

# Attuning Our Heads + Hearts to Justice

## An Examination of Social Conscience

A Service Of  
St. Margaret of Scotland Catholic Church's Social Justice Ministry  
3854 Flad Avenue \* St. Louis, Missouri 63110  
Phone:(314)716-0363 Fax:(314)716-0364  
[www.stmargaretsl.org](http://www.stmargaretsl.org)

### What is an Examination of Social Conscience?

Catholic tradition teaches that we are all part of a human family. All of our decisions have social consequences. The Catholic Church teaches that doing social justice is an "essential" element to our faith and central to the gospel of Jesus (from *Communities of Salt and Light*).

To help us make socially just decisions in all areas of life, the Catholic Church has developed ten principles. Whenever we make decisions as an individual, a family, a parish, or a diocese, we must ask if our decisions support the economic, political, and cultural well-being not only for ourselves, but for all people.

An Examination of Social Conscience was developed to help each of us "attune our heads and hearts" to the depth and wisdom of our Catholic Social Teaching. By bringing to every area of our lives these principles, we begin to make manifest in the world the Good News proclaimed by Jesus Christ.

### Principles + Questions to Guide Us

#### Dignity of the Human Person

*Human life is sacred. Ensuring the dignity of each person is the starting point for moral vision in society.*

- + Can I look at the decision before me & recognize the human lives that may be impacted?
- + Does my decision reflect the attitude that all human life - regardless of stage of life, gender, racial/ethnic background, sexual orientation or religious affiliation - is God's holy creation?

#### The Common Good & Community

*Human dignity happens on/y in community. When making moral decisions, we must ask what must be done to promote not on/y the well being of the individual, but of the community itself.*

- + Is my well-being alone at the center of my decision-making? Have I considered others?
- + How does my decision impact others, especially the community as a whole?

#### Option for the Poor

*Deprivation & powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community. A just community can be achieved only if members give special attention to those on society's margins & consciously make choices to benefit them.*

- + How do I define "the poor" among us? Do I allow my perceptions of them to cloud my ability to listen to, speak with & include the poor in decision-making that impacts their lives?
- + Have I considered the impact my decision will have on the poorest among us? Do I do this without expectation of reward or recognition, whether from the poor themselves or the community at large?
- + When all factors have been considered, have I made a decision that supports the lives of the poor, the marginalized, the disempowered?

## Rights and Responsibilities

*Our decisions must support a community's fundamental right to food, shelter, clothing, employment, healthcare and education. All humans have these rights and they must be protected.*

- + Does my support of policies - whether at the level of my parish, neighborhood, city, or nation - support community access to these fundamental rights?
- + Does my charitable work assist when gaps in access to these rights exist, & inform my action in support of needed policy change?

## Subsidiarity

*The community and individuals must govern themselves at the lowest level possible. When local communities cannot meet their needs adequately we must ensure that higher levels of government intervene.*

- + Does my decision-making assure that people are able to make decisions about their own lives in the communities in which they live and work?
- + Do I seek & support intervention at higher levels when basic rights are threatened at lower levels?

## Economic Justice

*Our decisions must reflect a primary principle of justice: Economics must serve people - not the other way around. No one is allowed to amass excessive wealth when others lack basic necessities of life.*

- + Do finances serve the people's community? Or is their goal truly about amassing wealth in pursuit of power?
- + How do I spend my financial excess? Am I doing my part to assure that those lacking basic necessities receive what is due them from me, my community, my parish, my government?

## Stewardship of God's Creation

*We have a responsibility to care for the world's resources as stewards and trustees, not as mere consumers & users.*

- + Do I treat the earth & its resources with respect, as one to whom the world has been entrusted?
- + Do I make choices and support policies that reflect this role as trustee and steward?

## Peace Promotion & Disarmament

*Peace is a positive action, not merely the absence of war. Our decisions must promote mutual respect for & confidence in families, cities, & nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements.*

- + Do I, by my decisions and decision-making, promote peace-making among people, communities & even nations?

+ Do I, by my words & actions, abstain from violence and demonstrate a willingness to build relationships of respect & Gospel love with others?

## Participation

*We must promote the rights of people to participate in their community. It is wrong for a person or group to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to contribute to the economic, political & cultural life of society.*

+ Do my actions & decisions promote inclusion of all to participate in community? Do the voices of new community members -whether at the parish, school, administrative or neighborhood level - have equal weight to all other voices?

+ Are my children aware of our commitment to social justice? How are they invited & included to participate?

+ Does the way we structure our community institutions allow all to contribute in meaningful ways?

## Global Solidarity & Development

*We are one human family, called by the Gospel to see & act globally. Our responsibilities to each other cross national, racial, economic, & ideological differences.*

+ How does my support of goods and services affect my brothers and sisters in other nations? + Do the policies I support reflect a sensitivity and solidarity with developing nations?

## Prayer

Let us Pray.

Embracing God,

You grace each of us with equal measure in your love.

Let us learn to love our fellow humans more deeply,

So that we may create peaceful and just communities.

Inspire us to use our creative energies to build the structures we need to overcome the obstacles of intolerance and indifference.

May Jesus provide us the example needed And send the Holy Spirit to embolden our hearts for the journey.

Amen.