
THE WELCOME TABLE

Engaging the Catholic Social Tradition
at the Center for Social Concerns

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic social tradition, or CST, is a practical ethic that aims to move the world *as it is* closer to the kind of world that God *means it to be*. The Church's living social tradition is comprised of two integrally related parts: first, the collection of official social teaching documents that articulate moral stances on issues such as poverty and sustainability, and second, two millennia of witnesses striving to enact the Gospel in their daily lives. Here at the University of Notre Dame's Center for Social Concerns, we count ourselves among the inheritors of this vibrant social tradition, energized by the hope of providing a place to gather, form, and nourish community-engaged scholars in the study and practice of the Catholic social tradition.

The Catholic social tradition is often defined in terms of its principles or themes, such as the common good, human dignity, and solidarity. But more than a collection of abstract principles, CST issues a call to **action**, an invitation to be part of a **living tradition**, and a challenge to **think and see anew** in light of a biblical vision of justice. As Pope John XXIII says of CST: "It is not enough merely to formulate a social doctrine. It must be translated into reality. And this is particularly true of the Church's social doctrine, the light of which is Truth, Justice its objective, and Love its driving force."¹

In this brief introduction to the Catholic social tradition, we offer the image of the welcome table as a metaphor for the Church's vision of a truly just society. In the four sections that follow, we aim to: 1) survey the Scriptural and historical roots of CST; 2) present CST as an invitation for dialogue with people from other faith and non-faith traditions; 3) unpack CST's distinctive themes and principles; and 4) share practical suggestions for putting CST into practice. We at the Center for Social Concerns invite you to examine the diverse banquet that the Catholic social tradition offers and to find sustenance for your own work toward the common good.

SCRIPTURAL AND HISTORICAL ROOTS OF CST

*"I'm gonna sit at the welcome table.
I'm gonna sit at the welcome table one of these
days, Hallelujah!"*

During the American Civil Rights era, the African American spiritual "[I'm Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table](#)" provided a poignant anthem as blacks sought the right to sit at the same tables as whites. In 1960, four African American college students—Ezell A. Blair, Jr., Franklin E. McCain, Joseph A. McNeil, and David L. Richmond (pictured at left)—brought the hymn's refrain to life when they attempted to be served at a segregated cafe in Greensboro, North Carolina. This act of nonviolent resistance was memorialized in a new verse: "I'm gonna sit at the Woolworth counter one of these days, Hallelujah!"



¹ *Mater et Magistra* (1961), paragraph 226. Note that most documents of official CST teaching are cited using paragraph number, not page number.

² [Photograph: Jack Moebe / Corbis](#)

Just as in 1960, today many people do not have a place at society's literal and figurative tables. The Catholic social tradition, however, envisions the kind of world where every single person has a seat around the proverbial table. CST begins by looking to the Bible as the revelation of the kind of world that God hopes for. In the Old Testament, we see how the prophets measured the people of Israel according to how well they cared for the poor. The prophet Amos, for example, rebukes those who mistreat orphans, widows, and foreigners, which Amos decries as an offence against God. For the prophet Jeremiah, one cannot know God unless she or he acts justly toward the poor.³ Jesus follows in the prophetic tradition of linking faith and justice. According to Luke, Jesus' first words as a public figure were to announce himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's message of liberation: "He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."⁴

Jesus lived and preached the welcome table.⁵ His life shows that the span of the welcome table extends as far as God's own immeasurable hospitality. Jesus was centrifugally drawn to society's outcasts, from eating with tax collectors and sinners to healing lepers and slaves. In one such encounter, Jesus welcomed an uninvited woman to a meal at a religious leader's house whom the others dismissed as a social untouchable. In a gesture of profound welcome, Jesus then allowed her to wash his feet and rub them with costly oil.⁶ Jesus often used the setting of a meal to reveal the breadth of God's love. Fittingly, the quintessential religious practice for Catholics is to gather around the Eucharistic table where Jesus gives his own body and blood as nourishment for his followers to continue working to extend the table in their daily lives.

In their brief history of the Church's social tradition, scholars David O'Brien and Thomas Shannon observe that CST begins with the life and teaching of Jesus. They note, however, that Jesus did not offer a "specific economic message," and over the course of the centuries the Church has differently interpreted the social implications of the Gospel message.⁷ While the Catholic social tradition is as old as the Church itself, the "modern" era of CST is usually dated to Pope Leo XIII's 1891 *Rerum Novarum*. As an encyclical—a "circular letter" to the global Church that carries the pope's teaching authority—*Rerum Novarum* critically examines the social conditions created by the Industrial Revolution and calls for reforms such as paying workers a living wage. Pope Leo XIII thus catalyzed a new era in CST, characterized by reasserting the eternal truths of the faith while also demonstrating greater appreciation for changing social contexts. In short, modern CST evaluates contemporary cultural, economic, political, and environmental trends in light of the Gospel, offering a message of both hope and social critique.

³ Surveying the records of Judah's kings, Jeremiah is critical of all but Jehoiakim of whom Jeremiah says: "Because he dispensed justice to the weak and the poor, he prospered. Is this not to know me?" (Jeremiah 22:16).

⁴ Luke 4:18-19. See Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6.

⁵ Jesus's revelation of the welcome table warrants a nuanced account. In the parable of the wedding banquet in Matthew 22, for instance, the king tells his servants: "Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find! The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests" (Matthew 22:9-10). The king extends a universal invitation—no one is excluded from being invited to the banquet—and at the same time, the king expects that his guests to arrive prepared for the feast. John 8 offers another image of Jesus' acceptance of sinners, but not of their sin. An angry mob is preparing to stone a woman caught in the act of adultery as prescribed in Mosaic law. Pointing out the hypocrisy of the crowd, Jesus sends her accusers away, saying: "Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more" (John 8:11). Unlike the judgmental crowd, Jesus affirms the woman's human dignity while also teaching that her previous way of life was beneath her human dignity. Jesus calls all to come as they are and to leave changed.

⁶ See Luke 7:36-53.

⁷ Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage, ed. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 2.

Since *Rerum Novarum*, popes and other ecclesial leaders have continued to add to a growing body of official social teaching documents that express the Church's pastoral concern for those without a seat at the welcome table. John Paul II's 1987 *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, for example, warns of the perils of global inequality for both the rich and the poor. More recently, the 2018 document *Open Wide Our Hearts* by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops decries the scourge of racism in the United States and suggests how to work toward racial reconciliation. The shifts in content, methodology, and tone throughout the past nearly 130 years of the Church's social teaching demonstrate that CST is a tradition in development. While the essence of the Gospel message is "the same yesterday, today, and forever," the Church acknowledges that its social teaching requires constant renewal by local Christian communities striving to live out the Gospel in their particular contexts.⁸

The Church's social teaching documents spell out the social implications of the faith that Catholics profess. CST aims to help people live out the Gospel in the practical dimensions of believers' daily lives, from how to conserve natural resources to how to approach voting.⁹ The 1971 Synod of Bishops' document *Justice in the World* holds that working for social justice is an essential aspect of what it means to be a Catholic: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel." In other words, CST challenges those who profess faith in Jesus to put their faith into action as Jesus himself did.

CST AS DIALOGUE WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITH AND NON-FAITH BACKGROUNDS



While CST has a particular claim on Catholics, CST is not just for members of the Catholic Church. Recent official Catholic social teaching documents are addressed to "all people of goodwill"—to all who hope for a more just world. In CST, the Church aspires to engage people from all walks of life and with different frameworks for pursuing justice to work together in addressing the pressing social questions of our day.¹⁰

Images of the Welcome Table in Christian Art: The welcome table motif features in Andrei Rublev's icon of the Trinity (available on Wikipedia via public domain) which uses three seated figures to represent each person of the Trinity who seem to invite the viewer to join them at table in the open space in the image's foreground. See also Fritz Eichenberg's woodcutting entitled "The Lord's Supper" for another artistic rendering of the welcome table in Christianity. The song "At the Table" by Josh Garrels offers a musical interpretation of many of the same themes.

⁸ Hebrews 13:8. Pope Paul VI in *Octogesima Adveniens* articulates the epistemological humility inherent in CST and the importance of local Christian communities to apply and interpret CST. In the Compendium of Catholic Social Teaching, paragraph 85 speaks of the dual nature of CST teaching as both timeless and ever-changing. It must be further acknowledged that Church leaders and members all too often fail to live up to the ideal of CST, as is tragically evident in the case of the Church's sexual abuse crisis as well as how certain voices within the Church are significantly underrepresented, to the detriment of the entire Church.

⁹ John Paul II similarly underscores the relationship between belief and action, saying "the social doctrine of the Church has once more demonstrated its character as an application of the word of God to people's lives and the life of society, as well as to the earthly realities connected with them" (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 8).

¹⁰ CST is not synonymous with any single political or economic system nor does it neatly align with a particular political party. For example, CST has been used to critique elements of communism as well as capitalism, and CST documents call for an end of both the death penalty and abortion.

In recent social documents, the Church increasingly appeals to economists, scientists, politicians, and leaders from many other fields and faith backgrounds who possess the expertise necessary to bring to reality CST's hope for a changed world. CST thus benefits from those who otherwise might not consider themselves as conversation partners with the Catholic Church.¹¹

CST, then, issues a rallying cry for Catholics to put their faith into action and invites dialogue with all people who are working to build up a culture of the welcome table. At Notre Dame's Center for Social Concerns, scholars, students, and community partners of all different faith perspectives and academic disciplines draw from and embody the distinctive themes of CST.

THE WELCOME TABLE AND THE COMMON GOOD

The broad ethical vision of CST is often distilled into a set of foundational principles that express distinct characteristics of a just society.¹² The **common good, human dignity, preferential option for the poor, solidarity, subsidiarity, correlation of rights and responsibilities, care for creation, and dignity of work** represent some of CST's themes that are central to its biblical vision of justice.¹³ Understanding these distinct yet integrally related principles enables the translation of CST's vision into reality.

The welcome table motif offers an image of a just society dedicated to the **common good**, a concept at the heart of the Catholic social tradition. The term "common" here denotes something shared in common, not something commonplace or ordinary. In fact, a deeply countercultural logic is at work in a Christian interpretation of the common good. In *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, one of Pope John Paul II's social teaching documents, he defines the common good as "the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (38). The two halves of John Paul II's formulation of the common good—the good of *all* people (emphasizing the community) as well as the good of *each* (emphasizing the individual)—illustrate the complementarity among the themes of CST.

In the metaphor of the welcome table, the common good means that *each* person belongs at the table as a full member of society regardless of each person's history, identity, or ability. Every human person fully belongs around the welcome table because of the God-given **human dignity** of each person, made in the image of God as a unique reflection of God's infinite goodness. CST affirms the undiminishable worth of every single human life, no matter a person's race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, physical or mental ability, education level, criminal background, or any other attribute.

¹¹ Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* acknowledges CST's indebtedness to the work of experts outside the Church, writing: "These statements of the Popes echo the reflections of numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups, all of which have enriched the Church's thinking on these questions. Outside the Catholic Church, other Churches and Christian communities – and other religions as well – have expressed deep concern and offered valuable reflections on issues which all of us find disturbing" (7). Regarding areas of confluence and divergence between CST and human rights discourse see, for example, Megan Clark's 2014 book [The vision of catholic social thought: The virtue of solidarity and the praxis of human rights](#), between CST and restorative justice (see Center for Social Concerns faculty member Susan Sharpe's 2018 [article](#) for the Restorative Justice Network of Catholic Campuses), and between CST and Amartya Sen's capability approach (the Center for Social Concerns hosted a [2017 Workshop](#) devoted to this theme).

¹² Various sources provide differing lists of CST principles or themes. The United States Bishops organize CST into [seven themes](#); [Caritas of Australia](#) and [Catholic Social Teaching.org.uk](#) organize its content around six central themes. Catholic Charities of the Twin Cities offers substantial further resources on CST as well including numerous links to social teaching documents.

¹³ The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church notes the "unity" within the Church's social teaching and identifies God's love as the source: "This doctrine has its own profound unity, which flows from Faith in a whole and complete salvation, from Hope in a fullness of justice, and from Love which makes all mankind truly brothers and sisters in Christ: it is the expression of God's love for the world, which He so loved "that He gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16)." (Paragraph 3).

While the dignity of the human person emphasizes the individual human person, the common good defines the responsibility we each bear to the community. The common good means that everyone, but not everything, so to speak, is welcome at the table. In other words, the common good provides parameters for determining what is morally acceptable. In CST, the **correlation between rights and responsibilities** commits us to exercising our individual rights and privileges for the good of others so that they can exercise the same rights as well. For example, the common good affirms the right to own private property while also challenging property owners to use their resources for the well-being of others. Similarly, in upholding the **dignity and rights of workers**, CST asserts that people have a right to decent labor that enhances the worker's sense of human dignity while contributing to the common good. The common good's uncommon insight is that the good of each person is inextricably linked to the good of all.

The common good commits us to work for the good of others, as John Paul II put it, "because we are all really responsible for all." Our interconnectedness commits us to accompany those who are struggling, which CST describes as **solidarity**. We express solidarity through actions that help us understand another person and share in that person's joys and hardships. Solidarity stretches us beyond the circle of our friends; the common good reminds us of our connectedness to every person. Concrete examples of solidarity could include participating in a fast to raise awareness and funds for migrant farm workers or attending a march in support of survivors of sexual violence. Jesus epitomizes the Christian virtue of solidarity by his becoming human and offering his very life in order to restore us to right relationship with God and with each other.¹⁴

In practice, not everyone is welcomed around society's tables, and many members of our communities lack what they need to flourish. In response, CST exhorts everyone to make a **preferential option for the poor** by devoting additional care to safeguard those whose place at the table is most vulnerable.¹⁵ Notre Dame professor emeritus Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez traces throughout the Scriptures how God demonstrates a particular love for those most often overlooked in the eyes of the world.¹⁶ Fr. Gutiérrez offers what he calls a "spirituality" of the preferential option for the poor that neither idealizes the poor nor glorifies those in positions of service. Instead, Fr. Gutiérrez writes: "I accompany them not because they are all good, or because I am all good, but because God is good" (p. 32).¹⁷ Affirming the dignity of those living in poverty, Fr. Gutiérrez notes that the poor do not passively receive charity; they also possess the agency to work toward their own and others' flourishing.

¹⁴ See *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 40: "In the light of faith, solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the specifically Christian dimension of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation. One's neighbor is then not only a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but becomes the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit."

¹⁵ Although the concept is itself biblical, the term "preferential option for the poor" comes from the writings of Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez as well as the social teaching documents of the Latin American Bishops, particularly at Puebla.

¹⁶ Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* defines the Christological origin of the preferential option for the poor: "Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members" (187).

¹⁷ Farmer, Paul and Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 2013. In the Company of the Poor Conversations between Dr. Paul Farmer and Father Gustavo Gutierrez, edited by Michael Griffin and Jennie Weiss Block, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis. Gutiérrez warns about making a preferential option for the poor on the basis of idealizing the poor or to appear as a "good person." Gutiérrez centers the option for the poor solely on God's own goodness: "So in our spirituality it is supremely important that each of us refines the basis of our preferential option for the poor to say: I accompany them not because they are all good, or because I am all good, but because God is good" (p. 32). To the misconception that God's preferential option for the poor contradicts God's unconditional love, Gutiérrez explains: the preferential option for the poor "displays the universality of God's love for all—a love that, in a world structured to the benefit of the powerful, extends even to the least among us. In fact, Jesus shows us that God's love is clearest there" (28-9).

The preferential option for the poor affirms the dignity of marginalized persons, as does another related principle: **subsidiarity**. CST argues that the voices of those most directly affected by a particular social problem must be central in determining a solution. For example, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development illustrates subsidiarity in their approach to solving poverty by their criteria that “at least 50 percent of the members of the governing board of the applicant organization should be comprised of individuals who are involuntarily low-income.”¹⁸ According to CST’s logic of subsidiarity, priority is given to the most local level, but higher levels of authority (such as municipal, state, or federal agencies) have a responsibility to act when the need cannot be met on a more local level.

In such a complex, fragmented world, it can be difficult to conceptualize the common good’s claim that our own well-being is connected to the well-being of everyone else. CST’s value on **environmental sustainability and the care for creation** serves as a timely illustration of our global interconnectedness. Pope Francis in his 2013 encyclical *Laudato Si’* calls the earth “our common home” as he makes the case that our survival as individuals and as a planet requires that we work together to preserve the one ecosystem of which we all are members. Our ecological interconnectedness is evident in the fact that more highly industrialized countries consume a higher percentage of the earth’s resources and contribute significantly to environmental damage, which in turn disproportionately affects the health and livelihoods of those living in poverty. CST challenges us to steward well the earth’s resources, cognizant that we are also dependent on the created world for survival along with all other living things. Care for creation fosters a spirituality that regards the entire cosmos as God’s creation to which we respond with reverence, gratitude, and care.

Viewed as a whole, the integral unity among the principles of Catholic social tradition points to what Cardinal Bernardin described as “a seamless garment” or holistic approach to social issues. Affirming the sanctity of life from conception to natural death, CST champions positions held by both ends of the political spectrum without being confined to a particular political party or system. Having briefly explored these eight themes of CST and how they relate to each other, we can summarize each by returning to the metaphor of the welcome table in the inset that follows.



¹⁸For more information about the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and their policies, see: <http://www.usccb.org/about/catholic-campaign-for-human-development/grants/community-development-grants-program/community-criteria-guidelines-and-policies.cfm>

Human dignity: each and every person is made in the image of God and so deserves a seat at the table

Preferential option for the poor: the most vulnerable members of society are seated and served first

Solidarity: choosing to wait to be served food in order to serve first those who are hungriest

because of the connection among everyone gathered around the table

Subsidiarity: each person at the banquet does her or his part, not more and not less

Care for creation: as members of the same ecosystem, the people eating the meal steward well the natural world, not treating it merely as raw material to be exploited

Dignity and rights of workers: the work of preparing, serving, and cleaning up the meal should reflect, not demean, the dignity of the people performing these jobs

Correlation of rights and duties: with the right to eat at the table comes the responsibility to help others around the table

Common good: the commitment to work toward all of the criteria above, resulting in a peaceful, just, and joyous banquet that each and every person is able to enjoy

ENGAGING THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL TRADITION

As we've said, CST is a living tradition that each new generation continues to carry forward and deepen. If the goal is the welcome table, CST could be likened to a cookbook whose recipes are intended not simply to be read, but to be experimented with. We offer here three practical ways of engaging CST and putting it to use in your own work of extending the welcome table:

Social Analysis: The eight principles and themes of CST outlined in this introduction can sharpen our critical capacity to identify injustices while also articulating an ideal to which we can aspire. CST offers a guide for discerning the "signs of the times" in light of the Gospels and respond to today's pressing needs. The various documents of official Catholic social teaching offer valuable insights addressing a vast range of social issues. Knowledge of the Catholic social tradition does not mean having all the answers; rather, CST helps us to *question* the easy answers that pass as conventional wisdom. CST stirs our consciences not to mistake the world as it is for the way the world could and should be.

Action: Since 1983, Notre Dame's Center for Social Concerns has sought to be faithful to the call to enact the Catholic social tradition in our own time and place. Center for Social Concerns courses and programs offer opportunities to grow in solidarity and work for social change. For example, in the spring of 2018, students in the Center's *Advocacy for the Common Good* course launched a campaign to protect family-based migration and provide a pathway to citizenship for recipients of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals).¹⁹



In addition to hosting vigils to bring the campus together in prayer and writing op-eds to educate the public, these students conducted meetings with the local offices of two U.S. Senators in Indiana. The students engaged the representatives in dialogue on the issue, shared personal stories, provided supporting research that included the U.S. Catholic Bishops' position, and presented a petition with 500 signatures.

Contemplation: Equally important to social action is contemplation, the discipline of personal reflection to facilitate discernment. Studying CST entails critically examining sinful, unjust social structures and our complicity in them. The course readings, class discussions, and personal reflection exercises of Center for Social Concerns courses can help students better understand the world as it actually is and think more deeply about how we are called to respond. Choosing one's major or minor in college can be a vital dimension of vocational discernment as well in considering the kind of skills and dispositions we need to develop as we seek the common good.



As the co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, Dorothy Day dedicated her life to the work of the welcome table, first by receiving the Sacraments around the Lord's table and in turn providing hospitality to individuals experiencing homelessness. In her autobiography *The Long Loneliness*, Day recounts the humble table around which the Catholic Worker movement began. She writes that one day, as she and friends were "just sitting there talking," people began coming to them asking for food: "If there were six small loaves and a few fishes, we had to divide them. There was always bread...And somehow the walls expanded."²⁰ The "walls" have indeed continued to expand, with the global Catholic Worker movement now including some 200 houses of hospitality. As Dorothy Day demonstrates, the work of creating a welcome table often begins with small, personal acts of invitation and does not stop until the walls, tables, and the very structures of society themselves change.

Like Dorothy Day, who continued day after day to drink coffee and break bread with all who came to the Catholic Worker, CST invites us to work with the same unflagging hope. Those four young people who sat down for lunch that day at Woolworth counter might have turned back in the face of racial segregation, doubting the power of what could they do as college students simply sitting down at a counter. Their example remains vivid proof of Margaret Mead's injunction inscribed on the walls of Geddes Hall: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." There always remains more work to do, but we need not become dismayed that the perfect welcome table lies beyond our reach.²¹ No matter how small our table or how little we have to offer, the work of encountering another human person often requires no more than—but also never less than—our very selves.²² We each need each other. And realizing that is the start of the welcome table.

²⁰ Excerpts from *The Long Loneliness* along with many of Dorothy Day's works are archived at www.catholicworker.org. See <https://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/articles/867.pdf>.

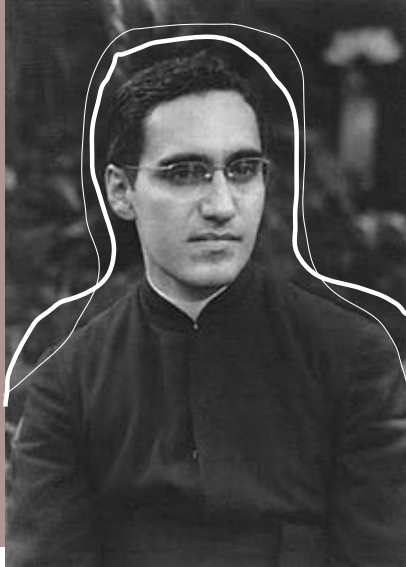
²¹As the U.S. Bishops write in *Economic Justice for All* (1986): "The Christian tradition recognizes, of course, that the fullness of love and community will be achieved only when God's work in Christ comes to completion in the kingdom of God. This kingdom has been inaugurated among us, but God's redeeming and transforming work is not yet complete" (67). http://www.usccb.org/upload/economic_justice_for_all.pdf

²²In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus offers a parable regarding the final judgment and the kingdom of God. In the parable, Jesus says that whatever little we do for the seemingly "least" of our brothers and sisters is an encounter with God and is required for entering the heavenly banquet table: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?" And the king will say to them in reply, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."

APPENDIX

LIVING CST WITHIN AND BEYOND THE WALLS OF THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL CONCERNS

CST is built into the very architecture of the Center for Social Concerns, defining the work we do and how we seek to do it. The meeting spaces throughout the first two floors of Geddes Hall are named for exemplars from diverse races, countries, and religious traditions, each of whom embody elements of CST's vision of the welcome table. Below are short biographies of each exemplar along with a personal reflection by Center for Social Concerns faculty and staff.²²



Oscar Romero was the Archbishop of San Salvador from 1977 to 1980. Saint Oscar Romero's radio-transmitted homilies were followed by tens of thousands of people as he assessed the political realities of his day in light of the **common good**. Archbishop Romero was assassinated in 1980 while celebrating Mass just after his homily in which he quoted *Gaudium et Spes*: —"While we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gain the whole world and lose himself, the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one." I admire how Romero read the daily politics of El Salvador in light of the Gospel—we need courageous Catholics to enact CST in our contemporary political sphere. The Center for Social Concerns offers two minors that examine the causes of social injustice and ways of contributing to the common good: the [Catholic Social Tradition minor](#) and [Poverty Studies Interdisciplinary minor](#).

—Reflection by Clemens Sedmak, Catholic Social Tradition Advisor at the Center for Social Concerns; Professor of Social Ethics, Keough School of Global Affairs

Nelson Mandela was a South African dissident, imprisoned for 27 years for his political opposition to apartheid. In 1994, he became the first President democratically elected by all of South Africa's peoples. I often think of Mandela because my students include people who are currently incarcerated. I remember that Mandela and his compatriots continued their activism in prison, articulating their vision for a South Africa that would respect the **human dignity** of all its citizens. They did so in short conversations inside putrid latrines to avoid being overheard by prison guards. Imagining the patient discipline of that work reminds me that dignity survives everywhere and can be protected from anywhere. [Inside-Out courses](#) are one way for Notre Dame students to learn with incarcerated people and (re)discover the dignity to be found in partnership.

—Reflection by Susan Sharpe, advisor on restorative justice



²²Images of CST exemplars belong to the public domain.

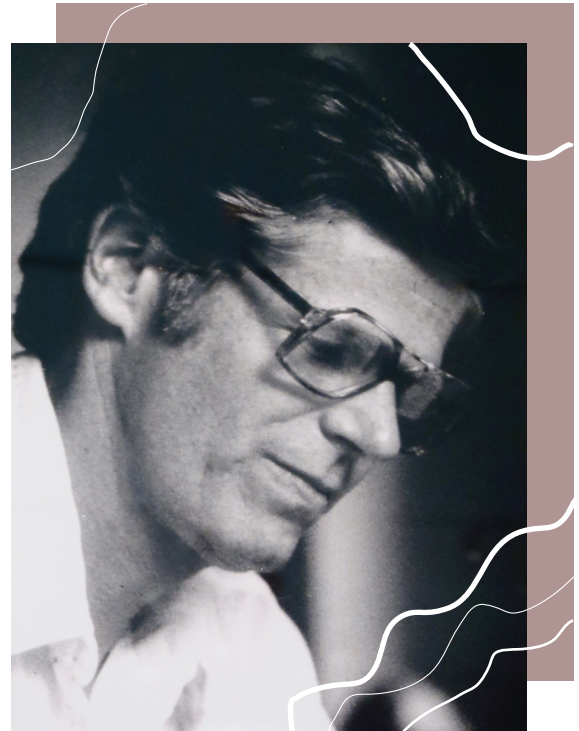


Dorothy Day was an American journalist and convert to Catholicism who co-founded the Catholic Worker movement which provided hospitality to the homeless of New York City. Dorothy's many writings and her lifelong example of living in Catholic Worker houses of hospitality illustrate her dedication to the **preferential option for the poor**. I am compelled by Dorothy Day's ability to find Jesus in the sacraments and in service among the poor. The CSC offers many opportunities [locally](#), domestically, and internationally to enact the preferential option for the poor, including the [Summer Service Learning Program \(SSLP\)](#), [International Summer Service Learning Program \(ISSLP\)](#), [Social Concerns Seminars](#), and [Mercy Works](#).

-Reflection by Ben Wilson, director of the SSLP

Fr. Don McNeill, C.S.C., was the founding Executive Director of the Center for Social Concerns and a member of Notre Dame's Theology Department who pioneered courses in community-based learning and postgraduate service opportunities, like the Holy Cross Associates and the Community for the International Lay Apostolate (CILA). The namesake son of an internationally famous radio personality, Fr. Don exemplified simplicity of lifestyle and humility, which Pope Francis lifts up as a quality of ecological conversion in his encyclical on **care for creation**, *Laudato Si'*. It was not unusual to spot Fr. Don riding his bicycle around campus even in stifling summer heat, pouring rain, and blinding winter storms. Through his mentorship, after graduation I joined the Holy Cross Associates Program in Chile ('87-'89), living, working, and praying in lay community alongside the priests and brothers of Holy Cross. The Center for Social Concerns offers [Social Concerns Seminars courses](#) along with other [community-engaged learning courses](#) that explore care for creation and sustainability, as well as a wide range of [postgraduate service opportunities](#).

-Reflection by Margie Pfeil, Theology Department and the Center for Social Concerns





Rosa Parks was a leading figure in the civil rights movement. A member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Parks trained as an organizer and activist for workers' rights and racial equality. A lifelong participant in the movement, she has been memorialized for her act of civil disobedience on the bus, refusing to cede her seat to a white passenger upon command from the driver. Her subsequent arrest catalyzed the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which resulted in the desegregation of public transportation. Parks demonstrates that **solidarity** requires moral courage in the face of injustice, especially when that injustice is legal. As an organizer in South Bend, I have learned from Parks that effective leadership is rooted in one's ability to build relationships. The CSC provides training in these skills through [Advocacy Education](#), explores workers' rights in the [Higgins Labor Program](#), and forms agents of change in the [McNeill Leadership Fellows Program](#).

-Reflection by Mike Hebbeler, director of Discernment and Advocacy Education

Mahatma Gandhi was a Hindu, Indian activist who led the movement for Indian independence from British rule, actively confronting British colonial structures. Through his nonviolent civil disobedience, Gandhi reminds us of the **correlation of our rights and duties** by using his voice to help make others' voices heard and using his rights and privilege for the good of others. As a researcher in the application of CST, I have often heard from Catholic activists how Gandhi has inspired the methodology they use to combat injustice. More personally, Gandhi serves as a pertinent reminder of the duty to use my own privileged position to personally act to ensure the rights of others, particularly when others' rights are violated by the community or society I belong to. The CSC offers students the chance to reflect on how they can "become the change" they wish to see in the world through the [Discernment Seminar](#) and the [Common Good Initiative](#), offered to graduate and professional students.

-Reflection by Anna Blackman, Postdoctoral Research Associate



REFLECTION ON CST BY CENTER FOR SOCIAL CONCERNS STUDENTS AND RECENT ALUMNI



Human dignity - During my [ISSLP](#) with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Gulu, Uganda, I saw how the sisters live out a commitment to human dignity at their vocational school teaching job skills such as sewing, hairdressing, and catering to young women coming from difficult situations. Their recognition of the dignity of the human person inspires me to approach my vocation of teaching as an opportunity to walk alongside students as they become the people God created them to be.

-Katie Ward, Music and Spanish, CST minor, 2019.

Preferential option for the poor - Through my capstone project within the Poverty Studies Interdisciplinary Minor, I have been able to develop a digital case study regarding the encampment of homeless people in South Bend, IN with Poverty Studies faculty and the Office of Digital Learning. This project has been a great exercise in presenting various stakeholder perspectives in a balanced way for an audience unfamiliar with the encampment situation. Learning how to craft a story that involves such a wide breadth of voices from persons of various backgrounds of privilege has been a great exercise in advocating for the vulnerable.

-Maggie Walters, Biology major and Poverty Studies minor.



Solidarity - As a Summer Service Learning Program participant at Casa Juan Diego in Houston, I lived and worked with recent immigrants to the United States. Although initially our superficial differences and even my own underlying biases seemed to separate us, we grew to know and love each other, sharing moments of joy and sorrow together as we continued our discernment of our paths in life, looking to Jesus as the truest form of solidarity, recognizing that God became man to be with us forevermore.

-Liam Nugent, Science Preprofessional Studies, Theology minor, 2020.



Subsidiarity - [Community based research courses](#) challenge students not just to find answers during a research process, but to first find and ask the most important questions alongside those who would be most impacted by the answers. After researching urban housing conditions with partners in the Near Northwest Neighborhood Association as part of the Introduction to Community Based Research (CBR) course my freshman year, my entire trajectory shifted to further develop the subsidiarity inherent in CBR's "with, not for, not on" research philosophy. This translates to my current work as a sustainability professional, as I know that the only worthwhile solutions for our planet's biggest challenges are the ones I could never find alone.

-Caitlin Hodges, Class of 2017, American Studies and Sustainability.

Care for creation - For my capstone project for my CST minor, I worked on designing and implementing a solar array for Our Lady of the Road, a local [in South Bend, IN] drop-in center for people experiencing poverty where I'm now doing a post-grad year of service. Caring for creation is simultaneously caring for everyone who shares our common home, including future generations in the circle of compassion.

-Emily Clements, Class of 2018, Chemical Engineering major, Sustainability and Catholic Social Tradition minors.



Dignity and rights of workers - Every day I am blessed to recruit and train leaders to fight their way out of poverty and demand respect in their workplaces and daily lives. To recognize the dignity of workers is to believe my fellow human beings are worthy of God's Love and fully capable of leading the fight for justice and equality.

-Stuart Mora, Class of 2008, History. President, Indiana Chapter - Unite Here Local 23 (Hospitality Workers' Union). Learn more about labor through the CSC's [Higgins Labor Program](#).



Correlation of rights and duties - In Indiana and across the country, many people are often denied the right to vote because of strict voter laws, voter purges, or socioeconomic conditions. Along with other activists, I've fought for increased ballot access, especially for those who were wrongfully purged from voter rolls. This work, and voting in general, lend themselves perfectly towards the CST principle of rights and responsibilities; a single vote may not sway an election, but the enfranchisement of others can compound into meaningful change.

-Prathm Juneja, Class of 2019, Computer Science and Political Science. Learn more at [NDVotes](http://NDVotes.com).

Common good - One of my favorite stories of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was when he questioned a rich man who, while seated next to a poor man, pulled towards himself the edges of his tunic so it wouldn't touch the poor man. I don't think the rich man even realized what he was doing, but the Prophet made him think more deeply about his instinctive reaction and how it made the poor man feel. For me, this story illustrates Catholic Social Tradition's idea of the common good since it shows that our actions affect each other even if we don't realize it and it's important to think more critically about our role and the work that we are doing when we work alongside people facing poverty and hardships we've never experienced. We must respect everyone else as members of our community because a community thrives only when everyone in it works together for the common good.

-Arwa Mohammed, Class of 2019, Preprofessional Studies and Arabic.





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