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CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND POLICY OBJECTIVES

Crime and Criminal Justice

Human Dignity

The Catholic approach to criminal justice begins with the recognition that the dignity of the human person applies to both victim and offender. Human dignity is not something we earn by our good behavior; it is something with which we are born. Catholic social teaching is based on our belief that every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, every human person - regardless of race, gender, economic status or other human characteristic - possesses inviolable dignity, value and worth. No human person becomes the worst act he or she ever committed. Instead, we believe that grace can transform human beings. We are called to stand with victims: the parents who lose a child, the elderly woman who is mugged, the cashier who is robbed and the child whose parent is in jail. When we ignore and neglect our family, friends and neighbors because we find their deep pain unsettling, we further isolate victims and deny their dignity.

- *Embrace the inherent dignity of offenders and victims*

Rights and Responsibilities

Our faith tradition insists that every person has both rights and responsibilities. We have the right to live and to those things that make life human. Our correctional facilities must provide the basic necessities that enable inmates to live with dignity: food, clothing, shelter, personal safety, timely medical care, education and meaningful work. We also have responsibilities to ourselves, our families and our community. Crime and corrections are at the intersection of rights and responsibilities. When our brothers and sisters commit crimes, they violate the rights of others and disregard their responsibilities. We, too, have responsibilities - to hold the offender accountable, and to respect his or her basic rights.

- *Diagnose and treat mental illness and chemical addiction*
- *Expand training and educational opportunities*

Family, Community and Participation

We believe the human person is social. Our dignity, rights and responsibilities are lived out in relationship with others, and primary among these is the family. The disintegration of family life and community has been a major contributor to crime. Supporting and rebuilding family ties should be central to efforts to prevent and respond to crime. Placing prisons in remote areas diminishes contacts with close relatives and undermines the family connections that aid in restoration. Likewise, maintaining family and community connections can help offenders understand the harm they've done and prepare them for reintegration into society. Isolation may be necessary in some rare cases. Cutting off family contact can make reintegration harder for those in custody.



- *Limit the impact of a parent's incarceration by addressing the emotional and economic needs of children*



MINNESOTA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

The Common Good

The common good is undermined by criminal behavior that threatens the lives *and* dignity of others and by policies that seem to give up on those who have broken the law. The social dimension of our teaching leads us to the common good and its relationship to punishment. We believe that punishment has three primary purposes: (1) defending public order; (2) protecting people's safety; and (3) rehabilitating the offender. Legitimate public authority has the right and the duty to inflict punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offense. Redress is also important to restoring the common good. This often neglected dimension of punishment allows victims to move from a place of pain and anger to one of healing and resolution.

- *Direct resources toward programs that focus on rehabilitation, treatment and redress*

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

This principle of Catholic social teaching recognizes that every public policy must be assessed by how it will affect our poorest and most vulnerable brothers and sisters. When children grow up with inadequate resources, they are more likely to turn to lives of crime in desperation or out of anger or confusion. Unaddressed needs - including proper nutrition, shelter, health care and protection from abuse and neglect - can be stepping stones on a path towards crime. Our role as Church is to continually work to address these needs through pastoral care, charity and advocacy.

- *Support the recommendations of the Legislative Commission to End Poverty*

Subsidiarity and Solidarity

These two related principles recognize that human dignity and human rights are fostered in community. Subsidiarity calls for problem-solving initially at the community level: family, neighborhood, city and state. It is only when problems become too large, or the common good is clearly threatened, that larger institutions are required to help. This principle encourages communities to be more involved. Criminal activity is largely a local issue and, to the extent possible, should have local solutions. Neighborhood-watch groups, community-oriented policing, school liaison officers, neighborhood treatment centers and local support for ex-offenders all can be part of confronting crime and fear of crime in local communities.

Solidarity recognizes that we are all really responsible for all. Not only are we responsible for the safety and well-being of our family and our next-door neighbor, but Christian solidarity demands that we work for justice beyond such boundaries. Catholics are called to see Jesus in the face of everyone, including both victims and offenders. Through the lens of solidarity, those who commit crimes and are hurt by crime are not issues or problems; they are sisters and brothers, members of one human family. Solidarity calls us to insist on responsibility while seeking alternatives that do not simply punish, but rehabilitate, heal and restore.



- *Improve access to credit, employment, higher education and housing for individuals who have completed their sentence*