

A Beginner's Action Plan – Applying Catholic Social Principles (Part 2 of 3)

- This article focuses on suggested actions to address broad public issues
- Assuming that I now understand some basics of Catholic Social Teachings,
- How can I apply them as opportunities arise in my life?

The Three Part Mini-Series for Beginners

Part 1 of this three part series provided some general thoughts about applying Catholic Social Teachings. Part 2 now develops thoughts specifically on addressing public policy issues at our local, state, and federal levels. Part 3 will consider what we can do in our personal lives.

Defining the Public Policy Arena

The public policy arena, as used in this article, spans local, state and national spheres and includes the role of individuals, corporations, organizations and government in addressing important public policy topics. Public policies and initiatives are needed to address issues that transcend individuals and families where, because of the scale and difficulty of solutions, collections of organizations and government units are necessary to achieve real success. Poverty, joblessness, health care, immigration reform, achieving a seamless ethic of life (death penalty, abortion, etc.) and many other concerns fall into this category. While individuals and families have roles here, solutions must involve broader reaches of society.

Ideas for Addressing Issues at the Local Level

What can be done at a local level should be done at the local level. This involves hands-on assistance, visiting those who are confined, local advocacy for those in need, and many other opportunities. Possibilities for your action plan include:

- Work to reduce domestic violence and advocacy for victims of domestic violence. (eg, join and support “Take Back the Night” in Northern Will County, Illinois)
- Collect and distribute food for neighbors in need. (support local food banks or St. Vincent DePaul chapters)
- Participate in community organizing – aimed at helping neighbors assume responsibility and be heard in their quest for affordable housing, corporate investment, job creation, voter registration, access to medical care and public transportation.
- Visit those who are confined because of illness or disability in hospitals, nursing homes and private homes.
- Visit those in prisons.
- Ask your local clergy for homilies exploring our Catholic Social Teachings and their local application.
- Participate in the Christian Service Commission at your parish. This group can provide you ideas, opportunities for participation and personal support. If one does not exist at your parish, consider starting one or join this kind of group at a neighboring parish.
- Recommend a helpful book, periodical or movie on some aspect of applying social justice teachings.

Individuals and families can help out - either by themselves or in cooperation with Churches and other local organizations.

Ideas for Addressing Issues at the State Level

States often assume responsibility for unemployment benefits, public aid, job retraining programs, Junior Colleges, etc.

Examples for action in the Christian tradition include:

- Advocacy for unemployment benefits and retraining for those who have lost jobs
- Advocacy to ensure states pay their bills and otherwise meet their obligations to hospitals, nursing homes, etc. which provide direct care to those in most need
- Advocacy for continued environmental protection
- Involvement in state programs for promoting business and job growth, affordable housing, etc.
- Call or e-mail your state representative about a specific topic or bill under consideration. In Illinois, go to: www.illinois.gov/government/gov_legislature.cfm

We can all help by pressing for a legislative agenda which is consistent with the needs of our state and which is in tune with our Catholic Social Teachings and principles.

Ideas for Addressing Issues at the Federal Level

A functioning federal government is needed to address issues which are beyond the capability and resources of states, corporations and individuals. Examples of action steps are:

- Join the Joliet Diocese Legislative Advocacy Network by signing up at www.paxjoliet.org/advocacy (This action also applies to legislation at the state level.)
- Become aware of the scope and severity of problems in the U.S. at large – poverty, injustice, joblessness, lack of healthcare, racism, piecemeal immigration actions, etc. (Example: <http://www.catholicsinAlliance.org>)
- Call or e-mail your U.S. House or Senate representative about a specific topic or bill under consideration (U.S. House: clerk.house.gov/member_info or U.S. Senate: www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm)
- Follow the lead of an organization which lobbies for policy positions consistent with Catholic social and moral teachings (eg, *Network, A Catholic Social Justice Lobby*, www.networklobby.org)
- Go to the U.S. Bishops web site on migration, life issues, economics, and many other topics (www.USCCB.org)
- Contribute financially to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD)

Our Call to Action

We can each help according to our time, interest and skills. We just need to commit ourselves and get started!

Deacon Bob Wallace December 2008

(For related materials, see www.paxjoliet.org/bulletin)

Additional Representative Sources:

1. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, USCCB, Nov 14, 2007 – see www.faithfulcitizenship.org which is one of the U.S. Bishop’s several permanent web sites on social concerns, peace and justice issues.
2. *Catholic Social Teaching – Our Best Kept Secret* by Edward DeBerri, James Hug and others, 4th Edition, 2004, Orbis (There may be later editions). This is an excellent overview of the many documents published by the Church in the last 120 years. This document was / is a project co-sponsored by the Center of Concern (www.coc.org)
3. *Principles, Prophesy, and a Pastoral Response – An Overview of Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, revised edition, 2001, U.S. Catholic Bishops
4. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican, June 2004 (Available from the Vatican web site: www.vatican.va, just search on the English title.)
5. *Gaudium et Spes* (literally “Joy and Hope”) commonly known as “The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”, Second Vatican Council, December 8, 1965 (Available from the Vatican web site: www.vatican.va, just search on the Latin title.)
6. *A Nation for All*, by Chris Korzen and Alexia Kelley, Jossey-Bass / Wiley, 2008
7. Social Teachings - see <http://www.catholicsinalliance.org/catholic-social-teaching>
8. Social teachings magazine – see <http://salt.claretianpubs.org/>
9. Social teachings summary - see <http://salt.claretianpubs.org/cstline/tline.html>
10. Books – see <http://www.catholicsinalliance.org/resources/books>

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. Cite and describe examples of helping organizations in your local community. Describe what kinds of social issues they are designed to alleviate and the positive mark they have made on your community.
2. Discuss how you (or others you know) have become aware of state level issues, which are not always well publicized in the local media. What are the best sources of information about pending state legislation, lack of enforcement of existing state statues, or requests for comment from your legislators?
3. Share any experiences you have had personally in discussing state legislative agendas with House or Senate representatives. Describe the issue you were advocating for (or asking about), and your take on the reaction by the legislator. What lessons learned can you share? Was there any follow-up?
4. Describe a similar experience at the federal level with a House or Senate representative. Describe the issue, the legislator’s reaction, lessons learned and any follow-up.
5. For each level discussed above (local, state, federal), share your views about which Catholic Social Teachings apply to the issues at hand, and the helpfulness of the guidance you derived from these Teachings. (Reference, as necessary, the set of Catholic Teachings articles in the “basics” which appeared at the beginning of this series (www.paxjoliet.org/bulletin) – or another equivalent resource.)