy

As Catholic Charities in the United States grew, so did the challenge of poverty. The 1930s brought the Great Depression, and with it increased federal funding of private anti-poverty agencies like Catholic Charities. Diocesan Catholic Charities directors advocated locally and through the NCCC for legal mandates to provide relief to dependent Catholic children. In many cities, they also carved out a role for Catholic Charities in the distribution of public relief. The expansion of New Deal programs led to the growth of Catholic Charities agencies and programs but also sharpened the effectiveness of its legislative advocacy. The NCCC (and O'Grady in particular) played a significant role in the shaping of social welfare legislation such as the Social Security Act, specifically in provisions for Aid to Dependent Children and Child Welfare Services. Working with the National Public Housing Conference, O'Grady and the NCCC played an instrumental part in the passage of the National Housing Act of 1934, which made housing and home mortgages more affordable.

These legislative successes led Catholic Charities to embrace a stronger identity as both a provider of services and an advocate for the poor in the post-war era. As Catholics moved into the middle class, and the proportion of the poor who were Catholic dwindled, Catholic Charities leaders moved away from primarily taking care of "our own" to caring for all people living in poverty. New social justice teachings from Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council strengthened that commitment and led to expanded social change ministries such as legislative advocacy and community organizing.

The War on Poverty in the 1960s sparked further growth of the Catholic Charities movement, led at the national level by Msgr. Larry Corcoran. The federal government's preference for funding local community-based organizations bred many "faith-based" War on Poverty partnerships in the 1960s. In 1969, in the spirit of Vatican II, the NCCC launched a process of reflection on the work and ministry of Catholic Charities, which came to be known as the Cadre Study. This study would, in the words of former CCUSA executive director Thomas Harvey, "reassess, rediscover, and reformulate" the identity of the organization. The result was a 1972 reorganization of the NCCC, with an accompanying strategic plan. But more importantly, the documents of the Cadre Study reoriented the identity of Catholic Charities to a more biblical and theological perspective. As Harvey later explained, "[Catholic Charities'] greatest service would be measured by the empowerment and liberation engendered." The roles of social action, legislative advocacy, and convening therefore would take on more prominence in the work of diocesan agencies. The National Conference articulated the motivation for its work in the final report of the Cadre Study: "Whatever we do, we will do as Christians, with love, respect, and dignity."

Another significant addition to combat the war on poverty was the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). Officially created in 1970 as the U.S. bishops' official anti-poverty program, CCHD provides funding to groups who work to help people struggling with poverty to help themselves. CCHD funds help local communities or grassroots groups (not necessarily Catholic) to create a better community. A central principle of CCHD is that those who are directly affected by unjust systems and structures often have the best insight into knowing how to change them.

In the 1980s, cutbacks in federal funding for social service programs led to increased demand for Catholic Charities services even as the spending cuts limited the scope of Catholic Charities' response. In 1983, the NCCC produced its first Code of Ethics, followed by updates in 1986, 1988, 2007, and 2018. It also changed its name to Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) in 1986 and reaffirmed the three goals of the Cadre Study: to promote quality service, to humanize and transform the social order, and to convene people of goodwill to share our vision. In addition, disaster response and parish social ministry emerged as new emphases.

Under the leadership of Rev. Fred Kammer, SJ, in the 1990s, the Catholic Charities network was recognized for its role as the largest private provider of human services in the United States, a distinction that holds true today. On the cusp of the 21st century, CCUSA embarked on a three-year Vision 2000 process, an effort to bring the mission of the Cadre Study up to date with social challenges present at the turn of the millennium. These challenges included managed health care, reduced government social service funding, and the devolution of responsibility for poverty to the states. The task force implementing the process adopted a strategic plan built around the following vision statement:

Believing in the presence of God in our midst, we proclaim the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the person by sharing in the mission of Jesus given to the Church. To this end, Catholic Charities works with individuals, families, and communities to help them meet their needs, address their issues, eliminate oppression, and build a just and compassionate society.

This vision inspired CCUSA's Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America and guided the network's response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, guided by then-president Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, and to Hurricane Katrina, led by newly appointed president Rev. Larry Snyder. Tom DeStefano led the organization and its implementation of *Vision 2000* initiatives during an important transitional period between the two priests.

Nineteen years after the 1988 updating of the CCUSA Code of Ethics, Catholic Charities revised its ethical guidelines in light of new and emerging challenges facing network agencies. The 2007 Code of Ethics, revised under the leadership of Snyder, notes its roots in scriptural and theological foundations, Catholic Social Doctrine, and the fundamental values of truth, freedom, justice, and love. The new ethical standards take timeless concepts like the dignity of the human person and apply them to the complex realities facing Catholic Charities staff in the 21st century.

A Century of Service

In 2010, CCUSA celebrated its centennial, and regional conferences throughout the United States revealed the vitality of the Catholic Charities movement. Agencies were hard at work serving the poor and vulnerable, reaching out to those in need of healing and hope, and advocating to bring about change that ends poverty.

Sister Donna Markham, OP, became the president and CEO of CCUSA in June 2015 and served in that role for eight years, the first woman to be named president. During her tenure, Sister Donna led a process to identify and strategically align CCUSA's priorities and advocacy efforts around affordable housing, integrated health, food and nutrition, immigration and refugee services, disaster services and workforce development. She also led CCUSA's response to the Covid pandemic, answering the call for increased assistance to reduce evictions, food insecurity, and unemployment. CCUSA provided much-needed emergency aid to its member agencies on the front lines, enabling them to continue serving their communities during a time of great uncertainty.

In 2019, CCUSA adopted the code of ethics of Caritas Internationalis in order to underscore CCUSA's ties to the universal church. The new code of ethics proposes a reciprocal relationship between fundamental values of the church's social doctrine (human dignity, justice, the common good, etc.) and permanent principles that form a foundation for society (subsidiarity, partnership, empowerment, equality, advocacy, etc.). The values and principles guide CCUSA's internal and external relations, and they are recommended to individual Catholic Charities agencies, as well.

Kerry Alys Robinson became president and CEO of CCUSA in August 2023, following the retirement of Sister Donna. Robinson is the second woman and second layperson to head the Catholic Charities ministry in the U.S. She came to CCUSA after many years of service to the Catholic Church, including her work as the founding executive director and executive partner of the Leadership Roundtable.

At the core of Catholic Charities' mission are charity and justice: love and what is due a person. These virtues are practiced not only through the outreach and convening services of Catholic Charities but also through its public policy education efforts and legislative advocacy. All three approaches are needed to adequately promote charity and justice.

As former CCUSA president Rev. Kammer stated, "It is not enough to feed more and more hungry families; we must also raise the public question about why so much hunger persists in this wealthy nation and how that condition might be changed by individual, community, business, and government action" (Kammer, Fred. Faith. Works. Wonders.: An Insider's Guide to Catholic Charities. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publications, 2009: 42.) At times Catholic Charities must be a prophetic voice in the public square seeking to transform and humanize the social order.

Nearly 300 years after the Ursuline Sisters brought Catholic charity to widows and orphans adrift in the New World, Catholic Charities continues to respond to Jesus Christ present in poor and vulnerable people. Every diocese has its own story of charity, which we invite you to explore. Collectively, these stories of Catholic Charities in the United States are a sign of hope in a troubled world and a light to illuminate a path out of poverty for our nation.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the common threads that run through the history of Catholic Charities in the United States and our own agency?
2. What social challenges gave rise to the founding of our Catholic Charities agency?
3. How has the mission of our Catholic Charities agency changed over the years?

For Further Reading

A New Moment: Envisioning the Ministry of Catholic Charities, 2017–2022, (Alexandria, VA: Catholic Charities USA, 2017).

Cadre Study: Toward a Renewed Catholic Charities Movement (Alexandria, VA: Catholic Charities USA, 1992); an abridged version of the original Cadre Study document, *Toward a Renewed Catholic Charities Movement: A Study of the National Conference of Catholic Charities* (Washington, DC: National Conference of Catholic Charities, 1972).

Vision 2000 (Alexandria, VA: Catholic Charities USA, 1997).

Donald P. Gavin, *The National Conference of Catholic Charities 1910–1960*. (Milwaukee, WI: Catholic Life Publications, Bruce Press, 1962)

Catholic Charities USA, “Love Your Neighbor: Catholic Charities USA Strategic Framework 2026 - 2030,” 1 December 2025 <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/publications/ccusa-strategic-framework-2026-2030/>

Catholic Charities USA: 100 Years at the Intersection of Charity and Justice, ed. J. Brian Herin (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

Kammer, Fred. *Doing Faithjustice: An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought and Action*, Fourth Edition. New York: Paulist Press, 2023

John Francis McGuire, *The Irish in America*, 1868; www.libraryireland.com/irishamerica/index.php.

Catholic Charities Local History Worksheet

Agency: _____

Year of incorporation: _____

Founders: _____

Bishop: _____

Director: _____

Number of staff members at founding: _____

Number of staff members today: _____

Questions for Discussion

1. What was the agency's founding mission?
2. How do the social concerns of today compare with those at the founding? How has the agency changed ministries to meet the current social concerns?
3. Who are the key leaders who shaped the agency?
4. How have the vision and mission of the agency evolved over the years?
5. Based on the history of the agency, what predictions might you make for the future of the agency?

Resource 9: CCUSA Foundational Documents

Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) was formed as a national movement and network to bring together the experiences of Catholic charitable organizations—notably diocesan and religious-sponsored institutions, along with St. Vincent de Paul Societies—to work together to enhance their mission and to be a voice in the nation’s capital on behalf of the poor.

For more than 100 years, Catholic Charities has responded to the call of the church to engage in the world. The methodology of “see, judge, act,” developed from the Catholic Action movement, led Catholic Charities to look at the world around us (see), to analyze what we see in the light of the Gospel and our tradition (judge), and to take appropriate action, consistent with our mission (act). The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) developed this methodology further and called, in *Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*, for the church to “read the signs of the times.”

In this section, we will look at some key moments of Catholic Charities’ development as a national network and movement and review the foundational documents produced.

The Founding of the National Conference of Catholic Charities

One seminal moment came in 1910, when a group of lay persons, with some priests and religious women and men, convened at the Catholic University of America (CUA) in Washington, DC, to discuss how local Catholic charitable organizations could coordinate their efforts, develop more professional social workers, and have a voice at the national level to impact public policy. That convening of diocesan leaders and representatives from the St. Vincent de Paul Society, facilitated by Msgr. (later Bishop) Thomas J. Shahan, the rector at CUA, formed the National Conference of Catholic Charities (NCCC). At this historic founding event, these pioneers in church-based social work practice promised each other and the larger church that they would be the “attorneys for the poor,” working together to improve the lives of newly arriving immigrants and communities impacted by poverty. This important meeting is hailed as the beginning point for the national movement called Catholic Charities throughout the United States. The recorded minutes and photographs of this meeting provide the first set of foundational documents for Catholic Charities.

The NCCC worked in close collaboration with the National Catholic War Council (NCWC), which later became known as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and now the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The NCCC provided leadership throughout the subsequent era, into the Great Depression, and through the war years, advocating for social policies that became part of the New Deal legacy. Various statements by the U.S. Catholic Bishops represent much of the thinking and work being advocated by the NCCC, notably their 1919 statement, “Program on Social Reconstruction.”

The Cadre Study: 1969–1972

The momentum of the Second Vatican Council created a renewal in the church and in Catholic Charities. This spirit of change in both society and the church led the leadership of the NCCC to call for a time of theological and sociological reflection, re-engagement, and renewal. This process came to be known as the Cadre Study for the cadre of 15 Catholic Charities leaders who participated in the study. This process engaged persons involved in the church, in society, and in Catholic Charities locally and nationally, beginning in 1969 and culminating in 1972 with the publication of the study's final report, *Toward a Renewed Catholic Charities Movement: A Study of the National Conference of Catholic Charities*. This document laid out the Catholic Charities framework for ministry.

The Cadre Study focused on the two-fold movement occurring: the mandate for renewal of various institutions in the church and the challenges being made to nearly all institutions in society. The study report stated, "There was an increasing awareness of the need for greater accountability of institutions to the society they were established to serve." Further, the report noted that persons in need and persons of color were beginning to

find their own expressions. There were people who, by reason of education, culture, or economic condition were classified as being "in need" but who saw themselves as the object of oppression by other elements of American society . . . Catholic Charities was and is in the somewhat unusual position of having solid contact with both the "oppressed" (those in need) and the "oppressor" (the helpers) (54).

Catholic Charities leaders reflected upon not only the fact that society and the church were changing but also the fact that the very structure of social work organizations and practices was "the subject of massive demands for a new orientation toward action and away from direct service."

Building on its more than a half-century of work, rooted in the Gospel and Catholic theology and social theory, the Catholic Charities movement adopted the Cadre Study as its blueprint for service in the post-Vatican II world. Demographic changes around poverty and a renewed church commitment to serve those most in need meant that Catholic Charities should look beyond serving a predominantly Catholic clientele to help anyone in need, regardless of religious beliefs. This imperative led Catholic Charities agencies to forge greater partnerships with other Catholic organizations and to expand their willingness to engage in governmental contracts and grants to provide essential services.

According to the Cadre Study report, in which a detailed "theology of charity" was developed, the Catholic Charities movement, "with its triple goals of quality service to people in need, humanizing and transforming society, and calling the larger church and society to join NCCC in this struggle," would move forward with a revitalized spirit of enthusiasm and hope.

The Cadre Study further envisioned that thousands of parishes and hundreds of thousands of parishioners would join Catholic Charities in their tradition and new work of charity and justice, helping the baptized faithful to live out their baptismal call.

Under the leadership of Msgr. Lawrence J. Corcoran, then the executive secretary of the NCCC, the Cadre Study developed a plan to help Catholic Charities reorganize itself as a national resource with a mandate to ensure that local agencies participate in the continued “reading of the times”; share their combined experiences as social work practitioners; and develop a movement of persons who share the newly articulated mission to serve, to humanize and transform the social order, and to convene the Christian community and other concerned people to do the same. Various forums and committees for reflection, action, and advocacy became a feature of the renewed organization.

A New Name and a Renewed Vision

The late 20th century saw the expansion of the Catholic Charities movement, with larger budgets and more staff at both the national and diocesan levels, allowing for improved service to greater numbers of people. The NCCC also began holding a series of congresses that focused on major issues confronting society. Some of the topics included housing (1985), the feminization of poverty (1986), pluralism (1987), and a just food system (1989). These issues were not limited to situations in the United States, but were global concerns, signaling the deeper involvement of Catholic Charities with its international coordinating body, Caritas Internationalis, headquartered in Vatican City. In 1986, the NCCC changed its name to Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA).

Pope John Paul II [addressed the members of Catholic Charities USA at the 1987 annual gathering](#), held in San Antonio, Texas. The pope focused on the call to love our neighbors, especially those who are poor or vulnerable. “Catholic Charities and related organizations exist essentially to spread Christian love,” the pope said. He also explained that Christian love is manifested through “works of mercy, justice and compassion.” Catholic Charities has the call not only to serve the needs of others but also to reform structures which cause or perpetuate oppression.

In the early 1990s, Catholic Charities began to reflect on new “signs of the times.” Beginning in 1993, the Vision 2000 Task Force began the work of redefining and developing a strategic plan that would allow CCUSA to face the challenges of the new century. The Vision 2000 Task Force signaled its re-commitment to CCUSA’s three-fold mission statement of service, advocacy, and convening. It further developed a national Vision Statement:

Believing in the presence of God in our midst, we proclaim the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the person by sharing in the mission of Jesus given to the Church. To this end, Catholic Charities works with individuals, families, and communities to help them meet their needs, address their issues, eliminate oppression, and build a just and compassionate society.

The Vision 2000 final report, published in 1997, laid out four strategic directions for Catholic Charities:

1. To “enhance our historical commitment to service by making the empowerment of those we serve, especially people who are poor and vulnerable, central to our work;”
2. To “build an inclusive (organization) which engages diverse people, organizations, and communities in transforming the structures of society that perpetuate poverty, undermine family life, and destroy communities;”
3. To “strengthen our identity with, and relationship to, the broader Church and witness to its social mission;”
4. To “build the organizational and resource capacity for people to participate in effecting the vision.”

The outcome of Vision 2000 was a strong reaffirmation of Catholic identity and Catholic Charities’ commitment to empowering the dispossessed, responding to disasters, building ties with related Catholic organizations and with the government to remove the structures that perpetuate poverty, and building resources to allow for dialogue and interaction to participate in carrying out the vision and mission of Catholic Charities. CCUSA called upon the church and others to continue to read the signs of the times and engage in charitable and social justice action.

Policy Papers

In 2005, Catholic Charities promulgated a policy paper on immigration in the United States, calling, in concert with the U.S. Bishops, for a comprehensive immigration reform bill that would allow persons and families to normalize their lives, and inviting the church to be a place of welcome for new immigrants.

In 2006, the Catholic Charities movement turned its attention, once again, to reading the “signs of the times,” and found that poverty in the United States remained intransigent, impacting millions of families, especially children. At the 2006 Annual Gathering, CCUSA released another paper, *Poverty in America: A Threat to the Common Good*, which called for public policy proposals, creative initiatives, and collective changes of heart that would cut poverty in half by 2020.

The work to reduce poverty led Catholic Charities leaders to reflect upon some of the long-term causes of poverty in our land. Racism proved to be one systemic cause requiring careful reflection and analysis, along with action. At the 2007 CCUSA Annual Gathering, members ratified *Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good*, which concluded that “Poverty and racism continue to undermine our nation’s most basic premise of liberty and justice for all.”

Sadly, the killing of George Floyd in 2020 in Minneapolis, Minn., as well as the reactions and protests that followed, demonstrated that U.S. society is still plagued by systemic racism. Sister Donna Markham, OP, president and CEO of CCUSA at that time, decided to update the poverty and racism paper. The new version reinforced the need for each individual to take a personal inventory regarding how one can help eliminate racism and how one might be inhibiting restorative action through silence or acts of omission. In the update, CCUSA commits itself to a series of action steps, ranging from examining its own employment policies to advocating for racial equity in public policy and legislation.

Kerry Alys Robinson became president and CEO of CCUSA in August 2023, following Sister Markham. Robinson reached out to the network and led a strategic planning process to consider action steps in light of the signs of the times. The network found some troubling indicators of struggle including food insecurity, a shortage of service personnel, polarization, and increasing levels of mental health challenges. The difficulties are also opportunities for Catholic Charities to respond more effectively and efficiently. Toward that end, CCUSA published “Love Your Neighbor,” a strategic framework to support the Catholic Charities network by leading nationally, connecting regionally, and strengthening locally. You can read the details here.

www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/publications/ccusa-strategic-framework-2026-2030/

Catholic Charities will continue to make the effort to follow the Holy Spirit by reading the “signs of the times” and engaging in reflection and action to help fulfill our mission of service, advocacy, and convening. The goal remains to help build a just and compassionate society in which each human person is treated with the dignity due him or her as a child of God, destined to live with God forever.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does our agency engage in “reading the signs of the times” for our local work? How does it influence our decision-making?
2. How does the three-fold mission of Catholic Charities, as articulated in the Cadre Study and Vision 2000 documents—to promote quality service, to humanize and transform the social order, and to convene people of goodwill to share our vision—continue to challenge and influence the work of our agency?
3. How is our local agency working to reduce poverty and create racial justice in our local community?

For Further Reading

Cadre Study: Toward a Renewed Catholic Charities Movement (Alexandria, VA: Catholic Charities USA, 1992); an abridged version of the original Cadre Study document, *Toward a Renewed Catholic Charities Movement: A Study of the National Conference of Catholic Charities* (Washington, DC: National Conference of Catholic Charities, 1972).

Catholic Charities USA: A Century of Service, Advocacy, and Convening. Eds. Donna M. DeBlasio and Ruth Liljenquist. Catholic Charities USA, 2010.

Vision 2000 (Alexandria, VA: Catholic Charities USA, 1997).

Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good (Alexandria, VA: Catholic Charities USA, 2020).

For further information on the U.S. bishops' 1919 "Program on Social Reconstruction," visit <https://guides.lib.cua.edu/bishops>.

For other historical data about Catholic Charities USA, visit the archives at The Catholic University of America, http://libraries.cua.edu/achrcua/bishops/1919_wel.html.

Resource 10: Global Church, Global Charity

Caritas Internationalis

Charity has to be understood in the light of God who is *caritas*: God who loved the world so much that he gave his only son (cf. Jn 3:16). In this way we come to see that love finds its greatest fulfillment in the gift of self. This is what Caritas Internationalis seeks to accomplish in the world. —Pope Benedict XVI

Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) is a member of Caritas Internationalis, the social action arm of the Roman Catholic Church. Caritas Internationalis is a confederation of more than 160 national Catholic relief, development, and social service organizations operating in almost every country of the world. It is the largest global network of Catholic charities dedicated to reducing poverty and advocating for social justice. The General Secretariat for Caritas Internationalis is headquartered in Vatican City. Rooted in the Gospel and Catholic Social Doctrine, Caritas Internationalis serves all those in need regardless of creed, race, gender, or ethnicity. The confederation enjoys a special status within the Holy See.

The first Caritas organization was started in Freiburg, Germany, in 1897. Since then, Caritas organizations have spread throughout the world. Caritas Internationalis was founded in 1951 to reflect the growing international presence of Caritas members on every continent. Msgr. John O'Grady, the second president of the National Conference of Catholic Charities, was a founding member of Caritas Internationalis. He recognized the importance of the Caritas family coming together to share experience and expertise and also to acknowledge the international dimension of the work.

As part of the universal church, Caritas organizations aid the poor, the vulnerable, and the excluded on behalf of over one billion Catholics. Caritas works on humanitarian emergencies, human development and peace, and the confederation campaigns against poverty and other forms of social injustice. Caritas agencies work in community centers, homeless shelters, international relief agencies, hospitals, homes for the elderly, schools for former child soldiers, HIV care clinics, and havens for refugees and other victims of human rights abuses. Caritas members directly help over 25 million people each year in 200 countries and territories.

Caritas Internationalis serves in seven regions around the world. Representatives of the regions make up the governing body of the organization. Every four years, a General Assembly is held in Rome to elect a new president, general secretary, and representative council. A strategic framework for the confederation and the work of the General Secretariat is also approved.

The Seven Regions of Caritas Internationalis:

- Africa
- Asia
- Europe
- Latin America and the Caribbean
- The Middle East and North Africa (MONA)
- North America
- Oceania

Caritas North America

In North America, Catholic Relief Services and CCUSA are member organizations of Caritas Internationalis from the United States, while Development and Peace—the social justice, relief, and development arm of the Canadian bishops—represents the church in Canada. Caritas North America organizations meet annually and work on areas of common concern.

Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

We must make haste. Too many people are suffering. While some make progress, others stand still or move backwards; the gap between them is widening.

—Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (*On the Development of Peoples*)

Through faith in Jesus Christ, who “gave his life for us” (1 Jn 3:16), the history of the church gives evidence of the springing forth of countless initiatives of charity. To this very day, Christians around the world care for the poor and the needy in ways ranging from the simple witness of the faithful to the activity of large Catholic organizations. This splendid diversity of initiatives and actions of Christian charity is to “bear the mark of a commitment of the whole Church and full faithfulness to the whole evangelical Message,” as described by Pope Paul VI in 1972.

The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development was created on August 17, 2016, from the union of four Pontifical Councils, according to the wishes that our Holy Father Pope Francis expressed in his Apostolic Letter, under the form of a *Motu Proprio*, *Humanam Progressionem*.

The four Councils are the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, and the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers.

The Dicastery promotes the integral development of the person in light of the Gospel and in line with the Social Doctrine of the Church. It dedicates particular attention to taking care of the goods of justice, peace, and the safeguarding of Creation, as well as issues regarding disarmament, human rights, human mobility, health, and charitable works. In this way, the Dicastery expresses the concern and attention of the pope towards a humanity that suffers, among whom are the needy, the ill and the excluded. In addition, the Dicastery follows issues regarding the necessities of those who are forced to abandon their own countries or those who are without one, the marginalized, the victims of armed conflicts and natural disasters, prisoners, the unemployed, victims of contemporary forms of slavery and torture, and other people whose dignity is at risk.

The Dicastery promotes its activities by means of a network of interactions that involve local churches, Episcopal Conferences, the other organs of the Roman Curia, international organizations (both Catholic and non-Catholic), and relations with governments and supranational organizations.

As an international Catholic community, we are connected by Caritas Internationalis and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in caring for our brothers and sisters. Through these international relationships, we can learn from one another and share resources. In the case of natural disasters and conflicts, we can share immediate information and work together, with one heart, to serve the least of these among us—locally, nationally, and globally. That is the power of our connection through the global Catholic Church.

Questions for Discussion

1. As a member agency of Catholic Charities USA, we are represented at Caritas Internationalis events and processes. Why is this important to me as a local Catholic Charities leader?
2. How is our agency connected to the world in our services or clients and how are we enriched because of this international connection?
3. How does our agency support the international work of the diocese?

For Further Reading

Explore the websites of Caritas Internationalis and The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development: www.caritas.org and www.humandevelopment.va.

J. Bryan Hehir. "Theology, Social Teaching, and Catholic Charities: Three Moments in a History." *Catholic Charities USA: 100 Years at the Intersection of Charity and Justice*, edited by J. Bryan Hehir. Liturgical Press, 2010, pp. 29-45.

Resource 11: Understanding Poverty and Racism

Poverty and racism are two major issues facing the United States, and they are deeply interconnected. Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) has long been on the frontlines of promoting social justice and addressing the needs of poor and vulnerable communities through advocacy and service. In 2020, CCUSA published a report titled *Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good*, which explores how poverty and racism are intertwined, how they pose a threat to the common good, and the urgent need to combat these issues.

Poverty affects people of all races and ethnicities, but people of color are disproportionately affected, linking back to the earliest days of this nation. CCUSA's report examines the history of racism in the United States and how it has contributed to the current state of poverty. Slavery, racial segregation, and discrimination have all contributed to the creation and perpetuation of poverty in marginalized communities; those communities continue to face systemic barriers hindering their access to basic needs and rights such as housing, quality education, health care, and a host of resources and opportunities.

For example, in the realm of education, students of color are more likely to attend schools that are underfunded and understaffed. This can lead to lower academic achievement and a lack of opportunities later in life. Similarly, people of color are more likely to experience discrimination in the healthcare system, leading to worse health outcomes and increased rates of chronic diseases.

The overrepresentation of people of color in the U.S. criminal justice system is one of the most prominent ways poverty and racism intersect. People of color are more likely to be arrested, convicted, and sentenced to longer prison terms than their white counterparts. This can have far-reaching consequences for individuals with a conviction history, such as difficulty finding employment and housing as well as the inability to vote in many states.

Advocacy plays an important role in bringing about transformative change in systems that have historically marginalized these communities. The Catholic Church engages in efforts to alleviate poverty and address issues of social justice. While the CCUSA report highlights Catholic Charities' services to millions of people living in poverty, regardless of their race or background, it also offers tools for advocates to engage in meaningful dialogue with policymakers and stakeholders to drive legislative changes that address these challenges.

The report further calls on people of goodwill to raise their voices, amplifying the concerns of impacted individuals and the need for systemic reforms. It offers several policy solutions around investment in affordable housing, addressing educational inequities, and reform of the criminal justice system. Equally important to these solutions is the need for stakeholders to create spaces so that impacted individuals may share their lived experiences to inform policy decisions and impart meaningful change. CCUSA recognizes this need through strategic partnerships of faith-based and community organizations, government agencies, and stakeholders from diverse sectors, encouraging collaborative efforts to dismantle systemic barriers, promote racial justice, and create a more equitable society.

Overall, *Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good* underscores the urgent need to address the scourges of poverty and racism in the United States. These issues pose a serious threat to the common good, as they undermine the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. By working collaboratively to address poverty and racism, we can create a more just and equitable society for all people.

Questions for discussion

1. Describe the connection of poverty and racism in your local community?
2. What policies or procedures are in place to combat racism in the agency and the greater community?
3. What is currently being done to ensure that people of all racial backgrounds have an equal chance of being hired?

Further reading

Open wide our hearts: The enduring call to love, USCCB 2018

Poverty and Racism: Overlapping threats to the common good, CCUSA 2020

SECTION 3

Forming Employees



The employees of a Catholic Charities agency are its primary resource. Any attempt to develop the Catholic identity of an agency will include extensive time and energy devoted to the formation of the people who staff it. How do they understand the mission of the church and their role in achieving it? What trainings, discussions, prayer experiences, or other practices will best foster the understanding and application of that mission? These questions are the focus of the resources in this section.

This section includes the following resources:

1. Developing a Plan to Form Staff
2. Guidelines for Hiring
3. New Staff Orientation
4. Staff Development Day
5. "What's Catholic about Catholic Charities?" PowerPoint Presentation
(See CCCConnect for PowerPoint Presentation.)
6. "Catholic Social Mission and Catholic Charities" PowerPoint Presentation
(See CCCConnect for PowerPoint Presentation.)
7. Staff Retreat
8. Employee Evaluation: Mission Commitment and Implementation

We recommend that agency leadership review each of the resources and then complete Resource 1, "Developing a Plan to Form Employees." This review will give you an opportunity to select which formation experiences are most needed by your staff and at what times during the year. CCUSA's Members Services team stands ready to assist you in this process.

Resource 1: Developing a Plan to Form Staff

As you become acquainted with the resources in this section, begin to develop a plan for their implementation. Consider the following factors: What is the size of your agency? How long would it take to train every employee, if orientation workshops did not exceed 25 people? Whom would you invite to a staff retreat? To a staff development day? How would you utilize the prayer resources provided? What other ways could an agency reinforce its training on Catholic identity: facility signs? computer screensavers/background messages? The answers to these questions will need to be determined by each executive director, reflecting on the best way to implement these resources, given local conditions.

Refer back to your Catholic Identity Plan, developed in Section 1: Evaluation and Planning. What is your plan for staff formation?

Staff Category	Year One	Year Two
Direct-service staff		
Direct-service staff with succession potential		
Leadership		

Sample Staff Formation Plan

To offer a hypothetical example: Ms. Cynthia Goodheart is a laywoman who serves as executive director for Heartland Catholic Charities, a medium-size agency with 100 employees. She has developed a plan to form each of the employees who staff the agency in Catholic identity, at each stage of employment, beginning with recruitment. The degree of formation varies according to the position of the employee and their perceived potential for leadership. She considers her staff as falling generally into three groups: (1) direct service, who require a basic awareness of the Catholic identity of Heartland Catholic Charities; (2) leadership, the executives and supervisors who lead the agency and are responsible for implementing the agency's policies and processes; and (3) a middle group of natural leaders among direct-service staff who show "succession potential," that is, staff members who demonstrate the qualities of tomorrow's supervisors and executive leadership. Cynthia aims to offer these leaders a deeper engagement with the Catholic Charities mission and Catholic identity to both gauge their response and prepare them for future responsibilities.

Cynthia has developed the following plan for each group over a two-year period:

Direct-Service Staff:

The recruitment suggestions and interview questions for direct service staff contained in the “Guidelines for Hiring” resource will be utilized to recruit and hire applicants positively disposed to the Catholic identity of Heartland Catholic Charities.

When the staff formation plan is first introduced, all direct-service staff employees will participate in one of four Catholic Identity Staff Development Days to be held in the first year. Thereafter, the resource will be a regular part of the New Employee Orientation.

Direct-service staff will experience the prayer resources provided in this Catholic identity toolkit at staff meetings. Cynthia will also gather the staff four times a year for collective prayer, using the Advent, Lent, Thanksgiving, and New Year prayers provided by CCUSA.

Direct-Service Staff Identified with Succession Potential:

- The recruitment suggestions and interview questions for direct-service staff contained in the “Guidelines for Hiring” resource will be utilized to recruit and hire applicants with the potential to become supervisors and leaders in Heartland Catholic Charities.
- All direct-service employees will participate in one of four Catholic Identity Staff Development Days to be held in the first year, replaced thereafter by the New Employee Orientation.
- All direct-service staff will experience the prayer resources provided in this Catholic identity toolkit at staff meetings. Cynthia will also gather the staff four times a year for collective prayer, using the Advent, Lent, Thanksgiving, and New Year prayers provided by CCUSA.
- Direct-service staff with succession potential will be invited to attend a staff retreat in the second year devoted to the spirituality of Catholic Charities.

Leadership Staff:

- The recruitment suggestions and interview questions for leadership staff contained in the “Guidelines for Hiring” resource will be utilized to recruit and hire executives and supervisors.
- All Catholic Charities leadership will participate in one of four Catholic Identity Staff Development Days to be held in the first year, replaced thereafter by the New Employee Orientation.
- All leadership staff will utilize the prayer resources provided in this Catholic identity toolkit at staff meetings. Cynthia will also gather the staff four times a year for collective prayer, using the Advent, Lent, Thanksgiving, and New Year prayers provided by CCUSA.
- Leadership staff will be invited to attend a staff retreat in the second year devoted to the spirituality of Catholic Charities.

The Heartland Catholic Charities Staff Formation Process

Staff Category	Year One	Year Two
Direct-service staff	Guidelines for hiring implemented; Staff development days begin; Participate in meeting prayers	Participate in meeting prayers (continue utilizing the guidelines for hiring & Catholic identity orientations for new employees)
Direct-service staff with succession potential	Guidelines for hiring implemented; Participate in Code of Ethics discussion; Participate in meeting prayers	Participate in meeting prayers; Staff retreat (continue utilizing the guidelines for hiring & Catholic identity orientations for new employees)
Leadership staff	Guidelines for hiring implemented; Staff development days begin; Lead meeting prayers	Lead meeting prayers; Staff retreat (continue utilizing the guidelines for hiring & Catholic identity orientations for new employees)

Resource 2: Guidelines for Hiring

When hiring staff, two sources will help Catholic Charities agencies identify staff members who both appreciate Catholic identity and will deepen the application of Catholic identity across the agency. First, the recruitment tips provided will help locate employees who are interested in the Catholic identity of the agency. Second, the interview questions provided will help separate those candidates who are positively disposed to Catholic identity from those who are indifferent to or merely tolerant of it. Because the requirements of direct-service positions differ from leadership positions, the interview questions vary.

Recruitment Tips

Catholic Charities leaders around the nation have tried various means to attract employees who value the Catholic identity of the agency. Successful methods include:

- Build relationships with faculty and staff at the nearest Catholic school of social work (even if it is located in another state). Ask to meet with final-year students to discuss job opportunities with Catholic Charities.
- Develop relationships with the alumni associations of the nearest Catholic colleges and universities. Ask if you may contact graduates with experience in the professional areas you are interested in.
- Maintain a relationship with local parishes, building an awareness of Catholic Charities' work.
- Advertise through the website of Catholic Charities USA.
- Make clear the Catholic identity of the agency in all recruitment marketing.

'Mission Fit' Interviewing Tool

It is important for Catholic Charities agencies to select staff based on "job fit" and "mission fit," among other qualities. Hiring for job fit assesses the candidate according to their skills and ability to do the technical component of the job. Hiring for mission fit assesses the candidate in light of their fit with Catholic Charities' culture and identity.

This resource includes many tools for the formation of staff—both direct-service staff and leadership. Successful formation of Catholic Charities staff requires the selection of staff members who already have a natural aptitude for, interest in, and personal agreement with Catholic Charities' culture and identity. The degree of mission fit is more important for leadership than for direct-service staff, but a commitment to the mission of the church is essential.

The following questions are intended to assist the interviewer in assessing the candidate in light of Catholic Charities' culture and identity, heritage, and values. The candidate's responses should be assessed according to the answer screens provided for each question.

A score of "0" means that the answer given may be acceptable in other organizations but indicates that the mission fit may not be as strong with Catholic Charities. A score of "2" means that the candidate already demonstrates the beliefs, values, and commitment to be a strong fit for a position at Catholic Charities. After all the items are completed, the resulting total score may also indicate the degree of training the candidate requires. For example, a decision may be made to hire someone with a low score, with the understanding that they will participate in training that will improve their performance.

Direct Service Positions

Question	2	1	0
A. What does it mean to work for a Catholic organization?	A Catholic organization is part of the world-wide Catholic Church and must be faithful to the church's teaching and practice.	An employee needs to respect the teaching of the Catholic Church.	It's the same as working for any other organization.
B. How do you feel about working for a Catholic organization?	It's an opportunity to live out values that I hold dear. Catholic Charities' mission is my mission.	I have great respect for the Catholic Church. I have found inspiration from Catholic sources.	I don't see it as an obstacle to the work. I have had positive relationships with Catholic clergy and religious.
C. Catholic Charities is committed to promoting respect for human life from conception until natural death. Would you ever counsel a client to obtain an abortion, use contraception, or commit assisted suicide?	No. Human life is sacred. We show our respect for the client through our beliefs on these issues.	No. The mission of Catholic Charities is clear. If I wasn't prepared to uphold it, I would not apply.	No. I am willing to set aside opposition to some Catholic teaching on human life while on the job – don't ask, don't tell.

Interview Questions for Leadership Staff

Question	2	1	0
A. What does it mean to work for a Catholic organization?	A Catholic organization is part of the world-wide Catholic Church and must be faithful to the church's teaching and practice.	An employee needs to respect the teaching of the Catholic Church.	It's the same as working for any other organization.
B. What does the word charity mean to you?	Charity is love; I am expressing my love and God's love through my work with Catholic Charities	Charity is meeting the basic needs of people. We serve God by doing so.	Charity is helping people.
C. What is the role of the church and Catholic Charities in the public policy arena?	As a ministry of the church, Catholic Charities should both advocate on behalf of people living in poverty and help organize clients to advocate for themselves.	As a ministry of the church, Catholic Charities should be a voice for the poor in all public arenas.	Catholic Charities should advocate for additional funding for its programs and to protect its interests.
D. What does being a leader in a Catholic ministry mean to you?	We experience God through the people we serve and are called to reveal God's presence and love through the way we care for our clients and community.	I would respect and appreciate the Catholic/ Christian heritage of this organization and would feel responsible to uphold it.	I'm not particularly religious. I would respect the religious beliefs of others; ministry is what I do on my own time, not at work.
E. How do you relate to those who report to you?	With openness and honesty.	With cordiality and politeness.	I show them who is boss.
F. Describe your leadership style in setting expectations and holding people accountable.	Expectations are clearly defined and we hold one another accountable in a respectful and compassionate manner.	Staff members know what is expected of them, and I hold them accountable for performance.	I lay down the rules and hold staff accountable.

G. What do the best leaders do to support teamwork?	Encourage and celebrate a sense of community..	Foster a sense of teamwork.	Avoid playing favorites.
H. When you are leading a team, how do you see your role?	I serve the mission.	I'm the coach.	I'm the boss.
I. In your thinking, how do leadership and service connect?	Good leaders are not ego-driven but always put the needs of others first. They are "servant-leaders."	Being service-oriented is a good thing. Service results in personal benefits.	Good leaders succeed when others succeed.
J. How does concern for vulnerable people affect your own personal behaviors?	I participate in ongoing personal involvement with people who are poor, e.g., assisting at a soup kitchen or Habitat for Humanity, working with one's church to help the poor.	I make charitable contributions and give voluntary support to individuals or causes.	My job responsibilities do not allow for such personal involvement.
K. How does concern for people who are poor affect your working relationships with staff?	I promote and facilitate educational advancement opportunities for lower-paid entry-level staff. I seek practical means to address compensation.	I personally contribute to or support charitable activities within the organization, such as arranging a fund for a co-worker in crisis.	Staff members are well-paid; I always encourage lower-salaried employees to improve themselves and to better if they so desire.
L. How does concern for the people who are poor affect your decisions with regard to your community?	I develop collaborative efforts in the community to improve access to services. I advocate for legislation to address issues of access.	I have a commitment to non-reimbursable services. I seek resources to maintain these services.	It's nearly impossible to maintain services for the poorest of the poor.
M. What does stewardship mean to you?	What we are doing is more than a nonprofit – it's a ministry of the church. I am responsible not only for day-to-day management but also for the ongoing ministry.	I am responsible for the financial success of the organization so the mission of the church can continue to be lived out.	I make sure we function well as a business: no margin, no business.

N. How would you be faithful to the value of stewardship in significant leadership decisions?	I would involve the voices of all stakeholders and find solutions that benefit the organization and the community, attending to our bottom line but also keeping us faithful to our mission and values.	I would balance mission and margin and always try to find a solution that sustains our bottom line without compromising our mission.	I would make sure decisions are financially responsible.
---	--	---	---

(Adapted from "Hiring for Organizational Fit," Sisters of Mercy Health System, 2007)

Resource 3: New Staff Orientation

Purpose

One of the most common ways Catholic Charities agencies express Catholic identity is through new employee orientation. New employees are typically eager to learn about their employer and its mission. It's also an important time to address any misconceptions about the Catholic Church and its relationship to the agency and its programs. A basic awareness of Catholic identity will help the employee make a strong start in Catholic Charities. (The process should be adapted to agency needs/time constraints. A list of resources is included in the PowerPoint, found on CCCConnect.)

Learning Objectives

- Participants will learn the scriptural, doctrinal, and historical foundations of Catholic Charities.
- Participants will articulate the values that led them to associate with Catholic Charities and relate those values to the values expressed in Catholic Social Doctrine.
- Participants will broaden and deepen their understanding of the local Catholic Charities mission statement and connect the mission statement to its scriptural, doctrinal, and historical foundations.
- Participants will learn the basic content of the CCUSA Code of Ethics.

Materials

Computer, data projector and screen, flipchart, easel, and markers

Process (3 hours)

9:00 a.m. Opening Prayer Service

Begin with an opening prayer service. Choose from among those provided or create your own.

9:15 a.m. Icebreaker: Word Association Exercise

Ask the group to participate in a word association exercise icebreaker. They are to call out the first words that come to mind when they hear the following words: Catholic, catechism, pope, charity, encyclical, Jesus. Use a sheet for each word and post the results. Throughout the training, refer back to this sheet when you reference each term.

9:25 a.m. Pairs Exercise: Personal Values and Mission

Tell participants that they are now going to participate in an exercise in which they will reflect on the reason they became involved in serving poor and vulnerable people. Ask them to break into pairs and discuss how they selected this line of work. Why are they working with poor and vulnerable people? In particular, what values motivated them to do so?

9:45 a.m. Plenary Discussion: Personal Values and Mission

Bring the large group back together and ask each pair (if group size allows) to introduce their partner, explaining what values motivated him or her to work with poor and vulnerable people. Note similarities and differences in their responses.

10:00 a.m. Break

10:15 a.m. Presentation: Catholic Social Mission and Catholic Charities

Utilizing the PowerPoint presentation and notes provided, present “What’s Catholic about Catholic Charities?” Invite questions. Note similarities between the values expressed in the Personal Values and Mission discussion and the values expressed by Catholic Social Doctrine.

11:45 a.m. Catholic Charities Mission Statement: Applying the Principles

Spend 15 minutes reviewing your agency’s mission statement. Draw connections with the scriptural, doctrinal, and historical foundations presented earlier in the “What’s Catholic about Catholic Charities?” PowerPoint presentation.

12:00 p.m. Adjournment

Resource 4: Staff Development Day

Purpose

The purpose of the staff development day is similar to that of the new employee orientation, except that it is oriented toward all employees, not just those who are new to Catholic Charities. The agenda assumes more experience with the agency on the part of participants, but the needs it addresses are similar. The session is designed for participation by agency veterans and relatively new employees, alike. (Agencies should consider including other pertinent topics and inviting outside speakers, such as staff from the diocese, Catholic Health Association, etc.)

Learning Objectives

- Participants will learn the scriptural, doctrinal, and historical foundations of Catholic Charities.
- Participants will articulate the values that led them to associate with Catholic Charities and relate those values to the values expressed in Catholic Social Doctrine.
- Participants will broaden and deepen their understanding of the local Catholic Charities mission statement and connect the mission statement to its scriptural, doctrinal, and historical foundations.
- Participants will learn the broad outlines of the CCUSA Code of Ethics with specific reference to their work specialty.
- Participants will apply the CCUSA Code of Ethics to five scenarios representing challenging situations Catholic Charities staffs have encountered.

Materials

Computer, data projector and screen, flipchart, easel, and markers

Resources

CCUSA Code of Ethics, videos, CCCConnect

Process (7 hours)

9:00 a.m. Opening Prayer Service

Begin with an opening prayer service. Choose from among those provided or create your own.

9:15 a.m. Word Association Exercise

Ask the group to participate in a word association exercise. They are to call out the first words that come to mind when they hear the following words: Catholic, catechism, pope, charity, encyclical, Jesus. Use a sheet for each word and post the results.

9:25 a.m. Pairs Exercise: Personal Values and Mission

Tell participants that they are now going to participate in an exercise in which they will reflect on the reason they became involved in serving poor and vulnerable people. Ask them to break into pairs and discuss how they selected this line of work. Why are they working with poor and vulnerable people? In particular, what values motivated them to do so?

9:45 a.m. Plenary Discussion: Personal Values and Mission

Bring the large group back together and ask each pair (if group size allows) to introduce their partner, explaining what values motivated him or her to work with poor and vulnerable people. Note similarities and differences in their responses.

10:00 a.m. Break

10:15 a.m. Presentation: Catholic Social Mission and Catholic Charities

Utilizing the PowerPoint presentation and notes provided, present "Catholic Social Mission & Catholic Charities." Invite questions. Note similarities between the values expressed in the Personal Values and Mission discussion and the values expressed by Catholic Social Doctrine.

11:45 a.m. Lunch

12:30 p.m. Catholic Charities Mission Statement: Applying the Principles

After the lunch break, spend 15 minutes reviewing your agency's mission and/or vision statements. Draw connections with the major themes of Catholic Social Doctrine presented earlier.

12:45 p.m. Pairs Exercise: Applying the Principles

Ask participants to break into the same pairs as before. This time, ask them to answer the question, "Which principles of Catholic Social Doctrine do I implement through my work, and what experiences have I had doing so?"

1:05 p.m. Plenary Discussion: Applying the Principles

When the pairs are finished, invite them back into the full group for discussion. Ask participants to name the principles of Catholic Social Doctrine they are applying and to share an experience doing so.

1:30 p.m. Break

1:45 p.m. CCUSA Code of Ethics

After a break, offer the second part of the PowerPoint presentation on the CCUSA Code of Ethics. Then divide the group into five small groups. Ask each group to read the case study, select a scribe, and develop answers to the questions as a group, applying what they have learned. Break out into other rooms, if possible.

2:30 p.m. Small Group Exercise: Scenarios

Scenarios

1. An underage immigrant is pregnant and approaches staff, saying she would like to have an abortion. How do you respond?
2. The state legislature is considering requiring all agencies working in foster care to allow the placement of children with gay and lesbian couples. How should Catholic Charities respond?
3. Trash from Catholic Charities' central offices is being strewn all over the street the night of the weekly municipal trash pick-up. The city is going to fine the agency if it continues. The neighbors say, "It's the illegals who do it!" What should Catholic Charities do?
4. You suspect that a client of yours is selling food stamps to buy alcohol. What should you do?
5. The agency has received a multi-year government contract that includes higher annual wage increases for those working on the contract than the agency currently plans to give to the other 100 employees. What should the agency do?

3:00 p.m. Plenary Discussion: Scenarios

Discuss the responses to each scenario in the large group. Help the group make connections to the Code of Ethics, Catholic Social Doctrine, and the local agency mission statement.

3:45 p.m. Next Steps

Place today's Catholic identity training day in the context of the overall Catholic identity plan for the agency. Explain to participants that the workshop continues in their daily practice—how they implement the themes of the day and apply the concepts to everyday situations is vitally important. Let them know of upcoming Catholic identity programs and resources and whom they should approach with further questions.

3:55 p.m. Closing Prayer

4:00 p.m. Adjournment

Scenario Worksheet

1. An underage immigrant is pregnant and approaches staff, saying she would like to have an abortion. How do you respond and why?
2. The state legislature is considering requiring all agencies working in foster care to allow the placement of children with gay and lesbian couples. How should Catholic Charities respond and why?
3. Trash from Catholic Charities' central offices is being strewn all over the street the night of the weekly municipal trash pick-up. The city is going to fine the agency if it continues. The neighbors say, "It's the illegals who do it!" What should Catholic Charities do and why?
4. You suspect that a client of yours is selling food stamps to buy alcohol. What should you do and why?
5. The agency has received a multi-year government contract that includes higher annual wage increases for those working on the contract than the agency currently plans to give to the other hundred employees. What should the agency do and why?

Resource 5, What's Catholic about Catholic Charities

This resource can be found on CCConnect.

Resource 6, Catholic Social Mission and Catholic Charities

This resource can be found on CCConnect.

Resource 7: Staff Retreat

The following retreat model is intended for key staff members. It takes place over one night and the following day. Although it may be necessary for retreat participants to go home for the night, it is ideal for them to spend the night at the retreat venue or somewhere close by. The location for the retreat ought to provide an adult setting. Because small groups are valuable, especially when the group is large, it is important to have a setting that invites conversation. An ideal location also provides grounds to walk. When participants arrive at the retreat location, consider welcoming them with a small bag of treats, such as candy, nuts, fruit, and/or other snack items.

A retreat is an opportunity to move away from the cares and distractions of everyday life and focus on the movement of the Holy Spirit. Some nonprofit organizations use the term “retreat” to refer to an off-site meeting for training or strategic planning. It is important to emphasize to participants that this retreat is based on the first definition. While one should expect the retreat to affect the tone and substance of future staff meetings, it is not appropriate to add business items to the agenda.

Not all staff should or would attend the retreat, simply because of the numbers. It is important to select staff members who will get the most out of a retreat experience, particularly staff with leadership roles. A designated facilitator should lead the retreat. You may wish to invite a member of your staff with gifts in this area or a local facilitator with some understanding of Catholic Charities.

Friday Evening

(For the retreat, a Friday/Saturday schedule is suggested, but any night/day combination is fine.)

The purpose of the Friday evening gathering is to extend hospitality to the participants, to provide an opportunity for everyone to get to know one another, and to begin to set the tone for the following day. The environment should be casual, comfortable, and inviting for conversation.

5:00 p.m. Gathering and Hospitality

6:00 p.m. Opening Blessing and Dinner Together

(Invite a clergy member or lay staff at least a day before the meeting to prepare an opening blessing for the retreat.)

7:00 p.m. Welcome

- Thank participants for attending.
- Provide overview of the retreat schedule.
- Discuss the objectives of the retreat:
 - o Provide an opportunity for participants to explore their faith and its influence in their lives and work with Catholic Charities.
 - o Deepen the faith foundations for the work of the agency.
 - o Build relationships among members of the staff.
- Invite the participants to share any expectations or hopes they have for the retreat.

7:15 p.m. Group Discussion 1: Getting Acquainted

Invite the group to break into pairs with people they don't know or whom they don't know well (a group of three people may be organized, if needed). In pairs, they are to introduce themselves but also respond to three questions. At the conclusion of the paired discussion, they will introduce their partner to the group. Good listening is important!

Questions:

1. What is your name and where are you from?
2. How did you come to work for Catholic Charities? What were the circumstances and why did you accept employment with the agency?
3. What gifts, talents, or strengths do you bring to the staff?

7:45 p.m. Facilitator Presentation

What does it mean to work for a Catholic organization? From the perspective of faith, why do we do this work? There could be many answers, but most likely there are one or two direct motivations or passions that this work really surfaces.

At this point, the executive director of the agency shares his or her story, how his or her faith motivated/inspired them into this work and current position, and what keeps him or her going. To conclude, the executive director shares a story about a person who inspired his or her faith in an important way.

8:05 p.m. Journaling

Now, using paper provided, each participant should respond in writing to the following questions (the papers will not be collected):

1. Who formed you in your faith?
2. Name an experience or person in your life that has had an important impact on your faith?
3. What sustains your faith? What keeps you going?
4. How does your faith impact your work with Catholic Charities?

8:25 p.m. Large-Group Sharing

Ask participants to share some of their stories, based on the questions. After everyone has had the opportunity, draw the session to conclusion. Did we hear any common themes? End by providing a summary of the stories, the commonalities discovered, and the strengths in the room, acknowledging the gifts.

8:50 p.m. Closing Prayer

Invite participants to center themselves again and enter into prayer. After a moment of silence, one of the participants reads 1 Corinthians 12:4–12.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

Pause for a moment of silence and then ask for intercessions from the group. Conclude intercessions with The Lord's Prayer.

Saturday

8:30 a.m. Morning Prayer

(Use the sample prayer service or develop your own.)

8:45 a.m. Welcome

Begin by reviewing the previous evening's activity. Do any participants wish to offer further reflections or insights?

The focus for this morning is on the Scriptures. Today's program will ground the group in an understanding of the scriptural roots of the ministry of Catholic Charities and their relationship to those Scriptures, using an ancient traditional Catholic Scripture prayer and study form called *lectio divina*.

9:00 a.m. *Lectio Divina*: The Beatitudes (Luke 6:17–26)

Facilitator:

Select three readers ahead of time and establish an order. Ask each reader to read slowly and deliberately. With each reading, the group will respond in a different way to the scripture.

First reading:

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

*"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.*

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

But woe to you who are rich,

*for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.*

Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

After a moment of silence, ask participants to share a word or phrase that took on special meaning for them—no explanation, just the word or phrase.

After everyone has shared their word or phrase, **the second reader proclaims the same scripture**—again, slowly and deliberately. After a moment of silence, ask participants to share how this passage of Scripture speaks to their heart.

When it appears that this sharing has concluded, **the third reader again proclaims the Word**, slowly and carefully. After a final period of silence, ask the staff what the scripture is calling them to do or become.

Conclude the *lectio divina* experience by asking everyone in the group to pray for the person seated to their right.

10:15 a.m. Break

10:30 a.m. Presentation: Scripture, Charity, Justice, and Poverty

Depending on the resources available, invite a scriptural scholar to present this next segment. If you have a Catholic college or university nearby or a seminary, she or he will be easy to find. If not, consider inviting someone from the diocese who has taken advanced scriptural studies. As examples, a diocesan priest, local religious, or Catholic high school theology teacher may have the background to give this presentation. Regardless of who offers the presentation, the following points should be covered:

- When God creates humanity in God's own image (Gen 1:27), human beings receive an inherent dignity that is never lost. When God gives Adam and Eve the earth to care for and cultivate (Gen 1:28), it is a charge of stewardship.
- In the Old Testament, God demonstrates a preferential, though not exclusive, love of the poor. God's earliest laws protect poor and vulnerable people.
- Throughout the prophetic books of the Bible, the prophets show the evil of their times, pointing out many injustices to the poor, and show the way back to God.
- Jesus is the model for the ministry of Catholic Charities. He models this preferential love for the poor and vulnerable through his public ministry. Link this principle to the dignity of all people and Catholic Social Doctrine.
- Teachings like the Beatitudes (*lectio divina* exercise, Lk 6:17–26) offer us guidance for living lives of peace and justice.
- Jesus' description of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25) demonstrates that we will ultimately be judged on how we treat poor and vulnerable people.
- In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), Jesus illustrates the kind of reversals that occur in his kingdom. Lazarus, a poor, ill man is exalted in Christ's kingdom, while the wealthy man who ignores Lazarus' plight on earth burns in Hades.

- In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), Jesus teaches that responding to suffering people is not simply a matter of following prescribed laws and rules. It is about embracing the law of love.
- Through the Washing of the Feet (John 13), Jesus provides us with a new model of leadership, servant leadership, which offers an inspiration to the operations of Catholic Charities ministries.
- Exhortations to act with charity and justice can also be found in the letters of the New Testament, such as in James, who reminds us to be “doers of the word and not merely hearers” (1:22–23), and that “faith by itself, without works, is dead” (2:17).

Be sure to encourage the presenter to utilize an interactive style and plan plenty of time for questions and answers.

12:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m. Scripture Presentation Process Discussion

Spend some time reflecting on the Scriptures. In groups of four (a group of three may be organized, if needed) discuss:

- What was the most important lesson you learned? How did it impact you, and how do you think it will impact your work with Catholic Charities?

In the full group, ask participants to share some of the highlights from their discussions.

- Discussion about the poor in the community
- Who the poor are
- What this means for us, individually and collectively

1:30 p.m. Scripture Implications Discussion

Spend the next hour in discussion about the implications of what has been learned for the ministry of Catholic Charities. Be sure to cover the following questions:

- We have discussed God’s preferential, though not exclusive, love of the poor. What is our agency response to this dimension of God’s love?
- How do we as staff internalize and act on this dimension of God’s love?
- Who are “the poor” within our diocese?
- Identify one group of poor and vulnerable people in our diocese that needs special attention (e.g., immigrants). How are we called to respond? What is the personal challenge for each member of the staff? What is the challenge for the agency?

2:45 p.m. Closing Prayer

Begin by giving thanks for all that has happened today, especially for the mission that Christ has entrusted to the church and Catholic Charities. Let us now listen to the word of God and hear Christ's mission as he proclaims it.

Spend some time reflecting on the Scriptures. In groups of four (a group of three may be organized, if needed) discuss:

Reader proclaims Luke 4:16-21

When He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was His custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

And He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. Then He began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

After a moment of silence, offer thanks to God for the opportunity to serve this mission through the ministries of Catholic Charities. Ask participants to share one grace they are thankful for this afternoon. Conclude by reading together the prayer, "Prophets of a Future Not Our Own" (See Section 6, Resource 4–2).

3:00 p.m. Adjournment

Resource 8: Employee Evaluation: Mission Commitment and Implementation

This evaluation sheet supplements existing agency evaluation processes covering employee job performance. It includes “rating questions” and “open-ended questions.” It should be used alongside other evaluative instruments to cover mission-related aspects of job performance. The questions can be utilized together or adapted selectively for existing instruments.

Rating Questions Key

- 1=Not at all
- 2=To a little extent
- 3=To some extent
- 4=To a great extent
- 5=To a very great extent

Review of Catholic identity for an employee

The employee views the Catholic identity of the agency positively.



The employee can articulate the roots of Catholic Charities’ mission in the Scriptures.



The employee can articulate the roots of Catholic Charities’ mission in the early history of the church.



The employee can articulate seven basic themes of Catholic Social Doctrine.



The employee can relate themes of Catholic Social Doctrine to her/his work.



The employee demonstrates a commitment to the life and dignity of the human person in how she/he conducts her/his activities on the job.



The employee respects the religious values and practices of clients.



The employee is familiar with the CCUSA Code of Ethics and applies it to her/his work.



The employee can articulate the relationship between the agency and the local bishop.



The employee is aware that through employment with Catholic Charities, she/he participates in a worldwide church anti-poverty organization, Caritas Internationalis.



The employee works ethically and with integrity.



Open-Ended Questions

1. How does the employee relate to the Catholic identity and mission of the agency?
What would strengthen the relationship?
2. How has the employee applied the CCUSA Code of Ethics on the job?
3. How does the employee describe the relationship between the agency and the church?

SECTION 4

Forming Board Members



The board members of a Catholic Charities agency are among its greatest treasures. Boards shape the direction of Catholic Charities agencies, how they concretize their mission in this place and time. Board members should be steeped in the tradition that undergirds this mission.

The employee orientation and training in the previous section can be easily modified for board members. In addition, the retreat model that follows provides both education and an opportunity for spiritual growth. CCUSA's Member Services stands ready to assist agencies who wish to implement these trainings and retreats.

Retreat for Board Members, Trustees, or Directors

The following retreat model is intended for the members of a board of trustees/directors. It takes place over one night and the following day. Although it may be necessary for retreat participants to go home for the night, it is ideal for them to spend the night at the retreat venue or somewhere close by. The location for the retreat ought to provide an adult setting. Because small groups are valuable, especially when the group is large, it is important to have a setting that invites conversation. An ideal location also provides grounds to walk. When participants arrive at the retreat location, consider welcoming them with a small bag of treats, such as candy, nuts, fruit, and/or other snack items.

A retreat is an opportunity to move away from the cares and distractions of everyday life and focus on the movement of the Holy Spirit. Some nonprofit organizations use the term “retreat” to refer to an off-site meeting for training or strategic planning. It is important to emphasize to participants that this retreat is based on the first definition. While one should expect the retreat to affect the tone and substance of future board meetings, it is not appropriate to add business items to the agenda.

A designated facilitator should lead the retreat. You may wish to invite a member of your staff with gifts in this area or a local facilitator with some understanding of Catholic Charities. While the executive director and some board members may have skills in this area, they should have a retreat experience unencumbered by this role. Please note that CCUSA also has a training program for board members/trustees called Vocation of the Trustee. For information, please contact CCUSA’s Member Services team.

Friday Evening

(For the retreat, a Friday/Saturday schedule is suggested, but any night/day combination is fine.)

The purpose of the Friday evening is to extend hospitality to the participants, to provide an opportunity for everyone to socialize, and to begin to set the tone for the following day. The environment should be casual, comfortable, and inviting for conversation.

5:00 p.m. Gathering and Hospitality

6:00 p.m. Opening Blessing and Dinner Together

At least one day before the retreat, invite one of the clergy to prepare an opening blessing for the retreat.

7:00 p.m. Welcome

Thank board members for attending.

Provide an overview of the retreat schedule.

Discuss the objectives of the retreat:

- Provide an opportunity for participants to explore their faith and its influence in their lives, work, and participation on the board.
- Deepen the faith foundations for the work of the board.
- Build relationships among members of the board.
- Invite the participants to share any expectations or hopes they have for the retreat.

7:15 p.m. Group Discussion 1: Getting Acquainted

Invite the group to break into pairs (a group of three may be organized, if necessary) with someone they don't know or whom they don't know well. In pairs, they are to introduce themselves but also respond to three questions. At the conclusion of the paired discussion, they will introduce their partner to the group. Good listening is important!

Questions:

1. What is your name and where are you from?
2. How were you invited to join the board? What were the circumstances and why did you accept?
3. What gifts, talents, or strengths do you bring to the board?

8:05 p.m. Journaling

Now, using paper provided, each participant should respond in writing to these questions (the papers will not be collected):

1. Who formed you in your faith?
2. Name an experience or person in your life that has had an important impact on your faith?
3. What sustains your faith? What keeps you going?
4. How does your faith impact your work on the board?

8:25 p.m. Large-Group Sharing

Ask participants to share some of their stories, based on the questions. After everyone has had the opportunity, draw the session to conclusion. Did we hear any common themes? End the session by providing a summary of the stories, the commonalities discovered, and the strengths in the room, acknowledging the gifts.

8:50 p.m. Closing Prayer

Invite participants to center themselves again and enter into prayer. After a moment of silence, one of the participants reads 1 Corinthians 12:4–12.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

Pause for a moment of silence and then ask for intercessions from the group. Conclude intercessions with The Lord's Prayer.

Saturday

8:30 a.m. Morning Prayer

(Use the sample prayer service or develop your own.)

8:45 a.m. Welcome

Begin by reviewing the previous evening's activity. Do any participants wish to offer further reflections or insights?

The focus for this morning is on the Scriptures. Today's program will ground the group in an understanding of the scriptural roots of the ministry of Catholic Charities and the group's relationship to those Scriptures, using an ancient traditional Catholic Scripture prayer and study form called *lectio divina*.

9:00 a.m. *Lectio Divina: The Beatitudes (Luke 6:17–26)*

Select three readers ahead of time and establish an order. Ask each reader to read slowly and deliberately. With each reading, the group will respond in a different way to the scripture.

Reading:

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

*Then he looked up at his disciples and said:
Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.*

Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

*But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.
Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.*

Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

After a moment of silence, ask participants to share a word or phrase that took on special meaning for them—no explanation, just the word or phrase.

After everyone has shared his/her word or phrase, the second reader proclaims the same scripture again, slowly and deliberately. After a moment of silence, ask participants to share how this passage of Scripture speaks to their heart.

When it appears that this sharing has concluded, the third reader again proclaims the Word slowly and carefully. After a final period of silence, ask the board members what the scripture is calling them to do or become. Invite participants to share after a brief moment of silence.

Conclude the *lectio divina* experience by asking everyone in the group to pray for the person seated to their right.

10:15 a.m. Break

10:30 a.m. Presentation: Scripture, Charity, Justice, and Poverty

Depending on the resources available, invite a scriptural scholar to present this next segment. If you have a Catholic college or university nearby or a seminary, she or he will be easy to find. If not, consider inviting someone in your diocese who has taken advanced scriptural studies. A diocesan priest, local religious, or Catholic high school theology teacher may also have the background to give this presentation. Regardless of who offers the presentation, they should cover the following points in their presentation:

- When God creates humanity in God's own image (Gen 1:27), human beings receive an inherent dignity that is never lost. When God gives Adam and Eve the earth to care for and cultivate (Gen 1:28), it is a charge of stewardship.
- In the Old Testament, God demonstrates a preferential, though not exclusive, love of the poor. God's earliest laws protect poor and vulnerable people.
- Throughout the prophetic books of the Bible, the prophets show the evil of their times, pointing out many injustices to the poor, and show the way back to God.
- Jesus is the model for the ministry of Catholic Charities. He models this preferential love for the poor and vulnerable through his public ministry. Link this principle to the dignity of all people and Catholic Social Doctrine.
- Teachings like the Beatitudes (lectio divina exercise, Luke 6:17–26) offer us guidance for living lives of peace and justice.
- Jesus' description of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25) demonstrates that we will ultimately be judged on how we treat poor and vulnerable people.
- In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), Jesus illustrates the kind of reversals that occur in his kingdom. Lazarus, a poor, ill man is exalted in Christ's kingdom, while the wealthy man who ignores Lazarus' plight on earth burns in Hades.
- In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), Jesus teaches that responding to suffering people is not simply a matter of following prescribed laws and rules. It is about embracing the law of love.
- Through the Washing of the Feet (John 13), Jesus provides us with a new model of leadership, servant leadership, which offers an inspiration to the operations of Catholic Charities ministries.
- Exhortations to act with charity and justice can also be found in the letters of the New Testament, such as in James, who reminds us to be "doers of the word and not merely hearers" (1:22–23), and that "faith by itself, without works, is dead" (2:17).

Be sure to encourage the presenter to utilize an interactive style and plan plenty of time for questions and answers.

12:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m. Scripture Presentation Process Discussion

Spend some time reflecting on the presentation on the Scriptures. In groups of four (a smaller group may be organized, if needed) discuss:

- What was the most important lesson you learned? How did it impact you, and how do you think it will impact your work on the board?

In the full group, ask participants to share some of the highlights from their discussions.

- Discussion about those who are poor in the community
- Who the poor are
- What this means for us, individually and collectively

1:30 p.m. Scripture Implications Discussion

Spend the next hour in discussion about the implications of what has been learned for the ministry of Catholic Charities. Be sure to cover the following questions:

- We have discussed God's preferential, though not exclusive, love of the poor. What is our agency's response to this dimension of God's love?
- How does this board internalize and act on this dimension of God's love?
- Who are "the poor" within our diocese?
- Identify one group of poor and vulnerable people in our diocese that needs special attention (e.g., immigrants). How are we called to respond? What is the personal challenge for each board member? What is the challenge for the agency?

2:45 p.m. Closing Prayer

Begin by giving thanks for all that has happened today, especially for the mission that Christ has entrusted to the church and Catholic Charities. Let us now listen to the word of God and hear Christ's mission as he proclaims it.

Reader proclaims Luke 4:16–21:

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”*

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

After a moment of silence, offer thanks to God for the opportunity to serve this mission through the ministries of Catholic Charities. Ask participants to share one grace they are thankful for this afternoon. Conclude by reading together the prayer, “Prophets of a Future Not Our Own” (available in Section 6, Resource 4–2).

3:00 p.m. Adjournment

SECTION 5

Church Structures and Leadership



Catholic
Charities
USA®

Working to Reduce Poverty in America



Catholic Charities leadership and board members come from all walks of life. Some come with years of experience serving the church, while others come from the private sector, government, military, and secular nonprofits, as well as the world of philanthropy. Many have noted the challenge of learning the structure and discourse of the church, which comes with its own set of rules, the Code of Canon Law.

This section of the toolkit provides a set of resources that examine dimensions of governance for Catholic Charities leadership. These resources include:

1. Roadmap of the Church
2. Engaging with Catholic Parishes
3. Implementing Codes of Ethics
4. Legislative Advocacy
5. A Just Workplace

Each of these resources touches on a different element of governance and each is written by an expert in that particular dimension of the ministry of Catholic Charities.

Resource 1: Roadmap of the Church

Catholic Charities is an organization of the Catholic Church primarily responsible at the local level to provide social outreach and assistance to persons and families in need and to work for social justice. One of the critical hallmarks of the Catholic identity of a Catholic Charities agency is its connection to the local church (diocese), especially through an organizational tie to the bishop of the diocese. In this resource, various aspects of the organization of the Roman Catholic Church will be explored to better illustrate what it means to be connected to the church.

What is the church? In a seminal document of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the church fathers adopted *Lumen Gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*). In this document, the bishops of the world wrote:

This is the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Savior, after His Resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd, and him and the other apostles to extend and direct with authority, which He erected for all ages as “the pillar and mainstay of the truth.” This Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity. . . Similarly, the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ. (No. 8)

The church fathers also refer to the church as the “people of God” (#9).

What does it mean, first of all, to be connected to the “local” church? The Code of Canon Law, which provides governance norms for the church, refers to the local church also as a “particular” church, which is first of all a diocese (can. 368). The local church is the diocese. In a diocese, the bishop is entrusted, along with the presbyterate (priests), with responsibility for pastoral care (can. 369).

Though the diocese is considered the local church, most Catholics engage in their faith at the parish level. The bishop appoints pastors or administrators to govern and lead parishes and engage the lay faithful in their spiritual journey. Catholics express their faith in many forms: through the hearing of the Word of God, through participation in the sacramental life of the church, and through the living out of their faith through service. Catholic Charities can provide a unique role in connecting with the local parish by assisting the lay faithful to find ways to live out the church’s call to serve those in need, (traditionally referred to as the corporal works of mercy). In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI calls upon the church to “organize love” (No. 20) at the local, national, and international levels so that the faithful can live out their obligations of loving God and loving their neighbor.

Besides our concern for the active commitment of lay Catholics in living out the corporal works of mercy (giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, shelter to the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, and burying the dead), Catholic Charities staff and board members must also understand and respect the importance and nature of the church's understanding of liturgy/worship and proclamation of the word. The Eucharistic celebration (the Mass) is considered as the "source and summit" of the Catholic faith. The church also provides other official means of liturgical expression and worship, namely through participation in the Liturgy of the Hours, Scripture study, and communion services.

Each of the dioceses, or local churches, is connected in union and communion with the universal church under the guidance and direction of the Supreme Pontiff, or pope, who serves as the Bishop of Rome. The pope directly appoints bishops to govern over dioceses. The pope also serves as the head of state of the Holy See, commonly referred to as the Vatican, which is designated as a nation-state that engages in diplomatic relationships with other countries through its Secretariat of State.

There are offices of the Roman Curia (administrative offices of the Vatican) called dicasteries that assist the pope in providing leadership in the universal church and thus impact the life of the church, even on the local level. There are two dicasteries with which CCUSA works closely: The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family, and Life. The former has the task of promoting the human person and the God-given dignity of all, together with human rights, health, justice, and peace. It is principally concerned with matters relating to the economy and work, the care of creation and Earth as our "common home," migration, and humanitarian emergencies. The latter is concerned with enhancing the apostolate of the lay faithful, the pastoral care of young people, the family and its mission according to God's plan, the elderly, and for the promotion of life.

Other offices of the Roman Curia that provide important information and resources for the work of Catholic Charities include the Council on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and the Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers.

Another global institution in the church directly connected to Catholic Charities is Caritas Internationalis, with its headquarters in Vatican City, and representatives at the United Nations in New York and Geneva. Caritas Internationalis is a confederation of 165 Catholic relief, development, and social service organizations operating in over 200 countries and territories worldwide (www.caritas.org). Caritas coordinates emergency response, policy/advocacy, communication, international representation, and capacity building. Local diocesan and national Catholic Charities agencies in most other parts of the world are referred to as "Caritas." Catholic Charities USA is one of the U.S. members of Caritas Internationalis, along with Catholic Relief Services.

The church also recognizes a hierarchy of relationships among bishops. The local bishop is always referred to as the “Ordinary” of the diocese. His title is “His Excellency.” Dioceses are organized into provinces presided over by a metropolitan who is an archbishop of his archdiocese. He is also properly addressed as “His Excellency.” Some metropolitan archbishops may also hold the rank of a cardinal, who is properly addressed as “Your Eminence.” The cardinals have traditionally been recognized as the “Princes of the Church”; they are called to assist the Holy Father in the governance of the church. Most cardinals are either archbishops of the largest dioceses in their countries or regions or the heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia. At the parish level, the pastor is a priest and is referred to as “Father” while others are given special recognition as monsignors. The diocese is divided into regions, as well, called deaneries or vicariates. A pastor of that region will be selected as a dean of that deanery.

The diocese—and through it, your Catholic Charities agency—not only relates to the universal church in Rome, but also to several national bodies in the United States. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is the national body that coordinates the work of the church in the United States. The bishops meet twice a year to discuss common issues and responses in the life of the church, including matters related to the church’s social mission. Several committees and offices of the USCCB provide valuable resources for the work of Catholic Charities. The Secretariat of Justice and Peace provides leadership in both domestic and international social policy on behalf of the bishops. The Office of National Collections coordinates the work of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which provides education on Catholic Social Doctrine and grants for community organizing, community development, and social change efforts.

In 1970, the Bishops of the United States established the Campaign for Human Development, as a prophetic measure to put into practice the Church Teaching and Tradition that preceded it and that subsequently has been developed. The bishops set the scope for this undertaking as follows:

There is an evident need for funds designated to be used for organized groups ... to develop economic strength and political power in their own communities ... We believe that this new effort can lead the People of God to a new knowledge of today’s problems, a deeper understanding of the intricate forces that lead to group conflict, and a perception of some new and promising approaches that we might take in promoting a greater spirit among those who are successful, those who acquired some share of the nation’s goods, and those still trapped in poverty. (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Resolution on Crusade Against Poverty, 1969.)

The USCCB Committee on Migration coordinates education advocacy on behalf of migrants and refugees. The Committee on Pro-Life Activities offers information and policy direction regarding pro-life concerns such as abortion, euthanasia, stem cell research, and other life-related topics. Also, the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development presents the church’s teaching on another life issue, the inadmissibility of the death penalty. The Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church helps coordinate the work of racial and ethnic inclusion and justice and pastoral care.

Several institutions related to the USCCB are separate corporations that provide direct services. One such institution of the USCCB is Catholic Relief Services, which is the official overseas relief and development agency of the bishops. Another is the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, which assists Catholic Charities and other church institutions in legal work with newcomers.

The Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA) is a national organization that supports the work of the Catholic healthcare systems and ministries in the country. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States works in thousands of parish-based conferences across the country helping people with emergency assistance with utilities, rent, food, and clothing. CCUSA, of course, is another major national Catholic-related organization that convenes and supports the work of local Catholic Charities agencies throughout the United States and represents Catholic Charities to various USCCB and Vatican offices, commissions, and councils.

In many circumstances, local bishops also convene and work together on the state and regional levels. Various Catholic conferences are organized by state and provide similar coordination and reflection on the needs and issues facing the church and others in a particular state.

The local diocese may have similar offices in their organizational structure (called the “diocesan Curia”) that relate to or fulfill mandates that coincide with the USCCB offices and committees. At the diocesan level, certain priests or auxiliary bishops may be designated as vicar(s) general and/or the moderator of the Curia who represent the bishop in certain matters. Each diocese will also have a chancellor who serves as the official archivist and serves as the secretary and notary of the Curia.

The local Catholic Charities agency may itself be an office of the diocese, with various responsibilities that relate to those of the USCCB. Diocesan offices such as Respect Life, Development, Justice and Peace, and Communications, to name a few, may also be Catholic Charities stakeholders. It is important that you understand how your local diocese is organized and how your agency relates to the bishop. Strong relationships with other church officials will only enhance your effectiveness and that of Catholic Charities.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does your Catholic Charities agency fit into the structure of the local church? How does it relate to the bishop?
2. How does your Catholic Charities agency help lay Catholics and others of good will practice the corporal works of mercy?
3. How can your Catholic Charities agency become better connected to the work of the church on state, national, and international levels?

Resource 2: Engaging with Catholic Parishes

Few relationships have been as fruitful and long-standing as the ones that Catholic Charities agencies have had with the Catholic parishes in their dioceses. Working together, Catholic Charities agencies and parishes have created a synergy that makes it possible to care for more people in need, have a stronger voice advocating for justice, and provide more and a greater variety of opportunities for the faithful to grow in love with God and neighbor.

Catholic Charities agencies and parishes have worked together informally to care for the poor and work for justice since their inception. In the 1970s, parish partnerships became formal Catholic Charities initiatives. Herein, we'll explain the purpose of Catholic Charities' interaction with parishes, describe what it looks like when parishes and agencies work together over time, and outline the prevalence of Catholic Charities' work with parishes.

The impetus for formalizing parish initiatives was CCUSA's Cadre Study. In that self-studied process, beginning in 1969 and culminating in 1972, the Cadre Study called Catholic Charities agencies to a leadership role in the church, where they would act as catalysts for individual wholeness and social justice, especially through the parishes. This concept was reinforced later in the Vision 2000 report, which stated, "In fulfilling its own servant role, Catholic Charities must help the Church at large to fulfill its service mission" (5). The vision of these seminal documents inspired Catholic Charities agencies nationwide, and CCUSA responded by creating Parish Social Ministry (PSM) programs that would help "Catholic Charities agencies to become more fully integrated into local parish communities, providing stimulus for leadership in nurturing faith, proclaiming justice, serving people, and building community" (5).

Since then, Catholic Charities PSM programs have helped parishes grow in love with God as they have illustrated their love for one another. Through support from Catholic Charities, parishes have responded to our nation's largest disasters, provided case management across the diocese, mobilized on advocacy issues, engaged in discussions about social issues in light of Catholic Social Doctrine, supported international relief and development efforts, initiated economic development initiatives in their communities, and much more. Parishes have truly become like "field hospitals," healing the wounds and warming the hearts of the faithful, from the ground up, [as Pope Francis recommends](#).

Catholic Charities PSM programs typically have a few common goals:

- Promote formation on the Catholic social mission.
- Raise awareness of the vision of parish social ministry.
- Build capacity for parishes to do social ministry.
- Facilitate networking between parish-based social ministry staff and volunteers in the diocese.
- Provide parish social ministers with national and diocesan Catholic social ministry resources.
- Develop grassroots/constituent-based advocacy.

With PSM programs, the client is the parish, and the goal is to help the parish advance the church's mission of love, justice, freedom, and peace in a way that is true and unique to the parish. [Communities of Salt and Light](#) is an excellent USCCB resource to help guide parishes in this ministry.

But relationships between Catholic Charities and parishes are often broader than parish social ministry. Catholic Charities agencies also work together with parishes in much the same way that they collaborate with any other organization—identifying opportunities where they can work together in ways that support the unique goals of each institution.

Many [services offered by Catholic Charities agencies](#) can be expanded or enhanced through strategic engagement with parishes. Examples include:

- Parish Social Ministry and Advocacy
- Prison Ministry
- Disaster Operations
- Community Gardens
- Workforce Development
- Catholic Identity Integration
- See CCUSA Parish Social Ministry Resources landing page for more.

In its efforts to provide service to people in need and to advocate for justice in social structures, Catholic Charities has turned to parishes for reasons such as:

- Capitalizing on their presence throughout the diocese by utilizing parish facilities.
- Supporting Catholic Charities with monetary or in-kind support or volunteer services.
- Praying for the success of Catholic Charities programs.
- Organizing spiritual complements to Catholic Charities programs.
- Helping create a unified voice on behalf of the poor and vulnerable people in the community by participating in Catholic Charities' legislative advocacy efforts.
- Bringing their insights about the reality of poverty in their communities to Catholic Charities.
- Assessing community needs and strengths.

And, in addition to getting parish social ministry support, parishes have turned to Catholic Charities to:

- Provide funding to parishes for emergency services in areas of the diocese where Catholic Charities is geographically unable to operate.
- Take referrals from parishes for people with needs greater than the parish is capable of meeting.
- Build capacity within parishes to help lift people out of poverty.
- Facilitate a parish's engagement in advocacy by creating a legislative network to disseminate action alerts and policy analysis from trusted organizations like CCUSA.
- Create a forum for parishes to share insights into the reality of poverty in their community by reserving positions on the board of trustees for parish leadership or convening pastors or parish leaders around issues of poverty.
- Engage with parish schools.

Working with parishes is an effort that will continue to evolve and reinvent itself in every diocese, but it has proven that the common belief in the presence of God in our midst and the common commitment to discipleship can create a synergy that helps build a more just and compassionate society.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the mission of Catholic parishes overlap with the mission of Catholic Charities?
2. In what ways does our agency work collaboratively with parishes?
3. In what ways do we need to strengthen our relationships with parishes?

For Further Reading

Catholic Charities USA Parish Social Ministry Resources [webpage](#)

[Catalysts and Collaborators in Social Ministry](#)

[Communities of Salt and Light Resource](#) (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2023).

Resource 3: Implementing the Code of Ethics

A code of ethics offers a set of values and principles to guide decision-making and everyday professional conduct for the members of the group for whom it was developed. Most professions in the United States have developed a code of ethics to guide the behavior of their members. Since these codes have become the standard for judging behavior and issuing sanctions, adherence is not to be taken lightly.

CCUSA's Code of Ethics was first developed in the 1980s and updated in 2018, following closely the code of Caritas Internationalis. These uniquely Catholic guidelines complement existing professional codes, such as those enacted by the National Association of Social Workers.

CCUSA's Code of Ethics is based upon and summarizes in one normative statement the values and principles which comprise the overarching ethical framework to which all staff are encouraged to adhere. In all their work Catholic Charities staff aspire to embody these values and principles. In so doing they aim to be active witnesses to Christ's compassion at work in the world.

CCUSA encourages agencies to adopt the code as its own or adapt it for its organization.

The Code lists a set of operating principles for agencies that express the fundamental values of the Church's social doctrine: Partnership; subsidiarity; participation; empowerment; independence; stewardship and accountability; equality, universality, impartiality, and openness to all peoples; protection; local economies; care for creation and attention to environmental impact; coordination; advocacy; learning and staff development; and staff care. The fundamental values include the following: Human dignity, justice, the common good, integral human development, compassion, preferential option for and with the poor and oppressed, respect, and solidarity.

When personal values of staff or ethical obligations to a client conflict with agency policies, procedures, laws, or regulations, concerted efforts should be taken to resolve the conflict in a manner consistent with the CCUSA Code.

Resource 4: Legislative Advocacy

For Catholic Charities USA, legislative advocacy entails defending or supporting a cause or action consistent with justice and the common good. It is, and has been, central to the mission of Catholic Charities. As far back as 1910, at the first meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Charities (now known as CCUSA), the network of agencies committed itself to focus on securing justice for those who were poor and vulnerable, to present their point of view to those in power, and to defend their fundamental rights with due regard for the common good. In short, Catholic Charities would be the “attorney for the poor.”

Catholic Charities grounds its practice of legislative advocacy in the faith of Jesus Christ handed on by the Catholic Church. As disciples of Jesus, Catholics strive to follow the Lord by loving their brothers and sisters in word and deed. Christians are aided in their discipleship through scripture and tradition, as well as the guidance of church leaders. Likewise, the legislative advocacy work of Catholic Charities employs these same resources to respond to pressing social needs.

Sacred scripture calls us to work for justice and to defend the needs of the poor and vulnerable. We fulfill this call not only through acts of direct service but also through raising our voices against unjust policies and structures.

The teachings of the church and the guidance of church leaders inform our commitment to advocacy. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, for example, states that we as citizens and as members of the faithful have the duty to work with governments and civil authorities for justice and solidarity. All citizens have “the right, and at times the duty, to voice their criticisms of that which seems harmful to the dignity of persons and to the good of the community” (No. 2238).

Pope Francis links the social justice commitment to the exercise of charity:

...when [individuals] join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the “field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity.” This entails working for a social and political order whose soul is social charity. (*Fratelli tutti*, No. 180)

In *Economic Justice for All*, the U.S. bishops make the same link: “...charity requires more than alleviating misery. It demands genuine love for the person in need. It should probe the meaning of suffering and provoke a response that seeks to remedy causes. True charity leads to advocacy” (No. 356). (The bishops also provide [a helpful brochure that depicts “The Two Feet of Love in Action”](#): the work of social justice and charitable works.)

The Catholic Church’s body of social justice teaching has traditionally been referred to as Catholic Social Doctrine (CSD). CSD is often summarized into a number of foundational principles. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, for example, lists [seven](#): Life and Dignity of the Human Person; Call to Family, Community, and Participation; Rights and Responsibilities; Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers; Solidarity; and Care for God’s Creation.

The principles of CSD serve as indicators of just living conditions when they are present in a community and signs of injustice when they are absent. They also provide a framework for the church and local communities to create an environment in which human beings can grow and prosper as individuals, families, and groups. The goal is that each person, with due regard for the common good, lives a life commensurate to his or her dignity. Such a life, ultimately, corresponds to humanity's end: to be united in Jesus in the life of heaven.

Catholic Charities agencies have an additional support for their efforts at legislative advocacy: The CCUSA government relations team. The CCUSA team acts as a liaison between Capitol Hill and the Catholic Charities network.

The CCUSA policy team maintains relationships with members of Congress and their staff, the White House, and executive departments. The team helps the federal government better understand the impact that poverty and other social ills have on the economy, families, and individuals. Part of this effort includes weighing in on specific legislation and policies, using CSD as a foundation. The CCUSA team also educates policymakers on the ways people in need are being served by local Catholic Charities agencies. The experience of agencies and the people they serve has the potential to impact policy formation.

CCUSA's policy team also keeps in close contact with Catholic Charities agencies, supporting their legislative advocacy work in a number of ways.

On the [CCUSA website](#), Catholic Charities staff and volunteers can access a manual for legislative advocacy that provides a comprehensive source not only for understanding what advocacy is but also for creating a framework for action: "Faith, Action, Justice: A Manual for Legislative Advocacy" can be used to start an advocacy team or refresh a seasoned one. A companion to the full manual is "Advocacy Basics," which provides 17 one-pagers on separate topics.

In addition to the advocacy manual, the CCUSA government relations team convenes staff from Catholic Charities agencies for a variety of meetings, both in person and via webinars. For example, Hill Day, which takes place during the spring gathering for Catholic Charities directors, provides an opportunity for local Catholic Charities leaders to visit their Congressional representatives; the government relations team accompanies the leaders on these visits after briefing them on important topics for discussion.

Other meetings might include guidance to agencies on federal legislation and policies, the outlook of a new Congress, and how to integrate CSD into advocacy work. The CCUSA government relations team can also be contacted directly to answer questions. Each team member carries a portfolio of issues that corresponds to the priorities of the Catholic Charities ministry (e.g., food and nutrition, housing, religious freedom, immigration, racial justice, etc.).

Every week, the CCUSA government relations team publishes the [Washington Weekly newsletter](#), which gives an overview of what's happening in the federal government that concerns the Catholic Charities network. For specific issues that call for immediate attention, the team sends out [action alerts](#) to recipients, who are encouraged to take a specific action (e.g., to either support or oppose the passing of a bill). The newsletter also provides information on upcoming meetings and webinars of interest to Catholic Charities, as well as a weekly reflection on the intersection of the Christian faith and working for the common good.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does our agency engage in advocacy?
2. How do we engage those we serve in advocacy?
3. Where do we need to be more engaged in advocacy?

For Further Reading

See the CCUSA website for Advocacy issue briefs, recent letters and statements, and other resources for Advocacy issue briefs, recent letters and statements, and other resources.

Political Activity and Lobby Guidelines for Catholic Organizations (2024), U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops <https://www.usccb.org/resources/political-activity-and-lobby-guidelines-catholic-organizations>

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States www.usccb.org/sjp/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship

A Better Kind of Politics: Civilize It, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, www.usccb.org/civilizeit

Respecting the Just Rights of Workers: Guidance and Options for Catholic Health Care and Unions, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, www.usccb.org/resources/respecting_the_just_rights_of_workers.pdf

Resource 5: A Just Workplace

Providing a fair and just workplace is another expression of Catholic identity within Catholic Charities. Catholic Charities agencies believe that Catholic principles of human dignity, solidarity, and economic justice are not just to be practiced by other institutions in society; these concepts must also be modeled by church organizations. As Pope Francis emphasized in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives” (No. 192). For this reason, Catholic Charities agencies are called upon to treat employees justly.

Each Catholic Charities agency must reflect on local challenges to the dignity of work and the rights of workers and in response determine proper policies and procedures. The questions the United States bishops posed to Catholic healthcare organizations in 1999 (*A Fair and Just Workplace: Principles and Practices for Catholic Health Care*) provide a good start:

- Does the institution provide a safe and healthful working environment?
- Do the lowest-paid workers receive wages sufficient to sustain themselves and their families?
- Is healthcare insurance provided or are wages sufficient for a worker to both sustain a family and purchase healthcare insurance?
- Are work hours flexible so as to permit adequate rest, leisure time, educational opportunities, and quality family time?
- Are training and educational opportunities that will lead to advancement and promotions available to workers?
- What is the purpose of part-time or contract positions: to advance the mission of the institution and meet the needs of workers or to avoid paying benefits?
- Do workers have easy access to written procedures that explain how to resolve disputes with supervisors or to file a grievance to protect their rights or the rights of others?
- Do workers have avenues for meaningful input into decisions affecting the workplace?

In different places, in different times, Catholic Charities agencies will answer these questions in diverse ways. But all must engage these questions with candor and a desire to live the traditions that guide Catholic Charities internally as well as externally.

Engaging issues of workplace justice typically creates some degree of tension. The challenge lies in turning that tension into policies that represent movement toward justice, the common good, and fair treatment and full participation of all people, particularly groups that have been underrepresented or subject to discrimination. Tough economic times can impose additional challenges that create friction. At times, that friction has erupted into open conflict between Catholic institutions and organized labor, particularly in church healthcare ministries.

Consequently, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops encouraged a decade-long dialogue between leaders of the labor movement, Catholic health care, and several Catholic bishops, mediated by Fordham University Law School. This dialogue produced a 2009 joint agreement, “Respecting the Just Rights of Workers: Guidance and Options for Catholic Health Care and Unions,” on relationships between Catholic healthcare institutions and unions that offered specific guidelines to both.

Catholic Charities leaders and employees in conversation with organized labor about current or potential union representation should read and reflect on these guidelines. The statement affirms both “the central role of workers themselves in making choices about representation and the principle of mutual agreement between employers and unions on the means and methods to assure that workers could make their choices freely and fairly” (Respecting the Just Rights of Workers, 4). These “means and methods” include a commitment from management not to use traditional anti-union tactics or hire outside firms that specialize in such tactics and pledges from unions to refrain from public attacks on Catholic healthcare organizations.

Agreements like these are the outcome of leaders of charitable ministries taking seriously the internal implications of Catholic teaching and traditions and entering into dialogue with all stakeholders, including potential adversaries. A just workplace at Catholic Charities or any other Catholic institution begins with reflection on the questions the U.S. bishops pose above, continues with dialogue with employees and other agency stakeholders, and concludes with setting concrete policy. Each cycle of reflection, investigation, dialogue, and policy-making brings us closer to the just workplace envisioned by Catholic teaching on the dignity of work and the rights of workers.

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways are we currently a just workplace?
2. What do we need to work on to become a more just workplace?
3. To whom do we need to talk to more about workplace justice issues?

SECTION 6

Prayer Resources



This section is intended to provide suggestions for prayers to be used in a variety of settings. The prayers are meant to be adapted to meet the needs of agencies or individuals. The length of the prayer time is up to the meeting organizers. However, there ought to be sufficient time for sincere, reflective, meaningful prayer, which includes periods of silence.

A comment on who leads the prayer: Some staff (or volunteers) may be uneasy about taking on that role. It's important to understand why. There may be personal reasons, which of course should be respected. However, if the reason is some sense that a lay person cannot lead prayer, then that should be corrected.

The Catholic Church has ordained ministers who preside at the church's liturgies; that is the ordinary situation. But in some cases, when a priest is not available, a lay person who has been trained may be designated to lead a particular liturgy, although the prayer formulas are changed to avoid confusion between ordained and lay.

In situations that are outside of the liturgy, like a Catholic Charities prayer service, a lay person may lead. The leader should prepare and lead in a spirit befitting prayer. Practicing the prayers and readings beforehand, helping to prepare any other readers, maintaining a respectful pace, and including moments of silence are ways to lead others in prayer.

Please keep in mind the following guidelines and suggestions for developing and using prayer:

- Let the whole group participate in the prayer.
- Use the principle of proclamation and response. For example: Read the Word of God (i.e., Sacred Scripture) and provide a way for participants to respond.
- When appropriate, include silence.
- Pray for others during the prayer time.
- Provide time for participants to share responses to the readings.
- Rotate prayer leaders and readers.
- Adapt any prayer to reflect the life of the agency.

Preparing for Prayer

- Prepare an environment that might include a candle, the Bible, a crucifix, and any other religious symbol appropriate for the occasion.
- Choose a prayer leader, reader(s), and any other people needed for the prayer.

Resource 1: Sample Prayer Service

Environment

Prepare a prayerful environment that could include a candle, a Bible, a crucifix, and any other religious item that expresses the Catholic identity of the agency. Items ought to express the cultural diversity of the staff as well.

Choose a prayer leader and reader.

Opening Prayer

God of Love,
You have revealed your love to us throughout history.
We know we are called to be your followers.

Send your Spirit upon us to guide us in our work.
May we be an expression of your love to the people we
serve.

We ask this in your Son's name, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Reading

(Choose one of the following readings.)
Matthew 25:31–46, Luke 4:14–22, or Luke 6:17–26

Silent reflection or shared reflection on the Scripture reading

(Invite participants to share their thoughts about the reading.)

Prayer Leader:

Loving God, Guide us in our work this day.
May we be faithful witnesses of your love
And give you glory in all that we do.
In Christ's name we pray.
Amen.

Resource 2: *Lectio Divina* Prayer Services

Group *lectio divina* centers on paying close attention to the spoken word. The Scriptures are read slowly three different times, and each time the group is asked to respond in a different way to the words.

Select three readers ahead of time and establish an order. Ask each reader to read slowly and deliberately. With each reading, the group will respond in a different way to the Scripture.

The sample *lectio divina* utilizes the Beatitudes (Luke 6:17–26). As an alternative, or in future prayer services, we recommend The Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31–46); The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37); or The Washing of the Feet (John 13).

Reading

Luke 6:17–26

Jesus came down with them and stood on a stretch of level ground. A great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and even those who were tormented by unclean spirits were cured. Everyone in the crowd sought to touch him because power came forth from him and healed them all.

And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for the kingdom of God is yours.
Blessed are you who are now hungry,
for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who are now weeping,
for you will laugh.
Blessed are you when people hate you,
and when they exclude and insult you,
and denounce your name as evil
on account of the Son of Man.
Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!
Behold, your reward will be great in heaven.
For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way.
But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.
But woe to you who are filled now,
for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will grieve and weep.
Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.

Reflection

After a moment of silence, ask participants to share a word or phrase that took on special meaning for them—no explanation, just the word or phrase.

After everyone has shared their word or phrase, the second reader proclaims the same Scripture—again, slowly and deliberately. After a moment of silence, ask participants to share how this passage of Scripture speaks to their heart.

When it appears that this sharing has concluded, the third reader again proclaims the Word slowly and carefully. After a final period of silence, ask participants what the Scripture is calling them to do or become. Invite them to share after a brief moment of silence.

Conclude the lectio divina experience by asking everyone in the group to pray for the person seated to their right.

Further Reading

Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, Liguori/Triumph, 1996.

Resource 3: Prayers

Catholic Charities USA Centennial Prayer

God of Justice, ancient and new,

From the beauty of sacred creation,
Through the covenant to the cross,
The movement of your Spirit in history
Brought order out of chaos,
voiced liberation for your people through
the prophets, and gave life through the
suffering and death of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Through the birth of your Church,
The movement of your Spirit in time
Brought forth a Body of faithful people,
Shaped by the story of your great love.
And commissioned for the service of justice
and peace.

Form and fashion us to be the movement
of your Spirit,
Bringing your love to a weary and worn world.
Renew us in heart, home, and heritage.
Deepen our commitment to serve those most
in need
With the gifts and passion of staff, volunteers,
and benefactors.

Bless and bring all of us to the fullness
of your love
That celebrates the life and dignity of all
your people.
We ask this through our Savior Jesus Christ,
Who lives and reigns with you
In the movement of your Spirit,
One God forever and ever, amen.

Prayer for Peace and Justice

God, source of all light, we are surrounded by the darkness of the injustices experienced by your people, the poor who are hungry and who search for shelter, the sick who seek relief, and the downtrodden who seek help in their hopelessness.

Surround us and fill us with your Spirit who is Light. Lead us in your way to be light to your people. Help our parish to be salt for our community as we share your love with those caught in the struggles of life.

We desire to be your presence to the least among us and to know your presence in them as we work through you to bring justice and peace to this world in desperate need.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

First printed in Communities of Salt and Light: Parish Resource Manual (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), 48. Used with permission.

Prayer for Justice

Grant us, Lord God, a vision of your world as your love would have it:
a world where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor;
a world where the riches of creation are shared, and everyone can enjoy them;
a world where different races and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect;
a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love.
Give us the inspiration and courage to build it, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
([Catholic Online](#))

Prayer for Peace

O God, who would fold both heaven and earth in a single peace:
Let the design of your great love lighten upon the waste of our wraths and sorrows:
and give peace to your Church, peace among nations,
peace in our dwellings, and peace in our hearts:
through your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.
([Catholic Online](#))

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops maintains [a collection of prayers on its website](#).

Resource 4: Prayer Services

Prayer Service on the Seven Themes of Catholic Social Doctrine

Our Call, Our Tradition

Leader: Let us place ourselves in the presence of the God who calls us to be salt and light.

Reader: Matthew 5:14–16, You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.

Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

All: The church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Reader: Genesis 1:27, God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

All: 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... We believe 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

Reader: Exodus 6:7, I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.

All: 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.

Human Rights and Responsibilities

Reader: Isaiah 10:1–2, Those who enact unjust statutes, who write oppressive decrees, depriving the needy of judgment, robbing my people's poor of justice, making widows their plunder and orphans their prey!

All: 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.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

Reader: Acts 2:44–45, All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need.

All: 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 ... instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

Reader: Sirach 24:22, Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame, and those who serve me will never go astray.

All: The economy must serve people ... 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.

Global Solidarity

Reader: Micah 4:3, He shall judge between many peoples and set terms for strong and distant nations; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.

All: We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers ... We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that "loving our neighbor" has global dimensions in an interdependent world.

Care for God's Creation

Reader: Genesis 1:31, God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good.

All: We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation ... We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

Seeing as God Sees

Reader: John 9:39–41, Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind." Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not also blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains."

Leader: Our tradition calls us to see the world in new ways—to reject the blindness of our age. And so, we pray. We are called to see with the eyes of the poor in a world blinded by riches and power.

All:

Cure our blindness, O God.

Leader: We are called to see with the eyes of the outcast, the leper, the person with AIDS in a world blinded by fear.

All: Cure our blindness, O God.

Leader: We are called to see with the eyes of all God's creatures in a world blind to the beauty of God's creation.

All: Cure our blindness, O God.

Leader: Jesus has opened our eyes to the needs of God's world.

All: We are ready to open our hands to God's work.

Leader: Jesus has opened our minds to the injustice of the world.

All: We are ready to open our mouths to proclaim God's justice.

First printed in In the Footsteps of Jesus: Catholic Social Teaching at Work Today by Stephen M. Colecchi (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), 12-14. Used with permission.

Prayer for Racial Healing

Opening Prayer

God of justice, in your wisdom you create all people in your image, without exception. Through your goodness, open our eyes to see the dignity, beauty, and worth of every human being. Open our minds to understand that all your children are brothers and sisters in the same human family. Open our hearts to repent of racist attitudes, behaviors, and speech that demean others. Open our ears to hear the cries of those wounded by racial discrimination and their passionate appeals for change. Strengthen our resolve to make amends for past injustices and to right the wrongs of history. And fill us with courage that we might seek to heal wounds, build bridges, forgive and be forgiven, and establish peace and equality for all in our communities. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 130: 1–8

R: We cry to you, O Lord, from the depths of the earth.

Out of the depths I call to you, LORD; Lord, hear my cry! May your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. **R.**

If you, LORD, keep account of sins, Lord, who can stand? But with you is forgiveness and so you are revered. **R.**

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and I hope for his word. **R.**

My soul looks for the Lord more than sentinels for daybreak. More than sentinels for daybreak, let Israel hope in the LORD. **R.**

For with the LORD is mercy, with him is plenteous redemption, And he will redeem Israel from all its sins. **R.**

Reading from Scripture

Isaiah 32: 15–18

In those days: The spirit from on high Will be poured out on us. Then will the desert become an orchard And the orchard regarded as a forest. Right will dwell in the desert And justice abide in the orchard. Justice will bring about peace; Right will produce calm and security. My people will live in a peaceful country, In secure dwellings and quiet resting places.

Reflection

An individual or group reflection on the scripture readings or the themes of racial healing and reconciliation may take place here.

Petitions

In hope that the arc of history bends toward justice, we lift up our prayers for racial healing, saying:

R: Bind us together, O God of love.

For the Church, that its prophetic voice may proclaim to all the challenge to break the hopeless cycles of poverty, ignorance, prejudice, and despair that degrade the sacred dignity of humankind, we pray: **R.**

For our country, that we might celebrate our racial diversity and the distinctive and rich contributions of every fiber of our cultural fabric, we pray: **R.**

For wise and decisive action on the part of local and national leaders, that the scandal of racism may be eradicated from our society, we pray: **R.**

For an end to the subtle racism of economic oppression that permeates our society's structures and resides in many hearts, we pray: **R.**

For our faith communities, that they may not succumb to indifference or accept the status quo, but press on for fundamental change, we pray: **R.**

For the victims of racial discrimination, that they may be filled with hope for a more just future, healing from wounds received, courage to advocate for change and for peace, and the grace to overcome hatred with love, we pray: **R.**

For those who work for racial justice, that they may be sustained in hope, empowered with courage, and filled with the grace to persevere in love, we pray: **R.**

Other intercessions may be offered here.

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

Jesus our brother, You revealed God through your wise words and loving deeds, and we encounter you still today in the faces of those whom society has pushed to the margins. Guide us, through the love you revealed, to establish the justice you proclaimed, that all people might dwell in harmony and peace, united by that one love that binds us to each other, and to you. Amen.

Sign of Peace

All present may share an appropriate sign of peace.

Prayer for Peace in our Communities

Opening Prayer

God of mercy and peace, you created us in your image, forming one human family. You love all your children without discrimination and invite us to love each of our neighbors as ourselves. In hope, we lift up to you for healing the tensions and racism that plague our nation and pray for increasing harmony and peace within our communities and in our hearts. Amen.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 85: 9–14

R: The Lord speaks of peace to his people.

I will listen for what God, the LORD, has to say; surely he will speak of peace to his people and to his faithful. May they not turn to foolishness! Near indeed is his salvation for those who fear him; glory will dwell in our land. **R.**

Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss. Truth will spring from the earth; justice will look down from heaven. **R.**

Yes, the LORD will grant his bounty; our land will yield its produce. Justice will march before him, and make a way for his footsteps. **R.**

Reading from Scripture

Colossians 3:12–15

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.

Reflection

An individual or group reflection on the scripture readings or the theme of peace in our communities may take place here.

Petitions

God is the author of peace and blesses all those who work for peace. Let us now lift up prayers for peace, saying:

R: Author of Peace, hear our prayer.

For an end to the violence perpetrated by harsh words, deadly weapons, or cold indifference. May our homes, our nation, and countries around the world become havens of peace, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

For the grace to see every human being as a child of God, regardless of race, language, or culture, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

For healing and justice for all those who have experienced violence and racism, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

For the protection of all police and first responders who risk their lives daily to ensure our safety; for fair and just policing that will promote peace and wellbeing in all our neighborhoods, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

For our public officials, that they will strive to work for fair education, adequate housing, and equal opportunities for employment for all, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

For our agency, that we may cultivate welcome, extend hospitality, and encourage the participation of people of all cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

For the courage to have difficult conversations about racism, and for a better appreciation of how our words and actions—or even our silence—can impact our communities, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

For solidarity in our global human family, that we may work together to protect those who are most vulnerable and most in need, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

Other intercessions may be offered here.

Closing Prayer

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

– Saint Francis of Assisi

Sign of Peace

All present may share with each other an appropriate sign of peace.

Prayer for Disaster Relief

Opening Prayer

God of hope and mercy, we lift up to you all victims of natural disasters and those responding with assistance and aid. Protect all who are in any form of danger; provide practical help to those in need; strengthen the weary, console the grieving, heal the suffering; and bless those engaged in disaster relief efforts with safety and courage. Help all people of good will respond with compassion and generous hearts. Amen.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 107: 23–26, 28–31

R: God of wonders, hear the cries of those in distress.

Some went off to sea in ships, plied their trade on the deep waters. They saw the works of the LORD, the wonders of God in the deep. **R.**

He commanded and roused a storm wind; it tossed the waves on high. They rose up to the heavens, sank to the depths; their hearts trembled at the danger. **R.**

In their distress they cried to the LORD, who brought them out of their peril; He hushed the storm to silence, the waves of the sea were stilled. **R.**

They rejoiced that the sea grew calm, that God brought them to the harbor they longed for. Let them thank the LORD for his mercy, such wondrous deeds for the children of Adam. **R.**

Reading from Scripture

Mark 4:35–41

On that day, as evening drew on, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us cross to the other side." Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" They were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"

Reflection

An individual or group reflection on the scripture readings or on the theme of disaster relief may take place here.

Petitions

Confident in God's loving care, let us now lift up together the following needs, saying:

R: Let us cry for help.

For the consolation of all who have lost loved ones, livelihoods, homes, or property, we pray: **R.**

For the blessing of hope upon those devastated by shock, overwhelmed with grief, or paralyzed with fear, we pray: **R.**

For the relief of the poor, elderly, sick, and vulnerable, who typically suffer most in disasters, we pray: **R.**

For the encouragement, protection, and perseverance of all aid workers, we pray: **R.**

For an increase of generosity and solidarity with victims by all people of goodwill, we pray: **R.**

Other prayers may be offered here.

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

God of compassion, you are our refuge and our strength, our sure rock in the midst of any storm, the light that pierces every darkness, and an anchor of hope for those who contend with despair. Reach out your hand to all those who fear that they are sinking beneath the waves or feel as if they're too weary to carry on through the heat of the day. May they receive that courage, resilience, and healing grace that can only come from you. We ask this in your holy name. Amen.

Sign of Peace

All present may share an appropriate sign of peace.

Prayer for the Care of the Poor

Opening Prayer

Generous God, we lift up to your mercy that poverty which is a moral and social wound upon our country's soul. In your goodness, help us to heal this wound by working to alleviate the suffering and pain of the poor. Amen.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 10: 12–14, 16–18

R: Rise up, LORD! Do not forget the poor.

Rise up, LORD! God, lift up your hand! Do not forget the poor! Why should the wicked scorn God, say in their hearts, "God does not care"? **R.**

But you do see; you take note of misery and sorrow; you take the matter in hand. **R.**

To you the helpless can entrust their cause; you are the defender of orphans. **R.**

The LORD is king forever; the nations have vanished from his land. **R.**

You listen, LORD, to the needs of the poor; you strengthen their heart and incline your ear. **R.**

You win justice for the orphaned and oppressed; no one on earth will cause terror again. **R.**

Reading from Scripture

Luke 4: 16–21

(Jesus) came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

Reflection

An individual or group reflection on the Scripture readings or the theme of poverty may be offered here.

Petitions

Confident that God always hears the cry of the poor, we lift up the following needs, saying:

R: Generous God, hear our prayer.

Give the church the grace to be a “poor church for the poor,” and so become an even greater sign to the world of Christ’s charity for the least and those in need, we pray: **R.**

Give the people of our nation the collective will to make the economic, social, and political choices to reverse the human-made disaster of poverty, and so offer a new vision of life and society, we pray: **R.**

Give those in elected office the conviction and courage to promote social policies and economic structures that reduce poverty and promote a just distribution of the world’s goods, we pray: **R.**

Give those who struggle with poverty renewed hope, economic and educational opportunity, and dignified work in safe conditions for just wages, that they might live in economic security, we pray: **R.**

Give us open hearts that we might willingly share our gifts with others, follow Jesus in his own poverty, and seek his face in the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters, we pray: **R.**

Give to Catholic Charities and other organizations of good will the leadership and resources needed to reduce poverty in the communities they serve, we pray: **R.**

Other intercessions may be offered here.

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

God of bounty, your son Jesus embraced poverty and taught that the poor are blessed, for “theirs is the kingdom of God.” Help us to step out of our certainties and comforts and keep our eyes fixed on him, so we can both see and serve him in the faces of the poor. Amen.

Sign of Peace

All present may share an appropriate sign of peace.

Prayer for the Care of Creation

Opening Prayer

God of all creation, your goodness and glory shine forth through everything you have made. Through the light of faith, help us to see this world, our common home, not as a resource to dominate and exploit, but as a gift to be cherished by all generations. Prompted by your Spirit, we ask this in the name of Jesus, through whom all creation was made. Amen.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 104: 24–31

R: The earth is full of your creatures, O Lord!

How varied are your works, LORD! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. **R.**

There is the sea, great and wide! It teems with countless beings, living things both large and small. There ships ply their course and Leviathan, whom you formed to play with. **R.**

All of these look to you to give them food in due time. When you give it to them, they gather; when you open your hand, they are well filled. When you hide your face, they panic. **R.**

Take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust. Send forth your spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the earth. **R.**

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD be glad in his works. **R.**

Reading from Scripture

Matthew 6:25–33

(Jesus said), "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your lifespan? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wildflowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides."

Reflection

An individual or group reflection on the scripture readings or another appropriate text, such as Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, may take place here.

Petitions

Trusting that God embraces with tenderness everything that exists, let us lift up our prayers for this world, our common home, saying:

R: We praise you, God of all creation.

Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. **R.**

Fill us with peace that we may live as sisters and brothers, harming no one. **R.**

Help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. **R.**

Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. **R.**

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor of the earth. **R.**

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, and be filled with awe and contemplation. **R.**

Enlighten us to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey toward your infinite light. **R.**

Other intercessions may be offered here.

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

God of beauty and God of truth, everything in your creation is connected, for all share a common origin in your creating hand. Fill us with a spirit of praise, gratitude, wisdom, and courage, that we might care for creation and not misuse it, ensure that its goods are shared in justice with all our brothers and sisters, and speak out on its behalf whenever it is threatened. Amen.

From Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* – *On Care for Our Common Home*

A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human being deemed unwanted. This compromises the very meaning of our struggle for the sake of the environment. It is no coincidence that, in the canticle in which Saint Francis praises God for his creatures, he goes on to say: "Praised be you, my Lord, through those who give pardon to your love." Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society. (No. 91)

Prayer for Victims of Human Trafficking

Opening Prayer

Living God, you freed the people of Israel from cruel slavery in Egypt and led them to a promised land “flowing with milk and honey.” We ask you to liberate today all the children, women, and men who are enslaved by the cruel yoke of human trafficking in our nation, and around the world.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 142: 2–8

R: I cry out to you Lord, for you are my refuge.

With my own voice I cry to the LORD; with my own voice I beseech the LORD. Before him I pour out my complaint, tell of my distress in front of him. **R.**

When my spirit is faint within me, you know my path. As I go along this path, they have hidden a trap for me. **R.**

I look to my right hand to see that there is no one willing to acknowledge me. My escape has perished; no one cares for me. **R.**

I cry out to you, LORD, I say, You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Listen to my cry for help, for I am brought very low. **R.**

Rescue me from my pursuers, for they are too strong for me. Lead my soul from prison, that I may give thanks to your name. Then the righteous shall gather around me because you have been good to me. **R.**

Reading from Scripture

Exodus 3:7–10

But the LORD said (to Moses): I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry against their taskmasters, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them up from that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.... Now indeed the outcry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them. Now, go! I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

Reflection

An individual or group reflection on the scripture readings or the needs of victims of human trafficking may take place here.

Petitions

Trusting in God's love and care for the oppressed, let us lift up prayer for victims of human trafficking, saying

R: Hear us, God of freedom.

For an end to the coercion and exploitation of vulnerable persons at factories, farms, and brothels, we pray: **R.**

For an eradication of the poverty and lack of opportunity that breeds human trafficking, we pray: **R.**

For a greater awareness of the reality and signs of human trafficking in our midst, we pray: **R.**

For cooperation between governments and social service agencies to neutralize traffickers and their networks, we pray: **R.**

Other intercessions may be offered here.

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

God of liberation, we pray for all your children who are enslaved by human trafficking. Free them from their bondage, heal them of their wounds, protect them from further harm, turn the hearts of their oppressors, and sustain them with hope for a new beginning in safety and peace. Amen.

Sign of Peace

All present may share with each other an appropriate sign of peace.

International Day of Prayer and Reflection Against Human Trafficking

February 8 is the International Day of Prayer and Reflection against Human Trafficking, first initiated by Pope Francis in 2015. February 8 is also the memorial of Saint Josephine Bakhita, a patron saint of trafficking victims. A native of Darfur, Sudan, she was kidnapped by slave traders at age 9 and suffered for many years as a horrifically abused slave in Sudan and Italy. She developed a sustaining relationship with God in the midst of her pain, was eventually emancipated, and became a religious sister. She died in 1947 and was declared a saint in 2000.

Prayer to Honor the Gift of Life

Opening Prayer

O God, source of all life and goodness, you fashion human lives in your image and likeness, and through your love, give each human life dignity, sacredness, and priceless worth; awaken in every heart new reverence for the least of your children, and renew among your people a readiness to nurture and sustain your precious gift of human life at all stages, and in all conditions. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading from Scripture

Isaiah 49:1, 3, 5–6, 13–15

Hear me, coastlands, listen distant peoples. Before birth the Lord called me, from my mother's womb he gave me my name. He said to me, you are my servant, in you, Israel, I show my glory. I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of earth. Sing out, heavens, and rejoice, earth, break forth into song, you mountains, for the Lord comforts his people and shows mercy to his afflicted. But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 139 1b–3, 13–14ab, 14c –15

R: I praise you, for I am wonderfully made.

O LORD, you have probed me and you know me; you know when I sit and when I stand; you understand my thoughts from afar. My journeys and my rest you scrutinize, with all my ways you are familiar. **R.**

Truly you have formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made; wonderful are your works. **R.**

My soul also you knew full well; nor was my frame unknown to you When I was made in secret, when I was fashioned in the depths of the earth. **R.**

Petitions

God is the author of life in whom we place our hope and trust as we lift up prayer for life. The response to each petition is:

R: Author of life, hear our prayer.

For all unborn children: that our love for them may keep them safe until the joyous day of their birth, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For the children of our country, especially those who are forgotten or neglected: that their presence might remind us of the infinite value of human life, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For all mothers, especially those who are young or alone: beaten or addicted; that God might heal their broken hearts and seal them with his love, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For fathers, especially those who are very young: that through God's grace and community support they might assume the great responsibility that God has given to them, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For all homeless parents, that God will teach us how to love and support them, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For those who mourn the death of a child, that they may be given the strength and courage to face the future, and that they may be understood and blessed, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For all who are lonely or afraid, for teenagers on the street, old people in nursing homes, prisoners with no one to visit them, and all whom the world has forgotten, that Christ might lead us to them, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For those with mental disabilities, that we might cherish the gifts God has given them, and in their lives hear the voice of our loving God, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For those condemned to die, and especially for men and women on death row: that their plight might move the hearts of the people of this nation, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For all who are about to die, that through our love, care, and devotion, they might know the beauty of life, to the moment of their final breath, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For all those who govern us, especially President [current President] and the members of Congress and the Supreme Court, that they may frame laws that are life-giving, protecting all those who are unable to protect themselves, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That the good seed of the Gospel of Life may take root in our land and grow to the glory of God, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

O God, compassionate and merciful protector of the widowed, defender of the orphan, and shelter to the stranger. You who are love itself have fashioned us in your divine image. You command us to love as we are loved by you, loving our neighbors, forgiving our enemies, and extending mercy to all. Holy God, send out your Spirit to fill our hearts with courage. Guide our steps along your way toward your heavenly home, that we may live with you there forever and ever. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for Refugees and Migrants

Opening Prayer

Merciful God, we pray for families and individuals who have left or fled their homes, seeking safer and better lives. We lift up to you their hopes, fears, and needs, that they may be protected on their journeys, their dignity and rights may be honored and upheld, and they may be welcomed with open arms into generous and compassionate communities. Amen.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 63:2–9

R: My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.

O God, you are my God—it is you I seek; For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts, In a land parched, lifeless, and without water. **R.**

I look to you in the sanctuary to see your power and glory. For your love is better than life; my lips shall ever praise you! **R.**

I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands, calling on your name. My soul shall be sated as with choice food, with joyous lips my mouth shall praise you! **R.**

I think of you upon my bed, I remember you through the watches of the night. You indeed are my savior, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy. My soul clings fast to you; your right hand upholds me. **R.**

Reading from Scripture

Leviticus 19:33–34

When an alien resides with you in your land, do not mistreat such a one. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God.

Reflection

An individual or group reflection on the scripture readings or the needs of refugee and migrants may take place here.

Petitions

Trusting that God's mercy is revealed in love for those who hurt or are in need, let us now lift up prayers for migrants and refugees, saying:

R: Hear us, God of mercy.

That migrants and refugees may receive compassionate and practical help and find comfort from their sorrow and fear, we pray: R.

That unaccompanied migrant children might be kept safe and reunited with families and loved ones, we pray: R.

That governments will address the root causes of migration and implement fair and compassionate immigration policies, we pray: R.

That all people of good will may stand in solidarity with migrants and refugees and have the courage to welcome every newcomer, we pray: R.

That peaceful solutions may be found to the conflict, injustice, and violence that forces people to flee, we pray: R.

That effective responses to climate change may halt the flooding, drought, and natural disasters that lead to migration of the poor, we pray: R.

Other intercessions may be offered here.

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

Loving God, you create every person in your image and unite us all in one human family. As our brothers' and sisters' keepers, fill us with courage and compassion, that we might meet the hardships of migrants and refugees, not with silence and indifference, but with generous acts of mercy, welcoming every stranger as Christ in our midst. Amen.

Sign of Peace

All present may share with each other an appropriate sign of peace.

Prayer for the Needs of the Sick

Opening Prayer

God of all goodness, Look with mercy on all who suffer any kind of infirmity, sickness or injury, that they may be comforted. Let your hand of healing and protection be upon them. When they are fearful, ease their fear and anxieties. When they are afraid, give them strength and courage. When they feel alone, send them someone to listen and to care. When they are confused, provide reassurance and direction. When they are in pain, ease their suffering. When they despair, give them hope. May they experience your healing presence in the comfort of a caregiver's calm gaze and tender touch. We ask this in your holy name. Amen.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 103: 1bc–2, 3–4, 8–9, 13–14, 17–18a

R. O bless the Lord, my soul!

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all my being, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all his benefits. **R.**

He pardons all your iniquities, He heals all your ills, He redeems your life from destruction, he crowns you with kindness and compassion. **R.**

Merciful and gracious is the Lord, Slow to anger and abounding in kindness. He will not always chide, Nor does he keep his wrath forever. **R.**

As a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear him, For he knows how we are formed; He remembers that we are dust. **R.**

But the kindness of the Lord is from all eternity To eternity toward those who fear him, And his justice toward his children's children Among those who keep his covenant. **R.**

Reading from Scripture

Luke 13:10–17

(Jesus) was teaching in a synagogue on the sabbath. And a woman was there who for eighteen years had been crippled by a spirit; she was bent over, completely incapable of standing erect. When Jesus saw her, he called to her and said, "Woman, you are set free of your infirmity." He laid his hands on her, and she at once stood up straight and glorified God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant that Jesus had cured on the sabbath, said to the crowd in reply, "There are six days when work should be done. Come on those days to be cured, not on the sabbath day." The Lord said to him in reply, "Hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger and lead it out for watering? This daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years now, ought she not to have been set free on the sabbath day from this bondage?" When he said this, all his adversaries were humiliated; and the whole crowd rejoiced at all the splendid deeds done by him.

Reflection

A reflection on the scripture readings or the themes of health, healing, and hope may be offered here.

Petitions

God is the source of all healing and hope, to whom we now lift up in prayer the needs of the sick and those who care for them. The response to each petition is:

R. God of healing and hope, hear our prayer.

That all who suffer any form of illness or infirmity may find relief from their pain, meaning in their struggles, and healing in body, mind and spirit, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That the human dignity of those with chronic illnesses may always be upheld and affirmed, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That those who struggle with mental illness and addictions may find understanding and acceptance, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That sick infants and children may be blessed with healing and joy, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That those who suffer alone may find consolation through the gentle presence of others, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That those who are dying may be filled with serenity and peace, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That family and friends who care for sick loved ones may be strengthened and supported in their service, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That doctors, nurses, and other professional caregivers may be guided by wisdom, strength, skill, and generosity, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That accessible and affordable health care may be available to all who seek it, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That national leaders may be guided by the principles of justice and compassion as they work for healthcare reform, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

An opportunity for additional petitions may be offered here.

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

God of gentleness and love, We entrust to your care all those in need of any form of healing and ask you to guide and sustain all who offer them healing and hope. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The following prayer services highlight the [corporal](#) and [spiritual](#) works of mercy.

Feed the Hungry – Console the Doubtful

Opening Prayer

O God, you have provided food for all living things and showed us in Christ how to care for the world. May everyone trust in you, who feeds even the birds of the air. Amen.

Read Luke 9:11–17

Responsorial Psalm 42

R. Give thanks to the LORD for he is good

The Lord's mercy endures forever! Let that be the prayer of the LORD's redeemed, those redeemed from the hand of the foe, Those gathered from foreign lands, from east and west, from north and south. **R.**

Some had lost their way in a barren desert; found no path toward a city to live in. They were hungry and thirsty; their life was ebbing away. **R.**

In their distress they cried to the LORD, who rescued them in their peril, Guided them by a direct path so they reached a city to live in. **R.**

Let them thank the LORD for his mercy, such wondrous deeds for the children of Adam. For he satisfied the thirsty, filled the hungry with good things. **R.**

Intercessions

For the Church, that Christians may never dismiss the hungry but feed them as Jesus says, we pray to the Lord:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

For the governments of the world, that they enact laws and provide services to see that everyone has adequate nutrition, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For the hungry, that they may feel God's love through the generosity of their neighbors, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For the sick, that they may receive the healing that they need, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

For the dead, that they be raised to heaven, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

From the Divine Mercy Chaplet

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.

Spiritual Work of Mercy

To "Console the Doubtful" means to help someone who is uncertain about a decision to reach a conclusion in harmony with his or her ultimate end, which is eternity with God.

"...everyone hopes to find Christ sitting in heaven; but look, he is lying in the portal, see him in the hungry, in the one who is cold, in the one who has nothing, in the foreigner." – St. Augustine

Give Drink to the Thirsty – Instruct the Ignorant

Opening Prayer

O God, who, being both good and almighty, give us, we pray, an effective love for our brothers and sisters who suffer thirst, that we might give them their due and they may have strength to serve you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Read John 19:25–28

Responsorial Psalm 42:2, 3–4, 6, 8, 12

R. My soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I enter and see the face of God? My tears have been my bread day and night, as they ask me every day, “Where is your God?” **R.**

Why are you downcast, my soul; why do you groan within me? Wait for God, for I shall again praise him, my savior and my God. **R.**

Deep calls to deep in the roar of your torrents, and all your waves and breakers sweep over me. **R.**

Why are you downcast, my soul, why do you groan within me? Wait for God, for I shall again praise him, my savior and my God. **R.**

Intercessions

For all who have vowed themselves to God, in their thirst for holiness, may they faithfully keep to their resolve, let us pray to the Lord:

R. Lord, have mercy.

For the people of the world who thirst for justice, that God will bless us with peace so we may live in true freedom, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

For us gathered here, that God’s flowing waters of life may sustain us and bring us closer to him, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

For all who are deprived of clean drinking water because of pollution, that those responsible will amend their practices immediately, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

For our beloved dead, that their desire for God will be quenched when they see God face to face, let us pray to the Lord: **R.**

Our Father ...

Closing Prayer

From the Divine Mercy Chaplet

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.

Spiritual Work of Mercy

“Instruct the ignorant,” spiritually speaking, means handing on the truth revealed by God through the person of Christ and transmitted via scripture and tradition by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Quote of Mercy

“For the Christian faith, the education of the poor is not a favor but a duty. Children have a right to knowledge as a fundamental requirement for the recognition of human dignity. Teaching them affirms their value, giving them the tools to transform their reality. Christian tradition considers knowledge a gift from God and a community responsibility. Christian education does not only form professionals, but also people open to goodness, beauty and truth.” Pope Leo XIV, *Dilexite*, No. 72

Shelter the Homeless – Comfort the Afflicted

Opening Prayer

O Lord, to whom no one is a stranger and from whose help no one is ever distant, look with compassion on those without a place to live; restore them, we pray, to a home of their own, and give us a kind heart to help the homeless in their need. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Read Luke 16:19–31

Responsorial Psalm 68:5, 6–7, 8–9, 10–11, 20

R. Blessed be the Lord day by day.

Sing to God, praise his name; exalt the rider of the clouds. Rejoice before him whose name is the Lord. **R.**

Father of the fatherless, defender of widows—God in his holy abode, God gives a home to the forsaken, he leads prisoners out to prosperity. **R.**

God, when you went forth before your people, when you marched through the desert, the earth quaked, the heavens poured, before God, the God of Israel. **R.**

You poured abundant rains, God, your inheritance was weak and you repaired it. Your creatures dwelt in it; you will establish it in your goodness for the poor, O God. **R.**

Intercessions

That all governments work tirelessly to provide food, clothing and housing to all who need them, we pray to the Lord:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That every local community supports policies and actions to end homelessness in their districts, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That people living in the same neighborhood practice healthy living habits for the good of their community and common areas, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That we are always good stewards in the use and preservation of our common home, the earth, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That houses of worship remain sanctuaries where people may find rest and peace, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

From the Divine Mercy Chaplet

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.

Spiritual Work of Mercy

To “Comfort the afflicted” means entering into the realm of suffering of another person so that the person is not alone. Being with the afflicted person reminds him or her that the affliction, however terrible, does not exhaust the person’s identity. A remedy for the affliction may or may not be available, but the loving presence of a neighbor is always a possibility.

Quote of Mercy

“We can find no social or moral justification, no justification whatsoever, for lack of housing.” – Pope Francis

Visit the Sick – Forgive Offenses

Opening Prayer

O God, who willed that our infirmities be borne by your only begotten son to show the value of human suffering, listen to our prayers for our brothers and sisters who are sick; grant them the grace to offer their pain in union with Christ. We ask this through the same Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Read Luke 17:11–19

Responsorial Psalm 91:1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 9–10

R. God has put his angels in charge of you, to guard you in all your ways.

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shade of the Almighty, say to the Lord, “My refuge and fortress, my God in whom I trust.” **R.**

He will rescue you from the fowler’s snare, from the destroying plague, he will shelter you with his pinions, and under his wings you may take refuge. **R.**

You shall not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that roams in darkness, nor the plague that ravages at noon. **R.**

Because you have the Lord for your refuge and have made the Most High your stronghold, no evil shall befall you, no affliction come near your tent. **R.**

Intercessions

That the Church may continue the care and outreach to the sick that so clearly marked the ministry of Jesus, we pray to the Lord:

R. Lord, hear our prayer

That all nations will make sure that adequate health care is available for all their constituents, particularly those who cannot afford medical insurance, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That each of us may serve with compassion our friends and neighbors who are sick, as opportunities arise, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That those who are dealing with illness of any kind may, with God’s grace, offer their suffering in union with Christ’s, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That all who have passed through the gates of death may find their hope fulfilled in the life of heaven, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

From the Divine Mercy Chaplet

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.

Spiritual Work of Mercy

To “forgive offenses” is obvious in meaning, but difficult in practice. The ministry of Jesus could be said to center on the reconciliation of sinners, and he told his followers that they must be ready to forgive too. To forgive someone might be difficult because it can seem that the wrongdoer is cheating justice. Forgiveness doesn’t preclude justice, but it is a way to meet an injustice with mercy. Also, the one who forgives is freed from carrying the burden of anger.

Quote of Mercy

“The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love.” – Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Visit the Imprisoned – Bear Wrongs Patiently

Opening Prayer

Merciful God, to whom the secrets of the heart lie open, who recognize the just and make righteous the guilty, hear our prayers for our brothers and sisters held in prison; grant that through patience and hope they may find relief in their affliction and soon return unhindered to their families. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Read Luke 23:33–43

Responsorial Psalm 42:2, 3–4, 6, 8, 12

R. To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul, my God, in you I trust.

No one is disgraced who waits for you, but only those who are treacherous without cause. Make known to me your ways, Lord; teach me your paths. **R.**

Guide me by your fidelity and teach me, for you are God my savior. Remember your compassion and your mercy, O Lord, for they are ages old. **R.**

Remember no more the sins of my youth; remember me according to your mercy, because of your goodness, Lord. **R.**

All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth toward those who honor his covenant and decrees. For the sake of your name, Lord, pardon my guilt, though it is great. **R.**

Intercessions

For all who have influence and authority over criminal justice systems, that they use their power to establish effective rehabilitation programs for inmates, we pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

For the families of incarcerated people, especially children, that they receive the assistance they need to maintain a healthy and dignified life, we pray: **R.**

For all those guilty of crime, that they may be given the grace to admit every wrongdoing and the strength to follow the path of conversion, we pray: **R.**

For all who have been victims of crime, that they are able to forgive like Jesus and to labor for a world of justice and mercy, we pray: **R.**

For the entire human race, that we make the effort to rid our personal lives of evil and injustice in order to sow peace in every relationship and every encounter we have, we pray: **R.**

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

From the Divine Mercy Chaplet

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.

Spiritual Work of Mercy

“Bear wrongs patiently” doesn’t mean being a doormat or standing idle as injustice spreads. Consider how Jesus practiced this work of mercy: when mistreated he pressed forward in fulfilling God’s will, but he also named—and challenged people to reject—evil. Instead of demanding a tooth for a tooth, Jesus “conquered evil with good” (Rom 12:21). The key is to not take slights personally. To “bear wrongs patiently” is a virtue that every disciple of Christ can develop with grace and practice.

Quote of Mercy

“This time in your life can only have one purpose: to give you a hand in getting back on the right road, to give you a hand to help you rejoin society. All of us are part of that effort, all of us are invited to encourage, help and enable your rehabilitation. A rehabilitation which everyone seeks and desires: inmates and their families, correctional authorities, social and educational programs. A rehabilitation which benefits and elevates the morale of the entire community.” – Pope Francis, from his remarks to the detainees at Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia, which he visited on September 27, 2015.

Bury the Dead – Pray for the Living and the Dead

Opening Prayer

Almighty ever-living God, you rule both the living and the dead and are merciful to all. We humbly beseech you, that those for whom we pour out our prayers may obtain pardon for their sins through your tender mercy. May they rejoice together, be blessed in your sight, and praise you without end. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

Read Revelation 21: 1–5

Responsorial Psalm 23:1, 2–3, 4, 5, 6

R: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.

In green pastures he makes me lie down; to still waters he leads me; he restores my soul. He guides me along right paths for the sake of his name. **R.**

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me. **R.**

You set a table before me in front of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. **R.**

Indeed, goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of the Lord for endless days. **R.**

Intercessions

For all who have died, that they may share the lasting peace of Jesus, who is our resurrection and life, we pray to the Lord:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

For vision to see God's love in the world, in spite of pain and suffering, separation and loss, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That we may find comfort in our faith, which tells us that death is a passing into new life with Christ, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That all of us will enjoy a happy life on this earth, a peaceful death, and union with the Lord in heaven, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

From the Divine Mercy Chaplet

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.

Spiritual Work of Mercy

“Pray for the Living and the Dead” may seem like an obvious spiritual work of mercy, but does it translate into practice? Prayer for others is the foundation of the relationship we have with them. We pray for the living and the dead because we are members of the same body. We pray for wholeness in Christ. The practice must be sincere and intentional for the relationship to deepen.

Quote of Mercy

By Christ's rising from the grave, to them who are in the grave, hope is given of rising again through Him. – St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, III, q. 51,1

Clothe the Naked – Admonish Sinners

Opening Prayer

Almighty and merciful God, look with compassion on our affliction, and so lighten your children's burden and confirm their faith, that they may always trust without hesitation in your gracious providence. Amen.

Read Luke 10:25–37

Psalm 42

R. But you, Lord, my strength, come quickly to help me.

Like water my life drains away; all my bones are disjointed. My heart has become like wax, it melts away within me. **R.**

As dry as a potsherd is my throat; my tongue cleaves to my palate; you lay me in the dust of death. **R.**

I can count all my bones. They stare at me and gloat; they divide my garments among them; for my clothing they cast lots. **R.**

Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the grip of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth, my poor life from the horns of wild bulls. **R.**

Intercessions

That all governments provide the basic necessities of life to the most vulnerable people among their constituents, we pray to the Lord:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That the Church will always make service to the poor a primary means of manifesting its love for God and neighbor, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That Christians everywhere will be moved to share their blessings, both spiritual and material, with those who are less fortunate, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That those who are without adequate clothing, either for living or for employment, will be given what they require for a dignified life, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

That people who find themselves naked in the sense of being abandoned by family and society will receive the comfort and aid they need, we pray to the Lord: **R.**

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

From the Divine Mercy Chaplet

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.

Spiritual Work of Mercy

To “Admonish Sinners” is a venerable practice highly recommended in the New Testament. It requires discernment for the appropriate time and the right motivation. Correction of this sort should not be made as a judgment, but rather as a service of truth and love offered by one sinner to another leading each other to reconciliation and new life.

Quote of Mercy

“It hurt Jesus to love us. We have been created in His image for greater things, to love and to be loved. We must ‘put on Christ’ as Scripture tells us. And so, we have been created to love as He loves us. Jesus makes Himself the hungry one, the naked one, the homeless one, the unwanted one, and He says, ‘You did it to Me.’ On the last day He will say to those on His right, ‘whatever you did to the least of these, you did to Me, and He will also say to those on His left, whatever you neglected to do for the least of these, you neglected to do it for Me.’” – Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta, from her address at the National Prayer Breakfast, February 3, 1994.

SECTION 7

Glossary



Advent: The liturgical season immediately prior to Christmas, characterized by expectant waiting and preparation for the birth of Christ.

Bishop: A priest ordained for teaching the faith and leading the church. Bishops usually lead dioceses and offices in the Roman Curia. They are the successors to the Twelve Apostles.

Canon Law: The law that governs the Roman Catholic Church.

Cardinal: A senior church official, usually, though not always, a bishop. Together, as the College of Cardinals, they elect the pope. Most cardinals lead a diocese or archdiocese or an office in the Vatican.

Catholic Identity: What makes a Catholic Charities agency (or other Catholic institution) uniquely Catholic.

Catholic Social Doctrine: The body of Catholic teaching, developed since the Industrial Revolution, dealing with issues of poverty, wealth, peace, war, economics, and the role of government.

Charity: What is given out of love.

Code of Ethics: A code that sets out principles and procedures to be utilized in specific ethical situations. Codes of ethics help members of an organization make distinctions between right and wrong and apply these concepts to specific situations. Catholic Charities employees may be bound by more than one code of ethics, such as a professional code (e.g., social work) and the agency code.

Corporal Works of Mercy: Actions and practices required of the faithful that tend to bodily needs: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned, and burying the dead.

Curia: A group of officials who assist in the governance of a diocese or, in the case of the Roman Curia, the entire church.

Dicastery: A department of the Roman Curia.

Diocese: A “community of the Christian faithful in communion of faith and sacraments with their bishop ordained in apostolic succession.” The dioceses “are constituted after the model of the universal Church; it is in these [dioceses] and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 833)

Encyclical: A teaching letter from the pope that explains or clarifies existing doctrine.

Ethics: The process of making moral decisions about right and wrong, justice and injustice.

Formation: The shaping of a person’s faith life through education and spiritual exercises.

Gospel of Life: The teaching of the church regarding the protection of human life from conception until natural death. Pope John Paul II wrote an encyclical of the same name in 1995 that elaborates this teaching.

Holy Father: The pope.

Holy See: The term “Holy See” refers to the supreme authority of the Church, that is the Pope as Bishop of Rome and head of the College of Bishops. It is the central government of the Roman Catholic Church. As such, the Holy See is an institution which, under international law and in practice, has a legal personality that allows it to enter into treaties as the juridical equal of a state and to send and receive diplomatic representatives. (<https://holyseemission.org/contents/mission/our-history.php>)

Human Dignity: Because human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, they possess an inherent dignity from which all of the rights enumerated in Catholic Social Doctrine flow.

Incarnation: When God took human flesh through the birth of Jesus Christ.

Justice: What is due a person from being made in the image and likeness of God.

Lent: The liturgical season immediately prior to Easter, characterized by preparations of prayer, penitence, almsgiving, and self-denial.

Liturgical Seasons: The liturgical cycle divides the year into a series of liturgical seasons, each with its own emphases, and prayer.

Liturgy: The public worship of the church, such as, but not limited to, the Mass.

Mass: The celebration of the Eucharist, where Catholics receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

Natural Law: The law established by God in nature. The church believes that all human laws should have reference to the natural law.

Option for the Poor: The concept that God possesses a special, but not exclusive, love of people living in poverty and other vulnerable people. Our society must therefore reflect that special concern for the poor.

Pastor: A priest who leads a specific community of Catholics in a parish.

Pastoral Letter: A teaching letter of a bishop or conference of bishops (such as a state or nation).

Permanent Deacon: A clergyman ordained for service in the church. Permanent deacons can be married at the time of ordination but may not marry after ordination. (Transitional deacons are men preparing to be ordained to the priesthood. They may not marry.)

Presbyterate: The priests of a given diocese, understood as a body.

Priest: A clergyman who presides at the sacrifice of the Mass. Many priests serve in parishes, a good many of them as pastors.

Relic: An item of significance to the life of Christ or a saint recognized by the Church. A first-class relic is an item directly associated with the life of Christ or a body part of a saint. A second-class relic is an item that a saint wore or used.

Religious: Members of a religious order or institute for consecrated life.

Religious Order: Organizations of clergy and laity who live a common life following a religious rule under the leadership of a religious superior. Most members of religious orders take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Scripture: The books of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

Second Vatican Council (Vatican II): Held between the years 1962 and 1965, this “ecumenical council,” or gathering of the world’s bishops, produced four new constitutions and nine decrees addressing the church’s role and function in the modern world.

Spiritual Works of Mercy: Actions and practices required of the faithful that tend to spiritual needs: Counseling the doubtful; instructing the ignorant; admonishing the sinner; comforting the sorrowful; forgiving injuries; bearing wrongs patiently; praying for the living and the dead.

Subsidiarity: The principle that social matters should be addressed by the smallest or least centralized social unit except when the smaller authority is no longer capable of competently addressing these matters.

Synod: A meeting of church leaders. In the Catholic Church, Pope St. Paul VI in 1965 established a Synod of Bishops as a permanent institution of the church. The bishops gather with each other and the pope to talk about and pursue pastoral solutions that have a universal and validity and application.

Synodality: The involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is in communion when all of its members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in the evangelizing mission.

SECTION 8

Bibliography



This bibliography lists numerous resources for further study of Catholic Social Doctrine. The resources are divided into those with the Primary Authority of the Catholic Church—official church documents—and those with Secondary Authority, such as publications written by individuals and organizations about Catholic Social Doctrine.

1. Primary Authorities

- The New American Bible
- The Papal Encyclicals
- Bishop's Pastoral Letters
- Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church
- Catechism of the Catholic Church

2. Secondary Authorities

- CCUSA documents
- Books on the key themes of Catholic Social Doctrine
- Outlines of the history and themes of the Papal Encyclicals

Resource 1: Primary Authorities

The documents in each of the following sections are followed by links to online sources where you can access the text. Additionally, the following resources contain a comprehensive library of sources from all of the categories listed below.

The Bible

The Old Testament often refers to justice and provide guidance and foundations for Catholic Social Doctrine. Some of these references follow:

- Micah 6: The Lord requires us, "To do justice, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God."
- Exodus 22: Explains social laws requiring care for the Anawim—the widow, orphan, and the alien.
- Deut 15:11: Because the poor are always with us, we must open our hands.
- Prophets: Isaiah (the entire book); Habakkuk 1, 2
- Jubilee Justice: Lv. 25:8–17

New Testament References:

- Public Ministry of Jesus: Luke 4:18 – Jesus brings good tidings to the poor and freedom to the oppressed.
- The Rich Man and Lazarus: Luke 16:19 – He who was rich in life and did not help his neighbor finds himself poor in death.
- The Beatitudes: Matthew 5 – Blessed are the meek, those who thirst for righteousness, those who show mercy, etc.
- The Good Samaritan: Luke 10:29
- The Judgment of the Nations: Matthew 25:31 – Nations are judged for how they treat the least among them.

Books of the Bible on the USCCB website: bible.usccb.org/bible

The encyclicals of Pope John Paul II on social justice:

- *Laborum Exercem (On Human Work)*, 1981
- *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (The Social Concerns of the Church)*, 1988
- *Centesimus Annus (100 Years)*, 1991
- *Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life)*, 1995
- *Fides et Ratio (Faith and Reason)*, 1998

The encyclicals of Pope Benedict XVI on social justice:

- *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)*, 2005
- *Sacramentum Caritatis (The Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission)*, 2007
- *Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth)*, 2009

The encyclicals of Pope Francis on social justice:

- *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*, 2013
- *Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home)*, 2015
- *Fratelli tutti (On social friendship)*, 2020

The publications of Pope Leo XIV

- *Dilexi te (On love for the poor)*, 2025
- *Magnifica humanitas (On safeguarding the human person in the time of artificial intelligence)*, 2026

Documents of Vatican II (1965) on social justice:

- *Lumen Gentium (Pastoral Constitution on the Church)*
- *Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World)*
- *Ad Gentes (On Missionary Activity of the Church)*
- *Dignitatis Humanae (Declaration on Religious Freedom)*

Visit the Documents of the Second Vatican [Council](#) page for more.

Bishops' Pastoral Letters and Statements

These documents are issued by a bishop for his diocese or a bishops' conference for guidance and teaching in a specific diocese or area. Search for the publications listed below on [USCCB the statements and letters](#) page. www.usccb.org/resources.

Important Pastoral Letters issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

- "Brothers and Sisters to Us" (Racism), 1979
- "Capital Punishment" (The Death Penalty and Criminal Justice), 1980
- "The Challenge of Peace" (The Nuclear Threat and Disarmament), 1983
- "Economic Justice for All" (The United States Economy), 1986
- "Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for U.S. Parishes," 1997
- General Directory for Catechesis, 1998
- "Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity" (Immigrants and Refugees), 1998
- "A Commitment to all Generations: Social Security and the Common Good," 1999
- *In All Things Charity: A Pastoral Challenge for the New Millennium*, 1999 <https://www.usccb.org/committees/catholic-campaign-human-development/all-things-charity-pastoral-challenge-new-millennium>
- "Responsibility, Rehabilitation and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice," 2000
- "For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food," 2003
- "A Pastoral Letter on Racial Healing: 'We Are One Body,'" 2023
- "Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love," 2018

Each bishop may also issue individual and local statements in his area. You can locate these through your diocesan website or newspaper. A listing of diocesan websites can be found at www.catholic-church.org/cid/usa.html.

State Catholic Conferences may have statements on social justice. Access the websites of these Catholic Conferences at www.nasccd.org/.

Resource 2: Secondary Authorities

Catholic Charities USA resources

- Cadre Study: Toward a Renewed Catholic Charities Movement (Alexandria, VA: CCUSA, 1992)
- Vision 2000 (Alexandria, VA: CCUSA, 1997)
- Who Do You Say We Are? Perspectives on Catholic Identity in Catholic Charities (Alexandria, VA: CCUSA, 1997)
- Justice for Immigrants, 2005
- Poverty in America, A Threat to the Common Good, 2006
- Poverty and Racism, Overlapping Threats to the Common Good, 2006
- Home is the Foundation, 2009
- Poverty and Racism, Overlapping Threats to the Common Good, 2020

[Charities at Work Podcast](#), Presented by Catholic Charities USA, Includes an episode on each of the seven themes of Catholic Social Doctrine.

Books and Resources

Benestad, J. Brian, and Connors, Ryan, *Church, State, and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Doctrine*, Second Edition, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2025).

Brown, Dorothy, and McKeown, Elizabeth, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Catholic Charities USA: 100 Years at the Intersection of Charity and Justice, ed. J. Bryan Hehir (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays, Edited by Gerard V. Bradley and E. Christian Brugger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret, ed. Peter J. Henriot, Edward P. DeBerri, and Michael J. Schultheis (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

Cordes, Paul Josef, *Where Are the Helpers? Charity and Spirituality* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

Dorr, Donal, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching*, rev. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

Dues, Greg, *Catholic Customs & Traditions: A Popular Guide*, rev. (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994).

Gavin, Donald P., *The National Conference of Catholic Charities 1910-1960* (Milwaukee, WI: Catholic Life Publications Bruce Press, 1962).

Handbook of Catholic Social Teaching: A Guide for Christians in the World Today, Edited by Martin Schlag, (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2017).

Himes, Kenneth, *Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching*, (NY: Paulist Press, 2001).

Hittinger, F. Russell, *On the Dignity of Society: Catholic Social Teaching and Natural Law*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2024).

Kammer, Fred. *Doing Faithjustice: An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought and Action*, Fourth Edition. New York: Paulist Press, 2023.

Kammer, Fred, *Faith. Works. Wonders.: An Insider's Guide to Catholic Charities* (Eu- gene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publications, 2009).

Krier Mich, Marvin L., *The Challenge and Spirituality of Catholic Social Teaching*, (Louisville, KY: Sowers Books & Videos, 2005).

Massaro, Thomas J., *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2000).

Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations, ed. Kenneth R. Himes (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005).

Meeks, W. A., *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

Rowlands, Anna, *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times*, (London: T&T Clark, 2021).

Schmidhalter, Matthias, *The History of Caritas Internationalis*, (Vatican City: Caritas Internationalis, 2007).

Shea, Mark P., *A Primer on Catholic Social Teaching: The Church's Best-Kept Secret*, (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2020).

Snyder, Larry, *Think and Act Anew* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

Whalen, Michael D., *Seasons & Feasts of the Church Year: An Introduction* (Mahweh, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993).

Outlines of the History and Themes of the Papal Encyclicals

A Reader in Catholic Social Teaching: From Syllabus Errorum to Deus Caritas Est, Edited by Peter A. Kwasniewski, (Tacoma, WA: Cluny Media, 2017).

The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought, by Judith A Dwyer, ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994).

SECTION 9

Appendices



Please visit the Parish Social Ministry Resources section on CCConnect at ccconnect.net/topics/21141/media_center to access the electronic version of this publication, featured resources and web links, and PowerPoint presentation templates.

To access the resources below, please scan the individual QR codes.



1. Address of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV to the Members of the Board of Directors of Catholic Charities USA, May 4, 2026



2. Letter of Pope Leo XIV to the Participants in the 115th Annual Meeting of the Catholic Charities USA Network, October 4, 2025



3. Brief of Amicus Curiae Catholic Charities USA in support of Petitioners, Catholic Charities Bureau, Inc., et al., versus Respondents, Wisconsin Labor and Industry Review Commission, et al., February 3, 2025



4. *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, Seventh Edition, 2025, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.



5. *Catholic Charities USA: 100 Years at the Intersection of Charity and Justice*, Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, Chapter 3, "Theology, Social Teaching, and Catholic Charities: Three Moments in a History."



6. Summary - Encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas (On the Protection of the Human Person in the Age of Artificial Intelligence)*, Pope Leo XIV

Catholic Social Doctrine since 1891

Note: Much of the content in this section was drawn from *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret, Fourth edition*, ed. Peter J. Henriot, Edward P. DeBerri, and Michael J. Schultheis (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).

The Condition of Labor (Rerum Novarum): Leo XIII, 1891

Historical Context

The terrible exploitation and poverty of European and North American workers at the end of the nineteenth century prompted the writing of this encyclical.

Major areas of concern

- Care for the poor
- Rights of workers
- Role of private property
- Duties of workers and employers
- Return to Christian morals
- Role of public authority

The Reconstruction of the Social Order (Quadragesimo Anno): Pius XI, 1931

Historical Context

This encyclical commemorates the fortieth anniversary of *The Condition of Labor*. Pius wrote and issued this letter during a time when major depression was shaking the economic and social foundations in society worldwide. He strongly criticized the abuses of both capitalism and communism and attempted to update Catholic Social Doctrine to reflect changed conditions. He broadened the church's concern for poor workers to encompass the structures that oppress them. The principle of subsidiarity was first used in this letter.

Major Areas of Concern

- Role of the church
- Responsible ownership
- Labor and capital
- Public authority
- Just social order
- Capitalism and socialism

Mother and Teacher: Christianity and Social Progress (Mater et Magistra): John XXIII, 1961

Historical Context

This encyclical was issued in response to the severe imbalances between the rich and poor that exist in the world. John XXIII "internationalizes" Catholic Social Doctrine by examining, for the first time, the situation of countries that are not fully industrialized. He articulates an important role for the laity in applying the church's social teachings in the world. The letter also marks the 70th anniversary of *The Condition of Labor*.

Major areas of concern

- Just remuneration
- Subsidiarity
- Agriculture
- Economic development
- Role of the church
- International cooperation
- Socialization

Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris): John XXIII, 1963

Historical Context

Written during the first year of Vatican II, this is the first encyclical addressed to “all people of good will.” Issued shortly after the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and the erection of the Berlin Wall, this document spoke to a world aware of the dangers of nuclear war.

Major Areas of Concern

- Rights and duties
- Role of public authorities
- Common good
- Christian world order
- International relations
- Disarmament

The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes): Vatican Council document, 1965

Historical Context

This document represents the opinion of the overwhelming majority of the world’s bishops. It is seen as the most important document in the church’s social tradition. It announces the duty of the people of God to scrutinize the signs of the times in light of the Gospel and to bring about change in the world.

Major Areas of Concern

- Human dignity
- Common good
- Public responsibility
- Respect for families
- Right of culture
- Justice and development
- Peace

On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio): Paul VI, 1967

Historical Context

This is the first encyclical devoted entirely to the international development issue. The pope stresses the economic sources of war and highlights economic justice as the basis of peace.

Major Areas of Concern

- Structural injustice
- Church and development
- New humanism
- Common good
- Economic planning
- International trade
- Peace

An Apostolic Letter: A Call to Action (Octogesima Adveniens): Paul VI, 1971

Historical Context

This is an open, apostolic letter from the pope to Cardinal Maurice Roy, president of the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of *The Condition of Labor*. It deals with modern aspirations and ideas, especially liberalism and Marxism.

Major Areas of Concern

- Urbanization
- Role of local churches
- Duties of individual Christians
- Political activity
- Worldwide dimensions of justice

Justice in the World: Synod of Bishops, 1971

Historical Context

This document illustrates the powerful influence of native leadership of the churches of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It states that “action for justice” is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.

Major Areas of Concern

- Gospel mandate for justice
- Right to development
- Justice as Christian love
- Education for justice
- International action

Evangelization in the World (Evangelii Nuntiandi): Paul VI, 1975

Historical Context

This apostolic exhortation was written at the request of the 1974 Synod of Bishops. It affirms the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the active role that the institutional church and individual Christians must play in promoting justice in the world.

Major Areas of Concern

- Personal conversion
- Church and culture
- Justice and liberation
- Universal and individual churches
- Gospel and non-Christians

On Human Work (Laborem Exercens): John Paul II, 1981

Historical Context

Written almost entirely by the pope himself, this encyclical reflects statements made while he was a Polish prelate and those made during the first years of his pontificate. It also refines the church's teaching on property and its criticism of capitalism and Marxism.

Major Areas of Concern

- Dignity of work
- Capitalism and socialism
- Property
- Unions
- Employment (calls for workplace justice)
- Spirituality of work

The Social Concerns of the Church (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis): John Paul II, 1987

Historical Context

The encyclical reflects the severity of global economics at the end of the 1980s, with debt, unemployment, and recession seriously affecting the lives of millions not only in developing countries but also in more affluent countries.

Major Areas of Concern

- Authentic development
- North/South gap
- East/West blocs

- Solidarity
- Option for the poor
- Structures of sin
- Ecological concerns

The Hundredth Year (Centesimus Annus): John Paul II, 1991

Historical Context

The year 1991 marked the celebration of the 100th anniversary of The Condition of Labor. John Paul II speaks about capitalism, socialism, and communism in light of the collapse of the communist bloc.

Major Areas of Concern

- International development
- Religious freedom
- Economic justice
- Capitalism, socialism, communism
- Human and economic liberty

God is Love (Deus Caritas Est): Benedict XVI, 2005

Historical Context

This is the first encyclical by Pope Benedict XVI. A project begun by John Paul II, Benedict carried it forward by writing the first part of the letter, an essay on love. The second part is on the work of charitable organizations, the first of its kind.

Major Areas of Concern

- Establishing love as criteria for all church activity
- Theology of the church
- Relationship between justice and charity
- Relationships between politics and faith
- Formation of charity workers
- Attitude in charitable works

Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate): Benedict XVI, 2009

Historical Context

In the summer of 2009, the world faced a major economic crisis. World poverty was increasing, climate change was being debated, and disease and wars impacted the poor of the world.

Major Areas of Concern

- Christian humanism
- Economic justice
- Foreign aid
- Technology
- Environment
- Secularism and fundamentalism

Laudato si' (On Care for Our Common Home): Francis, 2015

Historical Context

In 2015, the global conversation about climate change and the ecological crisis anticipated the upcoming United Nations' conferences on sustainable development goals in September and the Paris Climate Accord in December of that year. As a sign of the church's commitment to act for positive change, Pope Francis sent a delegation headed by Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana to the meeting in Paris.

Major Areas of Concern

- Interrelations among God, human beings, Earth
- Integral human development
- Integral ecology
- Solidarity

Fratelli tutti (On social friendship), 2020

Historical Context

Pope Francis wrote this encyclical at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many communities were locked down and individuals were isolated from one another. The need to cultivate a culture of encounter is stressed.

Major Areas of Concern

- Openness to migrants
- Solidarity
- Common destination of created goods
- Politics as a vocation
- Religious freedom

Dilexit nos (He has loved us), 2024

Dilexit nos centers on the love of Jesus for humanity as symbolized by his sacred heart. Jesus became human, so he has a human heart both in the literal sense and in the sense of the heart as the core of the human person's being. Jesus models for us how to love as human beings. Like him, we can open our heart to God the Father, receive God's love, and then love others in response. As we receive Jesus' love more and more, through prayer and reading scripture and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, we are moved to love others through sorrow for our sins and repairing our relationships and social structures to anticipate God's kingdom.

Historical context

Dilexit nos is the last encyclical by Pope Francis, who died April 21, 2025. Considering the world from his perspective as a global leader, Francis wanted to stress what is essential—love for our brothers and sisters. In response to war, polarization, consumerism, and the misuse of technology, we all need a change of heart that focuses on the common good and the dignity of each person.

Major areas of concern

- The heart as the core of the human person
- Conversion of heart by yielding to Jesus
- Adoration of Jesus
- Compunction for sins
- Reparation and building a new civilization of love
- Mission to the world

Dilexi te (I have loved you), 2025

The apostolic exhortation reminds the church of the dignity of those who are poor, and this includes not only material poverty but also other forms: spiritual, social, developmental, educational/knowledge. A person does not lose his or her dignity if she or he has less than others in terms of money or talents or other "goods." A person who has a developmental disability, for example, is no less human than someone with mature (or developed) faculties. However, those who are impoverished do deserve special attention in order to flourish, to be part of the process of integral human development that everyone should enjoy. This conviction of the Church – of the preferential option for the care of those who are poor – is grounded in none other than the person of Jesus, who did not deem equality with God something to be exploited for his own sake. Rather, as St. Paul writes to the Philippians, Jesus became poor. Divine, he took on mortal flesh. Moreover, Jesus identifies with the poor: whatever you do to the least of these you do to me. So Pope Leo XIV stresses that if we do not love and care for the poor, we cannot claim to love Jesus.

Historical context

Pope Francis started *Dilexi te* and Pope Leo XIV finished it. *Dilexi te* is an apostolic exhortation that expands on *Dilexit nos* with a special emphasis on caring for people who are impoverished materially and in other ways. The disparity between rich and poor prompted this exhortation to refocus on people who need care and assistance to avoid forgetting about them.

Major areas of concern

- Preferential option for the poor
- Poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon
- Jesus identifies with the poor
- Repairing social structures damaged by sin
- Working for the integral development of each human being
- Importance of organized care for the poor as well as personal almsgiving

Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)

A PowerPoint presentation on *God is love (Deus caritas est)*, Benedict XVI, 2005.
See CCConnect for all PowerPoints.

Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles

By the [School of Social Work, College of St. Catherine and University of St. Thomas](#)

Human Dignity

Dignity of the human person is the ethical foundation of a moral society. The measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person. Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals. Social workers treat each person in a caring, respectful manner mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities and social institutions to individuals' needs and social problems. Social workers act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person or group on any basis.

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

In a marketplace where profit often takes precedence over the dignity and rights of workers, it is important to recognize that the economy must serve the people, not the other way around. If the dignity of work is to be protected, the basic rights of workers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and join unions, to private property and to economic initiative. Social workers challenge injustice related to unemployment, workers' rights, and inhumane labor practices. Social workers engage in organized action, including the formation of and participation in labor unions, to improve services to clients and working conditions.

Community and the Common Good

All individuals by virtue of their human nature have social needs. Human relationships enable people to meet their needs and provide an important vehicle for change. The family, in all its diverse forms, is the central social institution that must be supported and strengthened. The way in which society is organized—in education, economics, politics, government—directly affects human dignity and the common good. Social workers promote the general welfare and development of individuals, families, and communities. Social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people at all levels to promote the well-being of all.

Solidarity

We are our brother's and sister's keeper. We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. An ethic of care acknowledging our interdependence belongs in every aspect of human experience including the family, community, society, and global dimensions. Social workers understand that relationships between and among people are an important vehicle for change. Social workers engage people as partners in the helping process and seek to strengthen relationships among people to promote well-being at all levels.

Rights and Responsibilities

People have a right and a responsibility to participate in society and to work together toward the common good. Human dignity is protected and healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Accordingly, every person has a fundamental right to things necessary for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are responsibilities to family, community, and society. Social workers, mindful of individual differences and diversity, respect and promote the right of all individuals to self-determination and personal growth and development. Social workers provide education and advocacy to protect human rights and end oppression. Social workers empower individuals/groups to function as effectively as possible.

Stewardship

It is incumbent upon us to recognize and protect the value of all people and all resources on our planet. While rights to personal property are recognized, these rights are not unconditional and are secondary to the best interest of the common good, especially in relation to the right of all individuals to meet their basic needs. Stewardship of resources is important at all levels/settings: family, community, agency, and society. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation for all people. Social workers promote the general welfare of people and their environments.

Priority for the Poor and Vulnerable

A basic moral test of any community or society is the way in which the most vulnerable members are faring. In a society characterized by deepening divisions between rich and poor, the needs of those most at risk should be considered a priority. Social workers advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and to promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice. Social workers pursue change with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups to: address poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice; expand choice and opportunity; and promote social justice.

Governance/Principle of Subsidiarity

Governance structures in all levels/settings have an imperative to promote human dignity, protect human rights, and build the common good. While the principle of subsidiarity calls for the functions of government to be performed at the lowest level possible in order to insure for self-determination and empowerment, higher levels of government have the responsibility to provide leadership and set policy in the best interest of the common good. Social workers engage in social and political action in order to promote equality, challenge injustice, expand opportunity, and empower individuals, families, and groups to participate in governance structures at all levels.

Participation

All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. Social justice and human dignity require that all people be assured [of] a minimum level of participation in the community. It is the ultimate injustice for a person or a group to be excluded unfairly. Social workers strive to ensure access to equal opportunity and meaningful participation for all. Social workers empower individuals and groups to influence social policies and institutions and promote social justice. Social workers advocate for change to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources and opportunities required to meet basic needs and develop fully.

Promotion of Peace

In light of the human dignity and worth of all and the ethical imperatives of solidarity and stewardship, we are called to promote peace and non-violence at all levels—within families, communities, society, and globally. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon the respect and cooperation between peoples and nations. Social workers promote peace and the general welfare of society from local to global levels.

Copyright © July 2006, revised Aug. 2010, St. Catherine University, University of St. Thomas School of Social Work Sources: [NASW Code of Ethics](#), *U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of Social Justice— Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis*

The Catholic Identity of Catholic Charities

An excerpt from *Faith. Works. Wonders: An Insider's Guide to Catholic Charities*, by Fred Kammer, SJ

Across this nation there are hundreds of independent organizations, involving thousands of programs, which make up the Catholic Charities network. [The staff, board members, and volunteers of these organizations are] the face and hands and heart of Catholic Charities. And despite the incredible variety of people of many faiths and none who make Catholic Charities a reality, certain essentials make the agencies Catholic Charities. Ten of them stand out. They are drawn from the history of the mission of Catholic Charities..., from authoritative documents of the Catholic Church, and from the experiences of Catholic Charities agencies across the country.

First, this ministry is rooted in the Scriptures. The work done by Catholic Charities has its roots deep in the Scriptures. In the Jewish Scriptures, at the heart of the biblical concept of justice was the care of the widow, orphan, and the stranger. Responding to their needs was a special responsibility of the Jewish people, and this justice was the gauge of whether they understood their relationship to God and to one another. Ironically, the contemporary work of Catholic Charities worldwide continues to be primarily to these same groups who comprised the biblical anawim: poor women; poor children; and those marginalized because, literally, they are foreign workers, immigrants, and refugees, or because they are racially different, or because they have a disability, HIV/AIDS, or some other condition that sets them apart. How these people are treated tests every society's justice and whether people understand that we are all children of one God who is passionately concerned about the least among us.

This was the teaching of Jesus as well. In the famous judgment scene in Matthew 25, one of Pope Benedict's "great parables," Jesus tells his followers that the nations will be judged by how they treat him – found among the hungry, homeless, sick, imprisoned, and poor. This teaching is reinforced in the great scene in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of John when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and charges them to do so for others. It is an expression of the servant model of Church [taught by] the Second Vatican Council (see *The Church in the Modern World*) and underscored by Pope Francis in *Fratelli tutti* (2020): "Solidarity finds concrete expression in service" and "service in great part means 'caring for vulnerability, for the vulnerable members of our families, our society, our people'" (No. 115).

Second, this ministry has been an integral part of the Catholic Church for two thousand years. As the apostolic Church formed, the apostles faced a challenge that threatened to tear apart the new Christian community. The charge brought by the Greek-speaking Christians was that their widows were not receiving a share of the community's goods. The apostles then appointed the seven deacons; and their first ministry was to make sure that justice was reflected in the life of the community—that poor widows and children were cared for. As Pope Benedict pointed out, this ministry was institutionalized in the Egyptian monasteries of the fourth century, then in Church corporate structures of the sixth century, which were entrusted by government with the means to assist the poor.

This ministry of caring for the needy also was institutionalized in the great monasteries of the first millennium spread across the Church. The monastic communities of men and women took care of orphans, the sick, the elderly, travelers, and the poor. Centuries later, from the monasteries it was carried by women and men religious back into the cities where orphanages, homes for the sick and elderly, hospices, and many other centers for health and social services were established. Still later, lay and religious associations such as those begun by St. Vincent de Paul in France in the seventeenth century expanded and deepened this work. Many other great Saints were known for their ministries to the poor and vulnerable: St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare, St. Peter Claver, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Martin de Porres, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and, in the United States, Sts. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Frances Cabrini, and Katherine Drexel.

Carried to the New World, this tradition of caring for the needy became part of the institutional and parish life of the Catholic Church here. The first such foundation was the orphanage, home for “women of ill repute,” school, and health care facility begun by the Ursuline Sisters in New Orleans in 1727. By 1900, over eight hundred Catholic charitable institutions existed in the United States. Now, staff and volunteers care for fetal alcohol syndrome infants, sponsor group homes for persons with mental disabilities, provide high-rise apartments for the elderly, resettle refugees and immigrants, counsel troubled families, offer hospice to persons with HIV/AIDS, feed hungry families, and shelter people who are homeless.

Third, Catholic Charities promote the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the human person. The ultimate rationale for these services is the belief in the sanctity of the human person and the dignity of human life, the underlying foundation for all of Catholic social teaching. This is reflected, for example, in adoption services that are among the most traditional in Charities and the care for the sick and the elderly which is a hallmark of the work of Catholic Charities. While society may exclude some people because they are sick, disabled, poor, or racially different, Catholic Charities reach out to them with respect for their human dignity. While society may reject some people because they are in prison or undocumented, Catholic Charities work to enhance their dignity, improve their lives, and meet their needs. Jesus Christ rejected no one from his healing touch and was known for his fellowship meals with tax collectors and sinners. So, too, Catholic Charities welcome persons with HIV, undocumented migrants, or others whom political majorities would ignore or punish.

Because of the theological and philosophical traditions of this faith community, at the heart of which are human sanctity and dignity, Catholic Charities have certain values and ethical standards to shape their work; these are set out in the Catholic Charities USA Code of Ethics.... [Among these values is the preferential option for and with the poor and oppressed articulated by Pope Francis and so many others: “none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 201).] This preference is fleshed out in the nature of Catholic Charities’ services, the locations of their offices, the use of sliding fee scales, and advocacy for social justice.

Fourth, Catholic Charities agencies are authorized to exercise their ministry by the diocesan bishop. Whether founded by a diocese, parish, religious congregation, or lay activists, Catholic charitable works and institutions root their formal Catholic identity in relationship to the Chapter and the diocesan bishop. As emphasized by Pope Benedict in *Deus Caritas Est*, the bishop is charged in church teaching and canon law with responsibility for the apostolate within diocesan boundaries and with a special charge to care for the poor. Organized in terms of canon and civil law, Catholic Charities agencies have responsibilities to operate consistently with the teachings and values of the church. While there is great organizational variety, the civil law structure of even a separately incorporated charities agency generally allows the diocesan bishop to exercise his canonical responsibilities for the apostolate.

Fifth, Catholic Charities agencies respect the religious beliefs of those they serve. Many people are surprised to learn that Catholic Charities agencies serve people of all faiths. They may be even more surprised to learn that most agencies do not keep statistics on the religious affiliation of those coming to them. This is not an accident of history or a result of receiving funding from the United Way or government entities. Instead, it reflects a determined position to serve the entire community, a custom going back as far as the fourth century and, in this country, to the Ursuline Sisters in New Orleans in 1727. Again, in the pattern of Christ Jesus, the agencies' response is to families and persons in need – those who are hungry, homeless, depressed, troubled, and frail – regardless of their religious beliefs. We see this in Jesus' own ministry, where he cured the daughter of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 and the centurion's servant in Luke 7. Pope [Francis grounded his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*] in this inclusiveness [calling all people to love others with no bounds and without regard to "differences of origin, nationality, colour or religion" (No. 3)].

This decidedly ecumenical approach is simultaneously very Catholic. It reflects our respect for human dignity, religious liberty, and the ecumenical sensitivity promoted at Vatican II. Many people come to Catholic Charities for particular needs: a hot meal, a safe place to stay, a voucher for prescription medicine, resettlement in a new nation, and resources to rebuild after a natural disaster. They do not seek or need religious proselytizing, nor would staff members and volunteers offer it. Agencies are Catholic precisely in their respect for others' religious beliefs. Moreover, the love of God is to be shown in the work of Catholic Charities, not imposed as a condition for housing, food, or counseling services. As Pope John Paul II told [those attending CCUSA's Annual Gathering"] in San Antonio in 1987, "For your long and persevering service - creative and courageous, and blind to the distinctions of race or religion—you will hear Jesus' words of gratitude, 'You did it for me.'"

For a variety of reasons, however, Catholic Charities also may sponsor particular programs for the Catholic community, including marriage preparation and counseling, parish outreach and training, Catholic school counseling, or other more specific services. These are usually funded by the Catholic Church, used primarily by Catholics, and have a more explicitly Catholic content where appropriate.

Sixth, Catholic Charities agencies recognize that some services require attention to the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of those they serve. In some services, it is appropriate and necessary to recognize and respond to the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of [clients]. Addiction treatment programs, marriage and family counseling, grief ministries, and other services call for attention to all the integrated facets of human beings. Catholic Charities agencies do this in many ways consistent with their respect for the individual's religious beliefs. For example, twelve-step programs have a distinctive spiritual component essential to their success. Homeless shelters often provide opportunities for sharing faith and hope, prayer of all kinds, and expressions of belief in a higher power. Senior centers and residences may provide opportunities for chaplaincy services of various denominations, depending on the desires of those served. And marriage and family counseling often must attend to the spiritual beliefs and values of those involved and how those beliefs help or hinder movement towards healing within the family. Counselors recognize and affirm the importance of this spiritual dimension of those they serve, again without imposing religious beliefs upon those involved.

Pope Benedict underscores this openness to the spiritual in all of the agencies' services when he emphasizes the concern of charity for the whole person. Often, he says, no matter what the need in question, people crave "the look of love" because of their interior desire for a sign of love, of concern.⁶ [Pope Francis builds upon Benedict's teaching when he writes, "Appearances notwithstanding, every person is immensely holy and deserves our love."]

Seventh, Catholic Charities have a special relationship to the Catholic diocese and to Catholic parishes. In over half of U.S. dioceses, Catholic Charities agencies have formal programs through which the agency seeks to support and encourage the parish in its ministry to the community and its needs. In many others this parish relationship also exists, although more informally. In this capacity, agencies assist parishioners in the exercise of their baptismal commitment to the poor and needy. Agencies provide professional resources, training, support, and encouragement to parish-based ministries such as food pantries, outreach to the frail elderly, community organizing, legislative networks working for social justice, and action for global solidarity and peace. By so doing, agencies help pastors and parishes to carry out their responsibilities to form caring faith communities. They also expand agencies' own ministry through the hands and hearts of many thousands of parishioners, and even enlist parishes and parishioners in joint ventures such as community-wide soup kitchens, sponsorship of refugee families, and prison visitations. The U.S. bishops urged parish leaders and members to develop links with diocesan Catholic Charities agencies and encouraged Charities agencies to reach out to parishes to support their social concern activities.

Catholic Charities agencies also cooperate with diocesan leadership by operating or collaborating with diocesan offices and programs, funded largely by the church. These would include the Catholic Campaign for Human Development anti-poverty program, family life and respect life programs, youth organizations, offices for African-American or Hispanic-American Catholics, Catholic Relief Services, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and justice and peace offices. In so doing, Catholic Charities assist the Catholic Church in carrying out other related aspects of the church's ministry within and to the wider community and help fulfill their own mission to serve people in need, advocate for a just society, and bring people together to solve community problems.

Eighth, Catholic Charities agencies work in active partnership with other religiously sponsored charities and with the civic community. Reflecting the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and an even longer experience with practical ecumenism, Catholic Charities agencies express the willingness and even responsibility of the Catholic Church to work hand in hand with other religions and other people of good will to serve community needs. They build coalitions to address emerging community needs by developing new collaborative responses, community education, and combined advocacy before public and private forums. The U.S. bishops have encouraged such activities and partnerships: "Voluntary organizations play an important part in our collective efforts to promote the common good, protect human life, reach out to people in need, and work for a more just and compassionate society ... Parishes, diocesan organizations, and Catholic charity and justice organizations should take every reasonable opportunity to work with such associations as well as with those organizations sponsored by other faith communities."

The bishops also urged collaboration with the private sector where businesses, corporations, and unions could play a strong role in promoting jobs with decent wages, providing volunteers and financial support, and supporting charities with technical assistance, business skills, and capital. Pope Benedict urged charity workers to “work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service that Christ requested of his disciples.”

Ninth, Catholic Charities support an active public-private partnership with government at all levels. The Catholic Church has a long and strong tradition of teaching about the responsibilities of governments for promoting the common good and protecting the least among us and the responsibilities of Catholics as citizens and taxpayers for support of those roles and active participation in civic life. In *Deus caritas est*, Pope Benedict taught that, “The just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics.” In carrying out this responsibility, “justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics.” The Church’s role here is the formation of consciences and education as to the “authentic requirements of justice” in the civic realm in which everyone has a duty. “Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew.” The Church does not replace the State, but has a duty to promote justice in the public dialogue.

An additional relationship exists between Church and State, Benedict teaches, whereby there has been “the growth of many forms of cooperation between State and Church agencies.” In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, the government encourages various forms of subsidiary organizations such as Catholic Charities agencies, who bring their own strong mission, resources, and volunteers to serve the needs of the public. In many cases as well, government provides the kinds of financial resources which are far beyond the wherewithal of private charities who in turn bring to bear the human and spiritual resources which are unavailable to government.

Two instances come to mind. One is the provision of income support, often to the elderly, disabled, and needy families, a role for which only government has the resources. The Compendium speaks of such redistribution of income under the heading of social justice and the pursuit of authentic well-being within a country. Charities cannot replace this function of government—basic income support—but they often provide additional financial and in-kind support (food, clothing, a rent payment) in times of crisis, when government income programs are clearly inadequate to meet family needs (which is the case all too often), and for short-term needs of families otherwise able to support themselves.

The second area of complementarity between government and voluntary agencies such as Catholic Charities is in the provision of needed social services. In the light of these teachings, Catholic Charities have sought and accepted partnerships with cities, counties, states, and the Federal Government in which they receive government funding for services to the wider community that they judge to be consistent with their own missions. These payments may take the form of contracts to deliver particular services such as foster care of vulnerable youth, reimbursement for care of individuals paid by government such as Medicaid, and government funding of construction such as housing. Government provides funding; and agencies bring additional funding, volunteers, efficiency, values, community credibility, and dedication to the service of local communities and their needy families.

As the U.S. bishops explain approvingly: “The U.S. government has also provided funding for needed social services by purchasing service contracts and providing other funding for nonprofit agencies. These agencies, in turn, have provided hands-on care by trained staff, enrichment of volunteers, private fund raising, and dedicated commitment to deliver the services to children, families, elders, and people with disabilities.” What the bishops describe at the level of the federal government is also true of state and local governments as well, either with federal funding delivered through block grants and other devices to the states and localities or with separate state or local funds.

The bishops have an important caveat as well. In describing positively this partnership between State and Church, they provided this caution: “In establishing partnerships with voluntary agencies, public sector authorities must not make requirements that weaken agency identities and integrity or undermine agency commitments to serve people in need.” Indeed, federal law protects the free exercise of religion for not only individuals but also religious organizations, schools, private associations, and businesses.

Tenth, Catholic Charities agencies blend advocacy for those in need and public education about social justice with service to individuals, families, and communities. Throughout the last century, the Catholic Church has been increasingly outspoken about the need for economic and political change. This change is consistent with the obligations of social justice in order to meet the needs of the entire community, with a special concern for the poorest and most vulnerable. Such change is in addition to the obligations of individuals to reach out to those nearest to them in charity and justice.

Catholic Charities, following the lead of the Vatican and the bishops of the United States, have made working for a more just society an integral part of its understanding of its mission. It is not enough to feed more and more hungry families; Charities also must raise the public question about why so much hunger persists in this wealthy nation and how that condition might be changed by individual, community, business, and government action. Thus, local Catholic Charities understand that advocacy, empowerment, and work for justice are intrinsic parts of their mission of caring for individuals, families, and communities in need. In taking this position, Catholic agencies understand the intimate connection between justice and charity arising from the Gospel. This connection has been a central theme for Catholic Charities USA from its founding in 1910, promoted consistently in the recommendations of the Cadre and Vision 2000, and contained in the mission and requirements of the various editions of the Code of Ethics of the organization.

Sample Job Description: Director of Catholic Mission Integration

Key Components

1. Ensure that all aspects of Catholic Charities operations are carried out in accord with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.
2. Assist agency CEO/director to integrate and operationalize the mission and values of Catholic Charities in all its entities, programs, services, and activities.
3. Educate and train management and staff about Catholic identity; develop orientation programs for staff, boards, and volunteers around mission and core values of Catholic Charities.
4. Suggest measures and programs that will clarify and nurture Catholic identity in a context that respects the diversity of staff, clients, and others who are involved with Catholic human services.
5. Assist management staff in the integration of strategic initiatives related to Catholic mission and identity.
6. Work with designated staff on employee orientation and volunteer development.

Major Duties and Responsibilities

1. Provide opportunities for education and consciousness-raising about the nature of the organized mission.
2. Suggest methodologies for articulating and witnessing Catholic identity and mission with staff, clients, and local community.
3. Provide opportunities for dialogue and understanding for agency employees in dealing with the cultural mores, values, and beliefs of other world religions.
4. Enhance existing collaborations with interfaith groups to deepen respect for and mutual understanding among colleagues, clients, and community members.
5. Organize days of reflection/retreats for employees' spiritual renewal and personal enrichment.
6. Assist in employee training on the CCUSA Code of Ethics.
7. Act as a resource for staff dealing with ethical concerns and assist with the establishment and work of ethics committees where they exist.

8. Develop and/or monitor programs for pastoral care and the spiritual and faith development of individuals in our care, respectful of each individual's faith tradition.
9. Monitor sense of identity and mission effectiveness in Catholic Charities and report to CEO and to board, when appropriate.
10. Develop measurement tools for evaluating performances of entities, programs, services, and activities in living out the mission.
11. Integrate where possible spiritual and faith dimensions into staff development programs.
12. Facilitate the planning, organizing, and execution of the spiritual aspects of annual events sponsored by Catholic Charities.
13. Monitor the integration of the servant leadership model and orientation programs.
14. Develop and monitor a plan for communication with all staff concerning Catholic mission and values integration.
15. Other related duties as assigned.

Primary Skills

- Knowledge and competency in Catholic theology
- Ability to develop, implement, and evaluate mission integration and Catholic identity curricula
- Strong knowledge of and commitment to CCUSA's mission and Catholic identity
- Knowledge of and competency in training and learning methods
- Solid knowledge of strategic planning
- Ability to work with people of diverse backgrounds
- Respect for and sensitivity to diverse faiths
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills and experience speaking with and presenting to large and small audiences
- Strong ability to persuade
- Strong customer/member services orientation
- Sound judgment and decisiveness
- Strong facilitation skills

Sample Job Description: Mission Integration and Catholic Identity Committee

The Mission Integration and Catholic Identity Committee assists the diocesan director and/or the director of mission integration in achieving greater mission integration and mission effectiveness in the agency.

In some agencies, the diocesan director is responsible for the integration of Catholic identity into the life of the agency. Many agencies do not have mission directors. In this situation, the committee provides support, development, and implementation of the agency's Catholic identity.

The role of the committee is basically the same as the job description for the director of mission integration (read Key Components).

The committee could be made up of staff representing various departments in the agency. It could also include representation from volunteers, local religious communities, and others interested in the Catholic identity of the agency. Actual implementation of staff programming related to Catholic identity remains the responsibility of the diocesan director and his or her delegates.

The committee will discuss such topics as mission and identity trainings and resources, spirituality in the workplace, servant leadership, the CCUSA Code of Ethics, and mission-based recruitment and retention.

This would place promotion of mission and Catholic identity at the center of strategic planning and operational priorities.