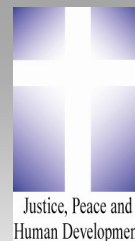




Caritas in Veritate

Group Study Session 2: Human Rights & Duties



PREPARATION

Total Session Time: 75 Minutes

Before the meeting

Distribute Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. You can order copies of the encyclical from www.usccbpublishing.org, or get the text of the encyclical online at www.vatican.va.

Copy and distribute the handout included with this session, which provides quotes from *Caritas in Veritate* on human rights and duties (pp. 8-9).

Encourage participants to become familiar with the entire encyclical prior to the session, and especially, to read those paragraphs from which the quotes on the handout are taken.

Arrange the chairs in a circle and set up a prayer space with an open Bible on a low table in the center of the circle. Decorate the prayer space with a cloth, candles, and flowers (but be sure that these items do not obstruct the view of those around the circle when seated).

Open the Bible to Isaiah 10:1-4, and select three persons ahead of time to read, at the appropriate times, 1) the Scripture passage, 2) the selected paragraphs from *Caritas in Veritate* on "rights," and 3) the selected paragraphs from *Caritas in Veritate* on "duties." Ask them to read slowly, and for the Scripture reader to return the Bible to its place of honor after the reading.

For additional group study of *Caritas in Veritate*, see the other study sessions at www.usccb.org/jphd/caritasinveritate. For additional group study of Catholic social teaching, order *In the Footsteps of Jesus Resource Manual on Catholic Social Teaching* and the USCCB video of the same name from USCCB Publishing at www.usccbpublishing.org/productdetails.cfm?sku=5-499, and see the educational materials at www.usccb.org/sdwp/foreducators.shtml.

Remind everyone that the purpose of the gathering is to reflect in faith on Pope Benedict's encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth*). Explain to participants that an "encyclical" is a letter that is a "teaching document" by the Holy Father. A "social encyclical" applies the consistent, traditional moral teachings of the Church to the social and economic challenges of the current day. The teaching letter *Caritas in Veritate* was written to address the current economic crisis, and deals with moral aspects of economic life, poverty and development, human rights and duties, environmental responsibility, and other moral and economic issues.



INTRODUCTIONS

5 minutes

Invite everyone to briefly introduce himself or herself, and to share one human right that he or she feels that all people have as children of God. Keep the introductions brief.

OPENING PRAYER

5 minutes

Invite everyone to place herself or himself in the presence of God.

Ask the first reader, selected before the session, to read Isaiah 10:1-4.

Pause for silent reflection on the Word of God for about 20 seconds.

Next, the Leader should *pray*:

*Father, your truth is made known in your Word.
Guide us to seek the truth of the human person.
Teach us the way to love because you are love.*

*Jesus, you embody Love and Truth,
Help us to recognize your face in the poor.
Enable us to live out our vocation to bring love and justice to your
people.*

*Holy Spirit, you inspire us to transform our world.
Empower us to seek the common good for all persons.
Give us a spirit of solidarity and make us one human family.*

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: Let us open ourselves to God's will for our world by praying in the words that Jesus taught us.

All: (recite in unison the Lord's Prayer)

If this is your group's first study session, ask participants to look at the "Social Encyclical Primer" handout (pp. 6-7). Ask them to read it prior to the session. Invite participants to discuss the following three questions:

- 1. How do the scriptures and the teaching and example of Jesus call us to live our faith in the practice of charity, the pursuit of justice, and the search for peace?*
- 2. Why does the Church speak out on social issues? What can the Church and its teaching offer our society and world?*
- 3. How familiar are you with the Church's social teachings and the documents listed in the summary? Do any of the topics covered by past encyclicals catch your attention in particular? Why?*

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

10 minutes



Caritas in Veritate and *Human Rights and Duties*



ENCYCLICAL EXCERPTS

5 minutes

Explain that participants will now hear some excerpts from *Caritas in Veritate*. First, some excerpts will be read related to the theme of **human rights**. After the excerpts are read, participants will be invited to respond to some discussion questions. After a short discussion another set of excerpts on **duties**, will be read, followed by another discussion period. Invite the second reader to read the excerpts from *Caritas in Veritate* on “human rights.” (See handout at the end of this session.)

DISCUSSION

35 minutes

After the reader has read the excerpts on human rights, provide some guidelines for the discussion. Be sure that everyone has an opportunity to respond to each question. Remind the participants that the purpose of the discussion is to explore our faith, not to debate with one another. Some groups find it helpful to use the “mutual invitation” method to move the sharing along. Each participant shares his or her reflections to a question, and then invites another person who has not shared to do so.

To help create a positive space for faith sharing, ask the participants to observe these simple guidelines:

Listen carefully.

Use “I” statements. (Take responsibility for what you express. Do not speak for “them.”)

Help all to participate. (Do not dominate.)

Stay on the topic and stay focused on the Pope’s message.

Be respectful and charitable at all times.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After sharing these guidelines, use these questions for discussion on human rights and duties:

1. Why is the right to life considered the most “fundamental” of all rights? In what ways is the right to life threatened in our world?
2. What are some other basic human rights? How is the dignity of the human person related to these rights? What can we do to respect the rights of others?
3. What is the difference between “basic rights” and the “right to excess” which the Pope warns against? What basic rights are threatened? As a Catholic, where do you see excess in our society?
4. How might recognition of our duties toward our brothers and sisters in need help change the way we assert our own rights as human beings?



Caritas in Veritate and Human Rights and Duties



ENCYCLICAL EXCERPTS

5 minutes

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

FOLLOW-UP ACTION

8 minutes

Invite the third reader to read the excerpts from *Caritas in Veritate* on “duties” (see handout at the end of this session).

After the reader has read the excerpts on duties, briefly review the guidelines for discussion and then lead a discussion using the following questions:

1. What is a duty? How is it related to the rights we possess as human beings?
2. What does it mean to have a duty to “secure a common good”? How can you fulfill your duty, as a Christian, to practice charity by working toward the common good?
3. How can we work to promote the rights and integrity of the family?
4. What duties do we have, as individuals, as a country, and as a world, toward the natural environment? How might this change our lifestyles?
5. What are the connections between our duty to protect the environment and our duty to protect the rights of the human person?

In response to this brief discussion of the Holy Father’s 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, we are called to practice charity by protecting human rights and fulfilling duties in order to secure the common good (7). Invite members of the group to share ways they can act on what they have learned as family members, workers, owners, consumers, and voters. For example, participants could

Advocate for the fulfillment of the basic rights of all in the human family by acting on alerts from Catholics Confront Global Poverty (www.usccb.org/globalpoverty) or USCCB’s Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development (www.usccb.org/sdwp/takeaction.shtml).

Contact the diocesan representative for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development to see how your community can support local groups that are working to ensure the basic rights of all in the local community are protected.

Reach out to the Pro-life director in the diocese, and visit the USCCB Pro-life Web site at www.usccb.org/prolife.

Visit the Web site of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change to learn more about climate change and the poor, and what you can do, at www.catholicsandclimatechange.org.

You can find other ideas for action on the *Caritas in Veritate* Web page of the USCCB Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development at www.usccb.org/jphd/caritasinveritate.



CLOSING REFLECTION

5 minutes

Invite the participants to listen once again to the reading from Isaiah 10:1-4 with this question in mind: What is the Word of God asking of me today?

Re-read Isaiah 10:1-4

After reading, pause for silent reflection on the question.

Invite the participants to share a word or a phrase that answers the question: "What is the Word of God asking of me today?"

CLOSING PRAYER

2 minutes

Leader: Let us again open ourselves to God's will for our world by praying in the words of Jesus.

All: (recite in unison the Lord's Prayer)

OR

Leader: Let us close by offering intentions based on today's reflections and conversation. In a moment, I will start us off with a couple of examples. I invite you to then add your own. After each intention, we will respond, "Lord, hear our prayer."

We pray for the rights of the family, that our policies will respect its integrity and ensure its economic well-being. We pray to the Lord . . .

We pray for our vocation as Christians, that we may live out our duties by working for the common good. We pray to the Lord . . .

After participants are done offering intentions, conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

DISMISSAL or FELLOWSHIP

Thank the participants for sharing their reflections and wish them safe travel home. Or, you may wish to invite participants to share in refreshments and fellowship after the session. Some groups may want to close with sharing the sign of peace.



Social Encyclical Primer



Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* was signed and released in June 2009. This encyclical, or teaching document, is the latest in a series of social encyclicals written by our popes over the last 120 years, as the Church sought to apply its moral principles and social teaching to emerging economic and social problems.

Jesus Christ is both divine and human. In his person, he embodies what it is to live a fully human life. He is the model of how we are called to live. His teaching has both personal and social implications. These social encyclicals shine the light of the Gospel of Christ and the Church's moral teaching on changing social circumstances, to provide guidance and support to Christians as we seek to live our faith in the world. In this way, the teaching is both very traditional and ever new. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate*:

The Church's social doctrine illuminates with an unchanging light the new problems that are constantly emerging. This safeguards the permanent and historical character of the doctrinal "patrimony" which, with its specific characteristics, is part and parcel of the Church's ever-living Tradition. Social doctrine is built on the foundation handed on by the Apostles to the Fathers of the Church, and then received and further explored by the great Christian doctors. This doctrine points definitively to the New Man, to the "last Adam [who] became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45), the principle of the charity that "never ends" (1 Cor 13:8). It is attested by the saints and by those who gave their lives for Christ our Savior in the field of justice and peace. It is an expression of the prophetic task of the Supreme Pontiffs to give apostolic guidance to the Church of Christ and to discern the new demands of evangelization (12).

Here are highlights from some of the encyclicals that are part of the Church's modern body of social teaching:

[*Rerum Novarum*](#) (*On the Condition of Labor*) 1891, Pope Leo XIII – Essentially the beginning of modern Catholic social teaching, truly groundbreaking, and a foundational document for many subsequent encyclicals (see below). This encyclical addresses the plight of workers in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, touching on issues that include socialism, unbridled capitalism, a living wage, workers' rights, support for unions, and a rejection of class struggle. Pope Leo first articulated the principles that underlie the preferential option for the poor.

[*Quadragesimo Anno*](#) (*On the Reconstruction of the Social Order*) 1931, Pope Pius XI – Commemorating the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical offers an update on the state of labor and industrialization, and strong critiques of communism, unrestrained capitalism, class conflict, and inequalities. Pope Pius denounces the concentration of wealth and economic power, and calls for the reconstruction of the social order based on subsidiarity.

[*Mater et Magistra*](#) (*Christianity and Social Progress*) 1961, Pope John XXIII – Issued 70 years after *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical looks to the Church as the "Mother and Teacher," calling the world to salvation and better social relationships. It looks at science and technology, noting their power to improve the human condition, but also to limit human freedoms, and calling on governments to safeguard human rights. Pope John expressed concerns for the growing gap between rich and poor



Social Encyclical Primer



nations, for the plight of farmers and rural areas, and for the arms race. The encyclical calls on wealthier nations to help poorer ones.

[Pacem in Terris](#) (*Peace on Earth*) 1963, Pope John XXIII – Issued only two months before the pope's death, this encyclical is the first to be directed to "all men of good will," instead of just to Catholics. In a response to the Cold War, the encyclical outlines necessary conditions for lasting world peace, looking at respect for human rights and disarmament. Pope John calls for the development of a world authority to protect the universal common good, condemns the arms race, and supports efforts to build peace.

[Populorum Progressio](#) (*On the Development of Peoples*) 1967, Pope Paul VI – This encyclical, which Pope Benedict's new encyclical commemorates, examines the economy on a global level, and addresses the rights of workers to decent work, just wages, decent working conditions, and to form and join unions. Pope Paul VI calls development the new name for peace, criticizes unjust economic structures that lead to inequality, and supports new international and social relationships.

[Laborem Exercens](#) (*On Human Work*) 1981, Pope John Paul II – Issued to mark the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical once again emphasizes the dignity of work and the rights of workers, and the priority of labor over capital. Pope John Paul also addresses disabled workers, emigration, materialism, and the spirituality of work.

[Sollicitudo Rei Socialis](#) (*On Social Concern*) 1987, Pope John Paul II – This encyclical honored *Populorum Progressio* on its 20th anniversary, offering solidarity as a central requirement of our faith and times. Pope John Paul critiques East-West blocs and other "structures of sin" that compromise the progress of poor nations, and calls for solidarity between rich and poor nations.

[Centesimus Annus](#) (*The Hundredth Year*) 1991, Pope John Paul II – On the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul II reflected on the current state of issues that Leo XIII had addressed in his day. It focuses on the moral dimensions of economic life, the advantages and limitations of the market, the role of business, and the responsibilities and limitations of government.

[Evangelium Vitae](#) (*The Gospel of Life*) 1995, Pope John Paul II – An affirmation of the gift of human life and the need to protect it, this encyclical explored many threats to human life, including the evils of abortion, euthanasia, and the use of the death penalty. It called the Church to be "a people of life and for life."

[Deus Caritas Est](#) (*God is Love*) 2005, Pope Benedict XVI – Benedict's first encyclical emphasized the connections between love of God and love of neighbor. Pope Benedict said the Church could no more neglect charity than it could Scripture or the sacraments. He located love of the poor at the center of Catholic life.

[Caritas In Veritate](#) (*Charity in Truth*) 2009, Pope Benedict XVI – Anticipated since 2007, this encyclical follows up on the themes of Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, calling it the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age. It deals with the ethics of contemporary economics; poverty and development; global solidarity; charity, justice, and the common good; rights and duties; and care for creation, among other topics.



Quotes from *Caritas in Veritate* on Human Rights & Duties



Excerpts from *Caritas in Veritate* on Rights

“The right to food, like the right to water, has an important place within the pursuit of other rights, beginning with the fundamental right to life” (27).

“*Openness to life is at the center of true development . . .* By cultivating openness to life, wealthy peoples . . . can promote virtuous action within the perspective of production that is morally sound and marked by solidarity, respecting the fundamental right to life of every person and every individual” (28).

“If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology” (51).

“In many cases, poverty results from a *violation of the dignity of human work*, either because work opportunities are limited (through unemployment or underemployment), or ‘because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family’”¹ (63).

“A link has often been noted between claims to a “right to excess”, and even to transgression and vice, within affluent societies, and the lack of food, drinkable water, basic instruction and elementary health care in areas of the underdeveloped world and on the outskirts of large metropolitan centers. The link consists in this: individual rights, when detached from a framework of duties which grants them their full meaning, can run wild, leading to an escalation of demands which is effectively unlimited and indiscriminate” (43).



Quotes from *Caritas in Veritate* on Human Rights & Duties



Excerpts from *Caritas in Veritate* on Duties

“The reality of human solidarity, which is a benefit for us, also imposes a duty.¹ Many people today would claim that they owe nothing to anyone, except to themselves. They are concerned only with their rights, and they often have great difficulty in taking responsibility for their own and other people's integral development” (43).

“The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practice this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation” (7).

“The notion of rights and duties in development must also take account of the problems associated with *population growth*. . . *Morally responsible openness to life represents a rich social and economic resource*. Populous nations have been able to emerge from poverty thanks not least to the size of their population and the talents of their people. . . States are called to *enact policies promoting the centrality and the integrity of the family* founded on marriage between a man and a woman, the primary vital cell of society,¹ and to assume responsibility for its economic and fiscal needs, while respecting its essentially relational character” (44).

“Today the subject of development is also closely related to the duties arising from *our relationship to the natural environment*. The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. . . Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other” (48, 51).

“The international community has an urgent duty to find institutional means of regulating the exploitation of non-renewable resources, involving poor countries in the process, in order to plan together for the future. . . This responsibility is a global one, for it is concerned not just with energy but with the whole of creation, which must not be bequeathed to future generations depleted of its resources” (49, 50).

“What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new lifestyles “in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments”. Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment, just as environmental deterioration in turn upsets relations in society” (51).

“Human beings legitimately exercise a *responsible stewardship over nature*, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits and to cultivate it in new ways, with the assistance of advanced technologies, so that it can worthily accommodate and feed the world's population. On this earth there is room for everyone: here the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity, through the help of nature itself — God's gift to his children — and through hard work and creativity” (50).