

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

These can be used for publication in parish bulletins, catechetical newsletters, etc.

Jesus takes the side of those most in need. In the Last Judgment, so dramatically described in St. Matthew's Gospel, we are told that we will be judged according to how we respond to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger. As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental "option for the poor" -- to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, 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.

Economic Justice for All, USCCB, 1986

The Church's love for the poor...is a part of her constant tradition. This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor. Love for the poor is even one of the motives for the duty of working so as to "be able to give to those in need." It extends not only to material poverty but also to the many forms of cultural and religious poverty.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2444

The moral test of a society is how its most vulnerable members are faring. The option for the poor is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1999

St. John Chrysostom vigorously recalls: "Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs." The demands of justice must be satisfied first of all; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2446

We judge any economic system by what it does *for* and *to* people and by how it permits all to *participate* in it. The economy should serve people, not the other way around. Jesus takes the side of those most in need. As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental "option for the poor" - to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor.

Economic Justice for All, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986

In God's sight poverty is no disgrace, and that there is nothing to be ashamed of in seeking one's bread by labor. This was strengthened by what we see in Christ himself, "who whereas he was rich, for our sakes became poor", and who being the son of a carpenter, did not disdain to spend a great part of his life as a carpenter himself. From the contemplation of this divine example, it is easy to understand that the true dignity and excellence of the human person lies in moral qualities, that is, in virtue, and virtue alone...

Rerum Novarum, Pope Leo XIII, 1891

Our faith calls us to measure this economy, not by what it produces but also by how it touches human life and whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person. Economic decisions have human consequences and moral content; they help or hurt people, strengthen or weaken family life, advance or diminish the quality of justice in our land. Followers of Christ must avoid a tragic separation between faith and everyday life.

Economic Justice for All, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986

God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. ...the right of having a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone. The Fathers and Doctors of the Church held this opinion, teaching that each is obliged to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods. ...this sacred council urges all, both individuals and governments, to remember from the Fathers: "Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him, you have killed him". Whoever in obedience to Christ seeks first the Kingdom of God, takes therefrom a stronger and purer love for helping all as brother/sister, and for perfecting the work of justice under the inspiration of charity.

Gaudium Et Spes, Pope Paul VI, 1965

The Gospel calls us to solidarity with those who are suffering, vulnerable, and in need. In this spirit we recall the words of Pope John Paul II, who proclaimed, "The Church hears the suffering cry of all who are uprooted from their own land, of families forcefully separated, of those who, in the rapid changes of our day, are unable to find a stable home anywhere." In an age of economic globalization, a special concern must be the migrant worker, both rural and urban. They are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse in transit, in border regions, and in the workplace. "The Church in America must be a vigilant advocate, defending against any unjust restriction the natural right of individual persons to move freely within their own nation and from one nation to another. Attention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration."

Welcoming the Stranger Among Us, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000

'He who has the goods of this world and sees his brother or sister in need and closes his heart to them, how does the love of God abide in him?' Everyone knows that the Fathers of the Church laid down the duty of the rich towards the poor in no uncertain terms. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich. These words indicate that the right to private

property is not absolute and unconditional. No one may appropriate surplus goods solely for his own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life.

Populorum Progressio, Pope Paul VI, 1967

Parishes are called to help those who suffer in our own communities and in situations of poverty and pain around the world. Baptism, confirmation and continuing participation in the body of Christ call us to action for “the least among us” without regard for boundaries or borders.

Called to Global Solidarity, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1997

The injustice of certain situations cries out for God’s attention. Lacking the bare necessities of life, whole nations are under the thumb of others; they cannot act on their own initiative; they cannot exercise personal responsibility; they cannot work towards a higher degree of cultural refinement or a greater participation in social and public life. ...Many Catholics have contributed unstintingly to the assistance of the needy and have gradually widened the circle of those they call neighbors. ...It involves building a human community where liberty is not an idle work, where the needy Lazarus can sit down with the rich man at the same table.

Populorum Progressio, Pope Paul VI, 1967

...the option or love of preference for the poor. This is an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness. It affects the life of each Christian inasmuch as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our social responsibilities and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning the ownership and use of goods. ...this love of the preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and above all, those without hope of a better future. To ignore them would mean becoming like the “rich man” who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate.

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, Pope John Paul II, 1987

Poor and vulnerable people have a special place in Catholic social teaching. A basic moral test of a society is how its most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching,
U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1999

As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental “option for the poor” - to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, 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.

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching, USCCB

As individuals and as a nation, therefore, we are called to make a fundamental "option for the poor". The obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless arises from the radical command to love one's neighbor as one's self. Those who are marginalized and whose rights are denied have privileged claims if society is to provide justice for all. This obligation is deeply rooted in Christian belief.

Economic Justice for All, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986