

## Coming for You - a New Series of Bulletin Articles

- Suggesting Better Ways to Frame and Deal with Today's Public Issues
- Firmly Based on an Outstanding Catholic Social Tradition
- Written Especially for You and Our Contemporary Times

### Today's Chatter is a Downer

If you are like me, you are increasingly dissatisfied with the tenor of today's dialog on important public and moral issues. And it is not just occurring during the election cycles we endure every four years. We know we have serious problems which we must solve for ourselves and for our children – but these problems seem to forever defy arriving at actionable solutions. We are concerned personally - many of us are experiencing great stress on our family budgets, gaps in insurance coverage, difficulty finding good jobs (for ourselves or our teens and young adults), and concern about our investments of our retirements. We are concerned publicly - we hear rancorous discussions about what should be our public policy and this seems to get worse as we become an increasingly pluralistic society. Government is not doing its job – and when asked about our satisfaction with our national government, we rank Congress (House and Senate) and the Executive Branch at historically low levels. We keep going on - keeping our families together as best we can - and doubt the public side of affairs can ever be fixed.

### Elephants in the Room

Our culture and sometimes our own lived experience tell us that we “cannot” talk about certain topics – like religion and politics, like abortion or the death penalty, or about gun control or comprehensive immigration reform. We may feel that we don't have the insights or facts from which to constructively engage difficult topics. We may avoid such discussions in order not to impact friendships or our position at school, the workplace or in our neighborhoods. So important topics are either not discussed at all or are distorted and exploited by vocal special interest groups who claim to speak for us and who insist they have the high moral ground. It is time to learn how to frame these important topics for ourselves and take back the initiative to discuss difficult topics with moral implications based on the merits of the various arguments.

### Seeking Basic Principles and Innovative Ideas

Fortunately, there are more enlightened ways to think about and address many of the public issues which impact us. It is time to recognize and use our Catholic social teachings as a basis for much insightful discussion. From these principles, we can launch innovative approaches from which we can begin to change the nature of the dialog and ultimately the results. And there are related moral principles in our U.S. Constitution, in Scripture and in philosophy. The innovation I speak of is needed to take the issues forward and develop solutions which many citizens can get behind and “move the country's ball forward.” Better results are possible when seeking common ground is our operating model, instead of

perpetuating ideological standoffs between competing ideas. We need Catholic social teachings close at hand from which to frame, analyze and solve common problems.

### Getting Beyond The Current Impasse

In the last 30 years or so, we observe that our government has increasingly failed to govern on behalf of ordinary people. We see instead powerful lobbies, multi-national corporations and other self interest groups with all the power. And we see the fallout – financial markets collapsing, expanding poverty, jobs moving away, health care more difficult to secure, preemptive war, more suffering and new ways to exploit people at home and abroad. And we see both sides of many issues “dug in” and unwilling to dialog. Not surprisingly, many citizens have become bitter and have “dropped out”. But instead of throwing up our hands in despair, we should ask ourselves, “What can we learn from our Constitution, from Scripture, and especially from our Catholic Teachings which can help reorient our attention, readjust public priorities, civilize the nature of our debate and lead to achieving far better results for all?”

### A Best Kept Secret

Catholic Social Teachings are seldom communicated for a variety of reasons (which we will not explore here). So, you may be surprised about the amount of material produced and the intelligence of the analysis generated over the last 117 years by our Catholic leaders. The so-called Catholic Social Teachings (or Tradition) have addressed an extremely wide range of public issues with moral principles, Scriptural citations, analysis and recommendations for how we could and should go forward as modern societies - while embracing each other as equals and working out our differences for the common good for all. This is not to say that we give up on our distinct values and beliefs and go with the least common denominator. It does mean that we respect each other and work compromises to deliver a “win-win” for all!

### Catholic Social Teachings – Coming for You

As a new phase of my diaconate ministry, I will capture for you the essence of these social teachings and help you apply them to the knotty issues of the day. In these original articles, I will be mostly using Catholic social teachings as the basis, but will also use Scripture and other references to illustrate the points. I will be using the Church bulletin and our diocesan web site to communicate this story one installment at a time. So, watch in this space for a series of articles – first fundamentals, then application to issues like immigration reform, abortion, poverty, health care and economics. My objective is to give you the “tools” and perspectives of the great social thinkers of the Catholic tradition.

## Representative Sources:

Catholic Social Teachings, for example, as contained in:

- *Catholic Social Teaching – Our Best Kept Secret* by Edward DeBerri, James Hug and others, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2004, Orbis (There may be later editions). This is an excellent overview of the social teaching principles and many source documents published by the Church in the last 120 years. This document was a project co-sponsored by the Center of Concern ([www.coc.org](http://www.coc.org))
- *Principles, Prophecy, and a Pastoral Response – An Overview of Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, revised edition, 2001, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
- *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican, June 2004 (Available from the Vatican web site: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va), just search on this English title.)
- *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Nov 2007 (see [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org))
- *A Nation for All*, by Chris Korzen and Alexia Kelley, Jossey-Bass, 2008. An excellent, readable discussion reflecting the common good

## Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. What evidence have you observed, in the last few weeks and months, of polarized discussions in our society? (for example, regarding poverty, loss of jobs, causes of the financial crisis, abortion, lack of access to health insurance, use of the death penalty, immigration reform, etc.)
2. What do you hear the Catholic Church saying about this wide range of social issues? What are your sources? Have you heard any of these issues preached about at weekend Mass? Is the Catholic position clear and consistent?
3. What do you hear the political parties or media pundits saying about the important social issues of the day? Are these secular positions clear and consistent?
4. What consistencies and inconsistencies do you observe between the Church position on social issues and what secular society says?
5. Can you describe, in general terms, some of the Church's social teachings? Would you be willing to learn more about these teachings and how to apply them to current day situations?
6. What does "the common good" mean to you? What do you feel this goal asks of all of us?
7. Are you able to explore these kinds of social issues with your family and extended family members? Why or why not? Describe your personal experiences.
8. Beyond family members, are you able to explore any of these social issues? (eg, at school, with co-workers at your company, in your neighborhood, when traveling) Why or why not? Describe your personal experiences.