The Church’s social teaching helps every Catholic to live a fully just life. The teaching involves a set of principles which are based on the Gospels, and which have been developed mainly over the last hundred years. This set of fact sheets will outline the basic principles and will give examples of how they can guide our lives and our action in the world.

**SOME USEFUL WEBSITES**

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council  
www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

Faith Doing Justice  
www.faithdoingjustice.com.au

Office for Social Justice, Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis  
www.osjspm.org

*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church  
www.hobart.catholic.org.au  
See link on left hand side under “Universal Church”

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**FACT SHEET 1**

**CONTACT THE COMMISSION**

Catholic Diocesan Centre  
35 Tower Road  
New Town  
GPO Box 62, Hobart, Tasmania, 7001  
phone (03) 6208 6271  
fax (03) 6208 6299  
email tcjcp@aohtas.org  
visit www.tasjustice.org.au

We have a small library of resource material on Catholic Social Teaching and social justice issues. You are welcome to borrow from us.

We have a collection of brochures and flyers on various social justice issues for you to take away.

Ask us for information about web resources or personal contacts on particular issues.
Human Dignity and Human Rights

The concept of human dignity is the starting point and central concern of Catholic thinking about human rights. Other Catholic social teachings draw their inspiration from that concept. The Catholic Church believes that each person is created in the image and likeness of God and is therefore equal in dignity and has equal rights. Human dignity is inalienable: a person does not lose their dignity through any means – for example: disability, age, lack of success, poverty, religion, race or gender.

“The Catholic Church is driven by an understanding that each and every person is a child of God with a dignity that nothing can erase. It therefore supports the sanctity of human life without exception, even the lives of those who have inflicted great evil on other people. All are made in the image and likeness of God and nothing that we might ever say or do can remove that dignity. In contrast with this reverence for life, the death penalty undermines society’s respect for human life and contributes to a culture of vengeance and death.”


RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY

A just society can exist only when it respects the dignity of the human person. As a result, “the social order and its development must invariably work to the benefit of the human person, since the order of things is to be subordinate to the order of persons and not the other way around.” (Gaudium et Spes, Section 26)

HUMAN RIGHTS

The concept of human rights flows from our understanding of human dignity.

Pope John Paul II declared that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948 was a “true milestone on the path of humanity’s moral progress.” He went on to say that “no-one can legitimately deprive another person, whoever they may be, of these rights, since this would do violence to their nature.” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church 152,153)

Human rights require that the essential needs of each person are met both materially and spiritually. They apply to every stage of life and every political, social, economic and cultural situation. They are both universal and indivisible.

QUESTIONS

What does this mean for us in our daily lives?

- We can ask ourselves the question: “Does this decision/situation/policy/act/law respect the dignity and rights of all concerned?”
- If the dignity of the human person is never forfeited, how should we treat those who transgress, or who we suspect transgress, our social laws or codes – for example: criminals, terrorists?
- What do I know of Restorative Justice?
- Do I treat all people with respect? Do I stand up for the rights of others as well as my own?
- Do I care as much for the struggles of those people who are different from me or who live far away?

RESPONSIBILITY

It is the responsibility of every man and woman to acknowledge, respect and uphold these rights. Pope John XXIII said “Those, therefore, who claim their own rights, yet altogether forget or neglect to carry out their respective duties, are people who build with one hand and destroy with the other.” (Compendium 156)

We, as Catholic people, know deeply how far short the world falls in protecting peoples’ human rights. The principles of Catholic social teaching can assist us in practical ways to play our part in developing a more just world.

Science and technology have given us many good things and are an important part of the development of our civilisation. However, they are to be used only for the common good, and not just for their own sake.