



INSIGHTS FROM CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING ON Poverty

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations prioritized the eradication of extreme poverty, defined as living on less than \$2.15 a day. By the close of 2022, estimates suggest that over 670 million people, or just under 10% of the global population, remained trapped in extreme poverty. The current levels of hunger, reminiscent of 2005, are exacerbated by rising food prices, creating significant challenges for many nations.

Beyond the absence of basic necessities like food and shelter, those in poverty face social stigmatization, exclusion from civic participation, limited access to education and culture, vulnerability to climate change, and isolation from thriving communities. Christianity, grounded in the belief that all people are made in the image of God, calls for the upholding of human dignity. Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes the need to address poverty and suffering, urging national and global economic policies to focus on securing justice for the poor. National and global economic policies must work to secure justice for the poor.

Reflections from Catholic Social Teaching

The solidarity which binds humanity together as members of a common family makes it impossible for wealthy nations to look with indifference upon the hunger, misery and poverty of other nations whose citizens are unable to enjoy even elementary human rights. The nations of the world are becoming more and more dependent on one another and it will not be possible to preserve a lasting peace so long as glaring economic and social imbalances persist.
— *Pope John XXIII, Mater et Magistra, 157*

As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental “option for the poor” — to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, and to assess lifestyles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. This “option for the poor” does not mean pitting one group against another, but rather, strengthening the whole community by assisting those who are the most vulnerable. As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of all our brothers and sisters, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response. — *USCCB, Economic Justice for All, 16*

Working for the common good requires us to promote the flourishing of all human life and all of God’s creation. In a special way, the common good requires solidarity with the poor who are often without the resources to face many problems, including the potential impacts of climate change. Our obligations to the one human family stretch across space and time. They tie us to the poor in our midst and across the globe, as well as to future generations. The commandment to love our neighbor invites us to consider the poor and marginalized of other nations as true brothers and sisters who share with us the one table of life intended by God for the enjoyment of all.

—*USCCB, Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good, 25*

Statistics on Domestic and Global Poverty

- The World Bank reports that 719 million people, 9.2% of the world's population, live on less than \$2.15 a day. In 2022, 11.5% of the United States' population, 37.9 million people, lived in poverty. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of children living in extreme poverty, reaching 40% in 2022. *Sources: World Bank, Our World in Data, World Vision.*
- Among the 74 million children living in the U.S., 11 million live in poverty. One in six children under five (3 million children) were poor, the highest rate of any age group. *Source: Children's Defense Fund*
- One in nine people globally is currently undernourished. Of these 795 million people, 98% live in developing countries. Every ten seconds a child dies of malnutrition, making up 45% of all child deaths under age five in developing countries. Those who do survive are often forced to go to school hungry, which hinders their ability to grow and learn and puts them behind in school. As of 2018, according to federal statistics, 11.1 percent of the U.S. population was food insecure. *Sources: The Borgen Project, Bread for the World-The Hunger Report*
- In 2022, 2.2 billion people still lacked safely managed drinking water, including 703 million without a basic water service; 3.5 billion people lacked safely managed sanitation, including 1.5 billion without basic sanitation services; and 2 billion lacked a basic handwashing facility, including 653 million with no handwashing facility at all. Women and girls spend an estimated 200 million hours carrying water every day, walking 6 kilometers (about 3.7 miles) every day to haul 40 pounds of water. More than 1,000 children under 5 die every day from diseases caused by contaminated water, poor sanitation, and unsafe hygiene practices. *Sources: United Nations Sustainable Development, World Vision, World Health Organization.*

Questions for Candidates to Public Office on Ecological Justice

- Does your administration support giving foreign aid to impoverished nations, particularly in the Global South (including the most disadvantaged regions of Central America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia)? Do you believe that foreign development assistance should be unrestricted or include conditions?
- Many believe that rapid industrialization is only possible in the Global South by lowering as many costs and barriers as possible; this often results in abysmal safety conditions for workers, exploitation of labor, displacement, and destructive environmental practices. How do you plan to prioritize these basic human rights alongside economic development? How do you understand the phrase "authentic human development"?
- How will your administration prioritize the needs of those in extreme poverty? What steps will you take to ensure children and families have access to basic human rights like housing, education, healthcare, and sufficient food?
- In the United States, how can national, state, and local governments create conditions to effectively move people out of poverty? What reforms and policies can promote sustainable growth in impoverished communities, instead of merely keeping people afloat in precarious economic situations? How do you envision partnering with non-profit, faith-based, community, and/or charity groups to achieve this goal?



Catholic Resources

- Poverty USA (USCCB) - povertyusa.org
- International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity (CIDSE) - cidse.org
- Bread for the World - bread.org

Education For Justice Resources

- *Populorum Progressio* and *Caritas in Veritate*: Authentic, Integral, Human Development - bit.ly/4cPlx6S
- Prayer Service for the Eradication of Poverty - bit.ly/3XmviE6
- Themes of CST: Option for the Poor and Vulnerable - bit.ly/3MJJkRs
- Quotes from CST on Being Citizens and Disciples - bit.ly/46FVzkX