

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

- This article focuses on potential actions in our personal and family lives
- Assuming I now understand the basics of Catholic Social Teachings,
- How can I apply them as situations arise in my life?

### The Three Part Mini-Series for Beginners

Part 1 of this three part series suggested a general approach through which to embrace Catholic Social teachings. Part 2 developed thoughts on addressing public policy issues in our local, state and federal arenas. Part 3 now addresses what we can possibly do in our personal and family lives.

### Defining the Private / Family Arena

For the purposes of this series, private and family issues occur largely within the family unit. As in other topic areas, the family is usually the best foundation for nourishment, education and healthy ideas about relationships with and helping others. Hence, learning and applying Catholic Social Teaching should start in the home and be applied consistently over time. From positive family experiences, socially responsible and moral teachings and attitudes can later be applied effectively outside the home and family.

The following sections provide ideas and perspectives which just scratch the surface in applying these teachings.

### Ideas for Actions by Families with Children

Most adults realize that applying proper social and moral teachings need to start in the home and be applied creatively and uniformly. Parents hopefully can agree on how to provide an environment where peace and justice is practiced in a hands-on, visible and loving manner. Examples for action:

- Be careful of media exposure to children – TV, movies, video games and internet. If we really believe in our teachings and the potential harm to children, alert families will completely avoid the most violent TV programs (like Fox's "24") and video games (like Mortal Combat and Grand Theft Auto). Family computers will have parental control software and be placed in common areas. With older adolescents and teens, there continues to be plenty of reason to actively regulate what they see on TV and videos, and play with in games.
- Avoid violent toys, for reasons already mentioned. More than one study has connected later violent behaviors with over-exposure when young to violence in media, games or toys.
- Support boycotts against violent media products and their advertisers and promoters.
- Decide as a family when and how much to donate to the less fortunate, for example, by redirecting some funds normally used for family entertainment or eating out. This behavior creates tangible examples and teaches children strong ideals especially at holiday times.
- Discuss opportunities for stewardship – in terms of time, talent and treasure – by returning in some measure God's blessings through hands-on volunteer work in the local

community.

### Ideas for Action by Adult Households

In homes without children present, there are additional opportunities. Examples for action include:

- Discuss opportunities for stewardship which require a large investment of time, talent and treasure - which is often out of reach of families with children present.
- Talk in depth about news events from a social and moral teachings point of view.
- Seek out local evening or weekend programs which explore the application of Catholic Social Teachings. Consider follow-through by working together in family oriented projects sponsored by these groups!
- Consider adopting a child or sponsoring a foster child in some manner, whether in your home or by funding an overseas child. Many programs exist domestically and internationally.
- Seek out ways to broaden and deepen your understanding of Catholic Social Teachings and their contemporary application in your extended families and friendship networks and in your neighborhoods.

### Additional Ideas for Everyone

Regardless of family situation, consider:

- Create a "quieter" household to help yourself become more sensitive to what is going on around you, especially in regard to the needs and concerns of family members.
- Read a book on social teaching, social justice or peace topics.
- Read a blog or similar topic source on justice and peace issues.

### Ideas for Fortifying Ourselves at a Spiritual Level

Our personal and family investments in social actions need to be guided and strengthened through prayer and imitation of Jesus Christ's behaviors as we read in Scripture. Accordingly, pray as a family, especially by adding to your usual prayer routine additional prayers explicitly directed to social action, peace and justice. Examples for family prayer action include:

- Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi
- Serenity Prayer

Also pray and reflect on specific Scripture passages, such as:

- Matt 5:1-10 (Beatitudes)
- Matt 25:31-46 (Judgment, Corporal Works of Mercy)

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(For related materials, see [www.paxjoliet.org/bulletin](http://www.paxjoliet.org/bulletin))

### Representative Sources:

1. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, USCCB, Nov 14, 2007 – see [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://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, 4<sup>th</sup> 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](http://www.coc.org))
3. *Principles, Prophecy, 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](http://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](http://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. Share your experience with children and adolescents in terms of controlling the media they are exposed to. What is the message you communicate to them as you explain that a specific media program is out of bounds for your household? What media (TV, videos, games, etc.) and toys are out of bounds for your family and why?
2. What have you done as a family action plan to bring Catholic Social Teachings to life in your home? (eg, donations, application of time and talent, periodicals read in your home, etc.)
3. Share the essential message in any books or magazines you have read on the application of Catholic Social Teachings. How has this message helped you grow and evolve in your family life or in some kind of family oriented ministry in your Church?
4. Share with your group any evening or weekend programs you have learned about in your local community. What have you learned through participation? Have you changed any of your attitudes on peace and social justice topics as a result? Invite others to join you in upcoming sessions.
5. Share how you have broadened and deepened your prayer life by incorporating living examples of the imitation of Jesus actions in the Gospels. Which Gospel (or other Scripture) passages are most helpful to you and why?

### Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your 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;  
and 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;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

### The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.  
Living one day at a time;  
enjoying one moment at a time;  
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;  
taking, as He did, this sinful world  
as it is, not as I would have it;  
trusting that He will make all things right  
if I surrender to His Will;  
that I may be reasonably happy in this life  
and supremely happy with Him  
forever in the next.  
Amen.

--- Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)