



CENTER FOR  
**SOCIAL  
CONCERNS**

In a spirit of solidarity, the Center for Social Concerns turns again to the Gospels and the Catholic Social Tradition for inspiration to work toward the common good during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Because of University travel restrictions and concerns about virus transmission, the Center for Social Concerns cannot support in-person community engagement this fall semester. Yet there are still many opportunities to do good. The faculty and staff of the center offer the following reflections and practical suggestions for being involved this fall semester.

*"In the midst of isolation when we are suffering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things, let us once again listen to the proclamation that saves us: he is risen and is living by our side."*

—Pope Francis's annual  
"City and World" address  
(Urbi et orbi),  
March 27, 2020.

# Living CST in Response to COVID-19

## About Catholic Social Tradition

The Catholic Social Tradition (CST) examines how we are called to live the social dimension of faith in a wounded world. CST draws on Scripture, two millennia of official Church writings, and the lived witness of people of faith who responded wholeheartedly to the social needs of their day. We are living in a time darkened by widespread suffering, anxiety, and growing inequality. CST does not give us easy answers for these challenging times. Rather, in the light of faith we seek creative ways of responding to our brothers and sisters in whom we recognize the presence of Christ.

## Applying the Principles of CST to the COVID-19 Crisis

### **The Common Good.**

The spread of the coronavirus illustrates how the human community intersects across the globe. Even as we practice social distancing, we are reminded that our well-being is connected to that of others and vice versa. As one group of physicians put it: "If our health care system fails, then we will all suffer. If the hospital is choked with COVID-19 patients, people with appendicitis, heart attacks, broken ankles, and so on will not be able to be treated." The Catholic Social Tradition calls us to work toward the common good, knowing that the good of the whole community depends on the good of each person. When we emerge from this time of dramatic isolation, will we be more unified than we were before or more divided than ever?

### **The Life and Dignity of the Human Person.**

Each person is a unique reflection of the image of God. Particularly in a time of crisis, we must critically examine the moral calculus—often tainted by racism and classism—by which we weigh the worth of different human lives. If all people are equally deserving of medical care, why do some have much less access than others? When ventilators and other necessities are in limited supply, it is timely to cultivate "a deep practice of human dignity," particularly toward those most likely to be overlooked.

### **Rights and Responsibilities.**

Catholic social teaching emphasizes that people have a right to the basic necessities that provide quality to life: health care, food, shelter, education, and employment. In times of crisis, our rights can seem to be in competition with others' rights. CST reminds us of our responsibility to employ our rights and privileges for the wellbeing of the global human family.

## **Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers.**

Work is an expression of human dignity and an expression of our involvement in God's creation. The pandemic has exaggerated inequalities across the labor market. Some office workers have been able to continue working from the safety of their homes while many others have lost jobs and "essential" workers risk the greatest exposure and are among the lowest paid workers. CST emphasizes the right to safe working conditions with a just wage which is based, among other criteria, on the contribution to the common good. The current public health crisis poignantly reminds us of the extent to which the good of our society depends on the labor of health care providers, caretakers, and workers who maintain the infrastructure of our communities.

## **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable.**

The pandemic has touched all of our lives in one way or another. And yet, as is always the case in crises, less well-resourced members of our communities will suffer the most. While the common good embraces all, Catholic Social Tradition holds that those who are in greatest need deserve preferential concern.

## **Caring for God's Creation.**

Care for the earth as our common home is a duty of our Catholic faith. We are all called to be careful stewards of God's creation and to ensure a hospitable environment now and into the future. Scientists have linked human activity to the spread of the coronavirus. While global emissions have dropped as fewer people are traveling, climate scientists debate if there will be any lasting environmental effect. What can each of us do to usher in a new era of what Pope Francis has called an "ecological conversion," or will our habits as consumers resume as usual after the crisis subsides?

## **Living Solidarity.**

More than "a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far," CST calls us to practice solidarity as "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good." The need for solidarity has rarely been so obvious as now, when so many are suffering and even dying alone. With courage, creativity, and prudence, each of us must search out new ways to tangibly express solidarity.

## Practical Ways to Live CST during a Pandemic

**Physical Distancing**– One of the most critical things we can do for the common good even if we are [young and healthy](#) is to observe physical distancing and [encourage friends and family](#) to do the same. The good things we miss during this time can present an opportunity to grow in solidarity with those who routinely lack access to these goods.

**Pray**– Pope Francis's [daily petitions](#) offer a model of faith, solidarity, and hope in these challenging times. Physically distanced, prayer remains a powerful way to come together and draw strength from the God who is close to all who suffer. We can begin by praying that we ourselves are moved to act for others.

**Virtual volunteering**– Many community organizations are now offering online volunteer opportunities. Consider working with a South Bend-area organization even if you are not on campus. Opportunities include data processing, web design, virtual tutoring, and simple conversation with individuals who are isolated. Take stock of your skills and resources (experience as a tutor, craft ability, web design, data analysis, social media communication) and visit the Center for Social Concerns [Community Partner Directory](#) to see how you can be an effective virtual volunteer.

**Advocate**– CST's emphasis on the Preferential Option for the Poor reminds us that society's most vulnerable members often lack access to public decision-makers. Contact your local representatives to urge them to take action on behalf of these populations. For example, join Bread for the World's [letter writing campaign](#) urging Congress to increase SNAP benefits (aka food stamps) or take part in [Network Lobbying's efforts](#) toward a just COVID-19 relief bill. Locally, advocate for individuals experiencing homelessness in South Bend and participate in [voter engagement through Faith in Indiana](#) leading up to the November presidential election.

**Join in Conversation** - All of us can relate to feeling cut off from others as a result of social distancing, but the effects of this experience can differ dramatically based on context. Many residents of hospice, rehabilitation centers, and nursing homes were already isolated before COVID-19 while the feeling is new for many children. A number of [South Bend community partners](#) have offered opportunities to connect through letters, online conversations, video tutoring, mentoring, and other activities. Even simple, live interactions with other people can make a big difference for people.

**Meeting Critical Needs**– As unemployment continues to affect millions, many families are struggling to meet their most basic needs, especially food, and non-profits are struggling to keep up. Plant a garden to share with neighbors, help out at a [community garden in your area](#), or [crowdfund](#) to donate funds to local food banks and other charitable organizations.

**"Small" practical acts for others**– It is understandable to feel overwhelmed by the massive scale of damage wrought by the coronavirus. We need systemic solutions that cross party lines and national borders. But we also shouldn't discount the impact of simple yet profound acts that boost someone's spirits. Host a book group; reach out to someone you've lost touch with or who doesn't have a wide social network; buy someone a take-out meal from a local restaurant and buy local whenever possible; look up your local hospital to see how you can help [support health care providers](#) on the front lines in your hometown; spread kindness and care — we need it now more than ever.