



# Catholic Social Teaching *for Everyone*

SESSION THREE:

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

# Opening Prayer:

O GOD, Father of all,  
You have a special love for the poor  
and the marginalized.

We pray for all who lack  
the basic necessities of life —  
food, shelter, clothing, and dignity.  
Provide for their needs  
and comfort them in their struggles.

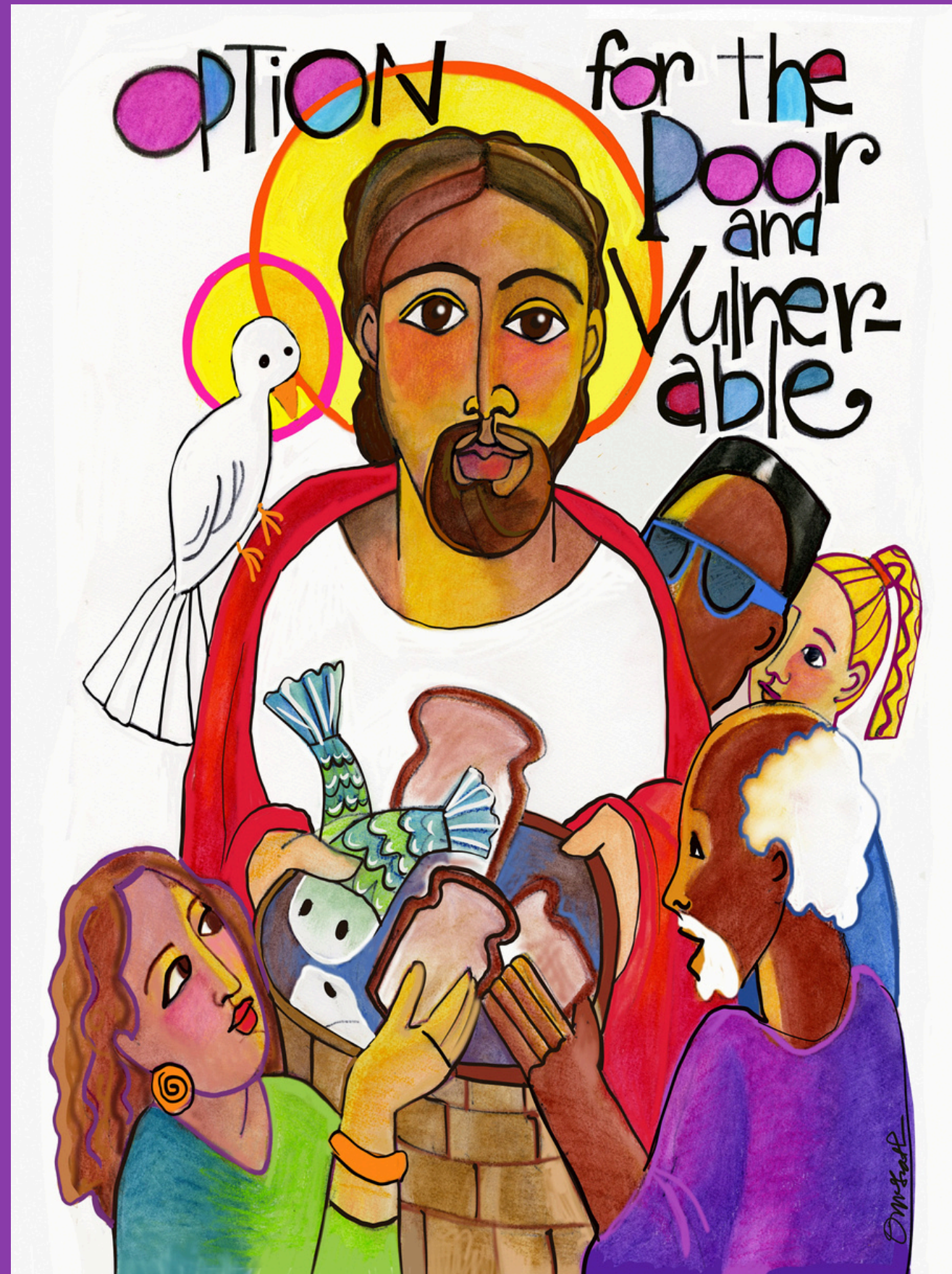
Open the hearts of the wealthy  
to share their blessings generously.

Help us to see Your face  
in every person in need  
and to serve them with love.

May justice flow like a river and  
righteousness like a mighty stream.

Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

# Themes of Catholic Social Teaching



## OPTION for the POOR & VULNERABLE

*A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. Our tradition instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.*

CST 101

# Option for the Poor and Vulnerable



# Church's Perspective on the Poor and Vulnerable

- “In general, we are witnessing an increase in different kinds of poverty, which is no longer a single, uniform reality but now involves multiple forms of economic and social impoverishment, reflecting the spread of inequality even in largely affluent contexts.” (*Dilexi Te* 12)
- “In fact, there are many forms of poverty: the poverty of those who lack material means of subsistence, the poverty of those who are socially marginalized and lack the means to give voice to their dignity and abilities, moral and spiritual poverty, cultural poverty, the poverty of those who find themselves in a condition of personal or social weakness or fragility, the poverty of those who have no rights, no space, no freedom.” (*Dilexi Te* 9)

# Church's Perspective on the Poor and Vulnerable *cont'd*

**“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?”**

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So, faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

*(Dilexi Te 29, quoting James 2:15-16)*



# Church's Perspective on the Poor and Vulnerable *cont'd*

- “The poor should be seen ‘not as a problem, but as people who can become the principal builders of a new and more human future for everyone.’” (CSDC 449)
- “Poverty poses a dramatic problem of justice; in its various forms and with its various effects, it is characterized by an unequal growth that does not recognize the ‘equal right of all people to take their seat at the table of the common banquet.’”(CSDC 449)

# What is the option for the poor?

“The primary purpose of [the Church’s] special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of society. It is to enable all persons to share in and contribute to the common good. The ‘option for the poor,’ therefore, 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.”

*(Economic Justice for All 88)*



# What is the universal destination of goods?

- “God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone. This is the foundation of *the universal destination of the earth's goods*.”(CSDC 171)
- “Each person must have access to the level of well-being necessary for his full development. The right to the common use of goods is the ‘first principle of the whole ethical and social order’ and ‘the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine.’ . . . It is innate in individual persons, in every person, and has priority with regard to any human intervention concerning goods, to any legal system concerning the same, to any economic or social system or method . . . ” (CSDC 172)

# Private Property



“Private property and other forms of private ownership of goods ‘assure a person a highly necessary sphere for the exercise of his personal and family autonomy and ought to be considered as an extension of human freedom . . . stimulating exercise of responsibility, it constitutes one of the conditions for civil liberty.’ Private property is an essential element of an authentically social and democratic economic policy, and it is the guarantee of a correct social order.” (CSDC 176)

# What is required of individuals?

- “In teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and the special situation they have in society: the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others.” (*Octogesima Adveniens 23*)



- “Almsgiving . . . offers us a chance to halt before the poor, to look into their eyes, to touch them and to share something of ourselves with them.” (*Dilexi Te 116*)

# What is required of societies?



“It is undoubtedly an act of love, the work of mercy by which one responds here and now to a real and impelling need of one's neighbor, but it is an equally indispensable act of love to strive to *organize and structure society* so that one's neighbor will not find himself in poverty, above all when this becomes a situation within which an immense number of people and entire populations must struggle, and when it takes on the proportions of a true worldwide social issue.” (CSDC 208)

# Final Thought

“The community of the faithful, sustained by the strength of the Holy Spirit, was rooted in being close to the poor, whom they considered not just an ‘appendage’ but an essential part of Christ’s living body.” (*Dilexi Te* 39)



# Questions for Reflection *and Discussion*

# Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

“There are many forms of poverty: the poverty of those who lack material means of subsistence, the poverty of those who are socially marginalized and lack the means to give voice to their dignity and abilities, moral and spiritual poverty, cultural poverty, the poverty of those who find themselves in a condition of personal or social weakness or fragility, the poverty of those who have no rights, no space, no freedom.” (*Dilexi Te* 9)

*Who are the poor and vulnerable in your midst?*

*Who is wounded; lacking in material means; socially marginalized; morally, spiritually or culturally poor; fragile; or without rights?*

# Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

“The poor not only suffer injustice, but they also struggle against it. . . .  
The lives of all take priority over the appropriation of goods by a few. . . .  
Love for the poor [and vulnerable] is at the center of the Gospel.”

(Pope Francis, Address to First World Meeting of Popular Movements, 2014)

*When have you felt inspired by the work of people living in poverty  
or on the societal margins to transform the causes of injustice?*

*How can you join or support their efforts?*



# Take Action



# Examination of Conscience (USCCB)



- Do I give special attention to the needs of the poor and vulnerable in my community and in the world?
- Am I disproportionately concerned for my own good at the expense of others?
- Do I engage in service and advocacy work that protects the dignity of poor and vulnerable persons?

# Taking Action — Samaritans

*Beginning – in 2002 to provide short-term financial assistance*

- Affirm the dignity of each person
- Respond to each need with compassion
- Provide a listening ear to those in crisis
- Give hope to those with nowhere to turn for assistance



*How*

- Understand the need
- Offer encouragement
- Advocate when appropriate
- Refer to additional resources
- Partner with other churches
- Provide short-term financial assistance (rent, utilities, etc.)

# Taking Action — Hypothermia Prevention Shelter

- History of hypothermia prevention in Fairfax County
- Hypothermia prevention @ SJN
- Our guests
- FACETS
- What happens at the shelter?
- How can you help?
  - a. Volunteer at the SJN Shelter
  - b. Join the hypothermia prevention ministry's planning committee



# Taking Action — Loaves & Fishes



- Under the umbrella of Loaves and Fishes are six separate meal ministries supported by parishioners at SJN.
- The Ministry has long-standing outreach efforts at our parish that have brought nourishment and compassion to thousands. Examples include:
  - A breakfast program at the Lamb Center
  - A monthly meal at the Embry Rucker Shelter
  - Supplying the South Lakes High School Food pantry to assist students and families

# Taking Action — Linens N Love

- History of ministry (national, international, and local )
- Mission of local chapter (sourcing and environmental benefit )
- SJN's Linens N Love accepts gently used:
  - Towels & washcloths, sheets & pillowcases, non-stuffed blankets
- Parishioners donate items at the marked drop-off bin in the hallway.
- Student leaders collect donated items, sort and organize donations, and deliver them to the community organizations.
- Donations are taken to:
  - Embry Rucker Shelter/Cornerstones
  - Fairfax County Animal Shelter
- Items that cannot be accepted by charities are donated to Green Drop.



# Closing Prayer:

## *Prayer for Those in Poverty (USCCB)*

God of Justice,

Open our eyes  
to see you in the face of those in poverty.  
Open our ears to hear you  
in the cries of those exploited.  
Open our mouths to defend you  
in the public squares as well as in private deeds.  
Remind us that what we do to the least ones, we do to you.  
Amen.