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*“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”*

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL SERVICES WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

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**Presented at:**

**NACSW Convention 2005**

**October, 2005**

**Grand Rapids, Michigan**

*This paper explores the human rights perspective in social work, social teachings and social services in the Catholic Church. It explains the human rights perspective as emerging from its origin of three Christian beliefs: the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Mystical Body of Christ. Seven major themes of the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church are compared with the Troman's model of the attitudes and dimensions of social justice. These social justice themes and attitudes are represented in all cultures through the ministry of the Catholic Church's largest social service organization, Caritas Internationalis.*

Social Justice challenges the fundamental principles for individuals and society. From a worldview perspective, the concept of social justice has been interpreted through five predominant perspectives in society: utilitarian, egalitarian, libertarian, racial contract, and human rights (Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, Yuen, 1997). Anyone or several of these perspectives create the framework in which social justice is implemented by different governments, religious groups, and professions in their contributing services towards humanity and the formation of a just society. Within the last decade, the social work profession has adopted the human rights perspective as the basic principle undergirding the formulation of social work policy in designing programs, the implementation for social work practice in services and the utilization in theory base research methodology (NASW Code of Ethics, 1999). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defined Human Rights as "The recognition of the inherent and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world" (Preamble, 1988).

However, long before human rights were written in international documents and national constitutions, people in ancient traditions have adopted human rights as a basic principle of social justice in society. The earliest implementation of human rights and social justice has been recorded in the Hamurabi Code, the Old and New Testament writings, the Koran,

teaching of Confucius, Hindus Vedas, and Native American legends. (Shiman, 1997). For Christian faith-based communities, social justice is rooted in the Bible and the Christian teachings of tradition.

### **Faith Beliefs of Social Justice in the Catholic church**

Social Justice is at the heart of the social teachings and social services in the Catholic Church. Since its inception, the Catholic Church has always held the human rights perspective in its teaching of social justice and used it as the essential framework for the implementation of all its social ministries throughout the world. The Church has understood this perspective as representing the teaching of the Old and New Testament, and the Traditions of the Church.

The human rights perspective of the Catholic Church has its origin in three basic beliefs of faith: Trinity, Incarnation, and the Mystical Body of Christ. These three beliefs of faith are the foundation stones of the Church's mission in its social teachings, preaching and social service ministries. The human rights perspective emerges in the social teaching of the Catholic Church in the truth found in the triune nature of God, which is communal, relational, and social. God the Father sends his only Son, Jesus Christ and shares the Holy Spirit as his gift of life and love in which each person is created uniquely in the image and likeness of God. "Beyond human and natural bonds, there is a discerning light of faith, a new model of the unity of the human race which is a reflection of the intimate life of God, that is One God in Three persons". (John Paul II, 1987. p. 655. #40). Through Baptism each person is empowered by the Spirit of God to build relationships based on God's justice that are life-giving and love communicating throughout the world.

Through the belief in the Incarnation, the son of God, Jesus, embraces the human condition becoming one with us except without sin and redeems us as invaluable members of God's family and the human family. "For Christ is the firstborn of all creation in which all things are created through him and for him and all things are held together in him." (Colossians 1:15-16).

"Faith in Christ the redeemer, while it illumines from within the nature of development also guides men and women in the task of collaboration." (John Paul II, 1987. p. 651 #31). Human dignity and human rights come from God not from society, or social contract or human accomplishment.

The belief regarding the Mystical Body is the central belief in the worship of Eucharist. Through the breaking of the bread and drinking of the cup Catholics become the one body of Christ broken and shared and given in service for all people. Eucharist strengthens the body of Christ to a corporate response in practicing the moral and social virtue of solidarity as brothers and sisters in the world. "It is a firm determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual because we are all responsible for all" (John Paul II, 1987. p. 654, #38).

### **Major Themes of Social Justice**

These three beliefs form the spirituality in the Catholic Church's teaching and services of Social Justice. From these basic beliefs, seven major themes regarding social justice

emerge and are implemented in the social service ministries of the Catholic Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, (1994) and the Catholic Conference of the United States Bishops, (1995) proclaimed the seven themes of Social Justice to be taught and implemented in all aspects of social service ministry and education. These seven themes include the following:

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person
2. Call to Family
3. Community, and Participation
4. Rights and Responsibilities
5. Option for the Poor, the Vulnerable and the People at Risks
6. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
7. Solidarity, and Care for God’s Creation.

These seven themes of the Catholic Churches’ teachings of social justice and human rights are promulgated and lived within the culture of the people in the church throughout the world.

**Process of Implementing Social Justice Themes**

According to John Tropman, (1995), implementing the Catholic ethic of social justice requires two value systems: Alpha and Omega. Both value systems are also basic attitudes and represent different ways of looking at the world. These two attitudes have a number of common dimensions in which either one of the two attitudes becomes the predominant attitude and the other becomes the subordinate attitude. These two attitudes encompass seven common dimensions that are represented in all cultures. The seven dimensions are self-concept, treatment of others, relevant social rules, relevant social process, goal achievement/accomplishment, responsibility, and basis of help. (p. 166-172). Utilizing the seven dimensions in the Tropman’s model and incorporating the seven themes of the Catholic Church’s teaching about social justice, it is possible to create a framework for implementing social work from the human rights perspective that can be represented in all cultures.

**Chart 1:Tropman’s Attitudes and Dimensions Represented in All Cultures and the Themes of Social Justice of the Catholic Church.**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Alpha</b>	<b>Omega</b>	<b>Social Justice Theme</b>
<b>Concept of Self</b>	Solo Self	Ensemble Self	<b>Life and Dignity of the Human Person</b>
<b>Treatment of others</b>	Competitive	Cooperative	<b>Call to Family, Community, and Participation</b>

<b>Relevant Social Rules</b>	Fair Play	Fair Share	<b>The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers</b>
<b>Relevant Social Process</b>	Either / or	Up and Down	<b>Solidarity</b>
<b>Goal Achievement/ Accomplishment</b>	Optimizing	Satisficing	<b>Care for God's Creation</b>
<b>Responsibility</b>	Cause	Condition	<b>Rights and Responsibilities</b>
<b>Basis of Help</b>	Worthy	Needy	<b>Option for the Poor and Vulnerable and People at Risks</b>

(Tropman. 1995, p.172)

The Omega attitude is the predominant attitude represented in the seven themes of the Social Justice human rights perspective in which the Catholic Church implements its social service ministries throughout the world.

### **Individual's relationship toward God and Neighbor**

The first two dimensions present the relationship of the individual's relationship towards God and neighbor. It reflects the Golden rule in the Sacred Scripture: "Do unto others what you want others to do unto you." (Matthew 7:12).

The ensemble self, that is the self described by the individual in relation to others, is expressed in the theme, Life and Dignity of the Human Person. This theme teaches that every person is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, human life from conception till death is sacred and the dignity of the human person is a God-given inherent right.

However, God created the human person to live in society. Therefore, cooperative treatment of others, emphasizes mutuality and is expressed in a call to live in family, as community, and in participation with each other. "The human person is master of himself; before God he is a steward; before other men he is an equal person, and he establishes with them relations of mutual understanding and love. This singular position and the person's value as an image of God is what we mean when we speak of the dignity of the human person." (John Paul II, 1981. p. 228-229 nos. 4-5). The individual person is not only sacred but also social; and therefore grows and develops to his or her fullest potential participating in the spiritual, social, and cultural context of family, community and relationships. In the design of God every person is called upon to develop and fulfill himself or herself, for every life is

a vocation. This self-fulfillment is not something optional, for each individual is a member of society and all people are called to the fullness of development. (Paul VI, 1967, nos. 15-16).

It is this “intrinsic connection between authentic development and respect for human rights which reveals the moral character of development. Therefore, development which shares in process and responsibility, implies a lively awareness of the need to respect the right of every individual to the full use of the benefits offered by science and technology” (John Paul II, 1987. p. 652, #33).

### **Social Boundaries within the Market Place**

The second two themes address the social boundaries within market place in society throughout the world. The Relevant Social Rules with their prominence and or enforcement in community and society challenges the fair share dimension and the social justice theme in its respect and dignity of work and the rights of workers. “Individual initiative alone and the mere free play of competition could never assure successful development” (Paul VI, 1967 #32). The Social Justice Human Right’s perspective of the Catholic Church teaches that economy must serve the people in society. The dignity of work is to be respected, and the basic rights of workers must be protected, that is, productive work, decent and fair wages, participation and formation of unions, safeguard private property and economic initiative.

The dimension of the relevant social process assesses the mobility of a person’s status in society. The person in the Omega culture looks at conditions in society and strives to resolve issues, solve problems, and alleviate pain. (Tropman, 1995). The response of the person is one of empathy not judgment. The focus is “What can be done to help?, not, How has this happened?” (Tropman, 1995, p.175). Individualism, isolation, and nationalism are challenges for international unity among different cultures. The social justice human rights teaching proclaims solidarity as one human family regardless of national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences.

Solidarity calls for developing interdependent world-wide relationships with a firm belief in preserving the common good (John Paul II, 1987, #38). Solidarity is not only a moral obligation but also a Christian virtue. “In the light of faith, solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the Christian dimensions of total gratitude, forgiveness, and reconciliation of one’s neighbor...It is exercised within each society when its members recognize one another as neighbor.” (John Paul II, 1987, p. 654, nos. 38-39). Solidarity is an essential obligation on all levels: individual, national and international for a sustainable development of society.

### **A Direction for the Services Provided in Ministry**

The last three themes encompass a direction for the services provided in ministry. Goals and objectives are incorporated in the mission statement of organizations. The mission statement establishes the focus and the direction for the organization to accomplish its purpose. The procedure in accomplishing the goals and objectives depends upon the underlying value perspective of the organization.

The Omega attitude of satisfice is encompassed in the theme, care for God’s creation. Care for the environment is a responsibility and a requirement of faith to embrace stewardship of the earth and all of creation to requirement. Protection for the environment and the

people in the environment call for the attitude of *satisfice* in that it diminishes procedures that encourages optimizing at the expense of procedures that may be good enough in order to create a balance between nature and the well-being of people. There is a need to develop an ecological ethic that requires “a greater realization of the limits of resources and find a need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature and to take them in account when planning for development” ((John Paul II, 1987, p. 649, nos. #26). An ecological sustainable development requires the well-being of all life forms both human and non-human.

Responsibility is defined differently in all aspects of society. Responsibility requires accountability and the perception of accountability depicts attitudes about existing conditions in society. The Omega attitude perceives responsibility as providing a solution to existing conditions and responds by alleviating the situations creating the conditions. (Tropman, 1995). It is not interested in blaming the victim or the cause-effect theory about the condition.

The Social Justice theme Rights and Responsibilities is rooted in Biblical Justice and teaches that “a just society is one marked by the fullness of love, compassion, holiness, and peace.” (U.S. American Bishops, 1984, p. 35. nos. 68). Although the Catholic Church teaches that Human Rights are God-given Rights and upholds it as the primary perspective of social justice, the church also teaches three other perspectives of social justice: “Commutative Justice calls for fundamental fairness in all agreements and exchanges between individuals or private social groups. Distributive Justice requires that the allocation of income, wealth, and power in society be evaluated in light of its effects on persons whose basic material needs are unmet. Contributive Justice implies that persons have an obligation to be active and productive participants in the life of society and that society has a duty to enable them to participate in this way.” . (U.S. American Bishops, 1984, p. 36. nos. 69-71). Exercising all four perspectives of justice requires a balance between rights, obligations and responsibilities towards neighbor, family, and society. These rights require protection of human dignity for all people and the responsibility to create a sustainable healthy development of community.

The mission statements set forth initiatives regarding the manner in which help is given to the people in need. It determines the attitude underlying the need for help and the standard for distribution of services. The Social Justice theme, *Option for the Poor and the Vulnerable*, protects the rights of the marginalized and the people at risk to receive services without judging their worthiness. The least of the neighbors is the first priority. “Listening to the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures, and hearing the appeal of a world that by its perversity contradicts the plan of the Creator.” ((John Paul II, 1987, p. 643, nos. #3).

Therefore, the motivating concern for the poor must be translated at all levels, national and international governments, into concrete actions. Every program made to increase production has in its last analysis and its main purpose to service the human person. Such programs should reduce inequalities, eliminate discrimination, and empower the individual to progress in human and spiritual development. “The basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring” (Paul VI, 19650 p. nos. 27).

Promoting true development of peoples requires the desire, the right, and the responsibility to ensure justice for all people, especially the poor. Securing justice requires the desire,

the right, and the responsibility to promote equality for every human person and foster solidarity with all people in society.

### **Policy Analysis and the Implementation of Services**

Policy analysis examines the philosophical orientation and the policies of the organization in relation to its congruence expressed in its mission statement. It examines the effectiveness of the programs in relation to the mission of the organization. The Catholic Church's social services, as an organization, is structured according to the Classical Scientific Management model of organization. It is hierarchical in organizational structure, with clearly defined positions. The Catholic Church as a centralized organization is decentralized in its structure through the organization of dioceses throughout the world.

The principle of subsidiarity provides each diocese with local autonomy for its implementation of all its activities. However, each diocese follows the Classical Scientific Management model of organization in its organizational structure, program development, and implementation of its services. The initiation of any program within the organization depends on the need for the program, the purpose of the program, and the viability of the program to sustain itself. The Social Service Ministries are both international and national in the range of services; however each of these services are implemented by the individual diocese or through the collaboration of bishops such as the National Conference of Bishops in the United States, or the World Synod of Bishops.

World-wide, each of the dioceses embraces the themes of social justice teachings of the Catholic Church as the basic foundation for the formulation of policy, program development and implementation of programs. However, the implementation and delivery of services depends on each organization's ability to function as a viable organization within the conditions of each diocese according to the needs of the people in the country in which they live.

### **Caritas Internationalis: An Example**

Although the Catholic Church has many ministries that incorporates social services, the most world renown and respected international and national organization is Caritas Internationalis or in the United States known as Catholic Charities. Caritas Internationalis, one of the world's largest networks, is a confederation of 162 Catholic relief, development, and social service agencies that provides services to tens of millions of people in over 200 countries and territories regardless of creed, race, ethnicity, and gender (Caritas Internationalis, 2003). As its primary purpose Caritas embraces the social justice teaching of human rights as well as preferential option for the poor, care of God's creation, solidarity, and stewardship through participation and cooperation. Caritas' s mandate includes "integral development, emergency relief, advocacy, peace building, respect for human rights, and support for stewardship of the planet's environmental resources." (Caritas Internationalis, 2003, p.2.)

The earliest Caritas organization began in Freiburg Germany in 1897 and spread to Switzerland in 1901 and the United States in 1910 where it became known as Catholic Charities USA. In 1924, the first headquarters of the Caritas organization was established in

Lucerne, Switzerland and in 1928 the organization was renamed as Caritas Catholica. With the onset of World War II the organization became dormant. After the war in 1947 Caritas was reorganized and resumed its mission in Lucerne. Caritas was recognized by the United Nations and given the official status of representation among all international organizations. In 1951 under the auspices of the Vatican, the First General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis was formed. Founding members of this Caritas organization came from thirteen countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Italy, Luxemburg, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States. In 1957 Caritas was renamed from Caritas Catholica to Caritas Internationalis in recognition of its status as an international organization (Caritas Internationalis, 2003).

### **Organizational Structure**

The organizational profile of Caritas is a “socio-pastoral expression of the Church and that promotes the social mission of the Church” (Caritas Internationalis, 2003, p.2). In its service to the poor Caritas seeks to empower the poor to become catalysts to eradicate poverty, unacceptable living conditions, and unjust political, social, and cultural structures. In implementing its policies, the organizational operations of Caritas are based upon the principles of subsidiarity, partnership and cooperation and stewardship.

The principle of subsidiarity is implemented in the autonomy for all activities at the local level. However, the confederation enables the collaborative working of all local charter Caritas organizations in the pursuit of the missions. The principle of partnership and cooperation sets the organization culture in all relations among the members within the organization and networking organizations in its long-term commitment to the organizations objective, based on shared values, strategies and information (Caritas Internationalis, 2003). The principle of stewardship focuses on the responsibility and accountability of its resources and services to the poor, the Church and to the members in the organizations.

The organizational structure consists of the General Assembly, Executive Committee, the Bureau, and the General Secretariat. The General Assembly and the Executive Committee are the decisions-making bodies of Caritas. The General assembly is the most influential and collaborative body because it consists of one representative from each membership organization from all parts of the world. Its functions are: approval of new members by the Executive Committee, election of the president and treasurer of the Executive Committee, ratification of the members of the Executive Committee appointed by the Regional Conferences, establishment of the budget and fiscal plan, and resolution of conflicts. The president of the General Assembly is the representative to the Holy See and to other organizations, presides at the General Assembly, Executive Committee, and the Bureau and only votes to make a decision on equal votes.

The Executive Committee consists of the President and the Treasurer and the members appointed by the Regional Conferences. The functions of the Executive Committee are: to execute the decisions of the General Assembly, establish committees, approve budget, and supervise audits. The Bureau determines the working conditions of the General Secretariat and appoints delegated and expert representatives to official bodies and other agencies. The Bureau also consists of the Secretary General and the personnel. The functions of the General Secretariat are to carry out the directives of the General Assembly, the Executive Com-



mittee, and the Bureau, and to be familiar with the relief programs of member organizations (Caritas Internationalis, 2003, p.3).

Membership eligibility consists of charitable organizations sponsored by their respective hierarchies and authorized to represent the organization for that country, national organizations sponsored the Bishops conference, and international organizations sponsored by the Holy See.

Finally, all services are financed by contributions on all levels. Within the structure of Caritas the finances are assured by annual contributions of member organizations and by registration fees for each session of the General Assembly and by gifts and contributions made by private donors.

### **Ministry Outreach**

The ministerial outreach of Caritas is twofold in nature: its social policy advocacy and its social service practice. In its outreach of addressing global concerns, Caritas' key role in policy is advocacy and its key role for practice is international cooperation of services. The organization's primary role of advocacy has a twofold purpose:

1. Caritas, as a charter member of the United Nations, has a direct effect in influencing the globalization of the market economy on behalf of the poor and the marginalized people in the world.
2. Caritas, as one of the largest world-wide charity organizations, is a catalyst in its solidarity with the poor because it has a voice in the public sector that challenges and influences attitudes of policy makers in their decisions regarding the poor and the marginalized people.

Its current advocacy positions has focused on issues for peaceful solutions in Palestine and Iraq, and for creating a sustainable development for the poor in the Third and Fourth world countries.

In the organization's role of international cooperation, Caritas implements its practice in two direct outreach services, relief and peace-building. In its relief outreach services, collaboratively working with other international, national and regional structures, Caritas provides funds and participates in relief operations for the people in countries experiencing major disasters as a result of nature or political conflict. Within recent times, Caritas has provided relief services for the victims suffering from natural disasters due to: floods (in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Argentina Lebanon, and Peru), Tsunamis (in India, and Bangladesh), and; drought and or earthquakes (in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Eritrea, Kenya; Algeria and Turkey). Likewise, it has provided services for refugees suffering from political conflict in Thailand, Indonesia, Congo, Bosnia, and the Sudan. In its outreach towards peace-building, Caritas works collaboratively with the local churches and other developmental agencies in providing funds and services which enhances a sustainable future for the people living in regions of political conflict. Within recent years, Caritas provided funds towards the National Peace Program of Sri Lanka, the National Humanitarian Aid program in Mali, the Way of Progress Humanitarian efforts in Angola and the Congo, and the Humanitarian Crisis Program in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines

## **Organizational Strengths and Weakness**

As one of the largest world-wide non-profit social service agency, some of the major strengths of Caritas include:

1. Contributes services and empowers people in their communities, before, during, and after crisis.
2. Identifies issues at the grassroots level, analyzes them at the national and international level, and advocates action locally, regionally, and globally.
3. Advocates as a public voice in its power to influence leaders of nations and people from the grassroots in taking action towards alleviating the impoverished conditions of people through out the world.
4. As a broker it has a remarkable networking ability internationally and nationally with churches, social service agencies, and community development programs throughout the world in providing and creating a sustainable future for victims of political conflict and natural disasters.

The major limitation of Caritas is the need to improve the organization through staff development in leadership skills on all levels and to incorporate new technology in their programs and services (Caritas Internationalis, 2003).

This costly onset operational expense will have a long-range benefit in the efficiency for providing services. Likewise, reorganization within the infrastructure of the organization would help to eliminate some of the bureaucratic operations that are often associated with the Classical Scientific Management model of organization.

## **Conclusion**

The code of ethics of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) asserts that “Social workers respect basic human rights of individuals and groups as expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international convention derived from that Declaration” (International Federation of Social Workers, 2004 p.4.) The seven dimensions in the Tropman model and the seven themes of the Catholic Church’s teachings about social justice are congruent with the code of ethics on the International Federation of Social workers and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. These dimensions and themes provide a framework for International Social Workers in the development and implementation of policy, practice in the delivery of services and in utilizing social research in technology from the human rights perspective.

The ensemble self in the Tropman’s model challenges social workers in their empowerment of people towards a self determination that describes themselves in relation to their treatment of others. Therefore, the empowerment of self elicits the defining of self in relation to family, community, and participation in context of social and cultural rights that respects the life and dignity of the human person. Social workers involved in community development need to advocate for fair share policies and practices that protect the economic rights of workers with respect and dignity, so that economic systems serve the workers and not exploit them. Therefore, international social workers have the responsibility to advocate and to protect the basic rights of workers through productive work, fair wages, and eco-

conomic initiatives. This includes participation of the workers in negotiating decisions affecting their dignity in the workplace. Incorporating the relevant social process of being one world-wide relationship reflects the perspective of empathetic solidarity as one human family regardless of national, racial, ethnic, gender, economic, and ideological differences. Solidarity is one essential obligation for international social workers because it affects social work on all levels: individual, national, international in creating a sustainable development of society.

In delivery of agency's services, international social workers need to include an ecological ethic in establishing satisficing goals and objectives in practices that diminishes procedures and encourages optimizing the quality of procedures that may be good enough in order to create a balance between nature and well-being of people. Responsibility for services requires accountability of services that provide solutions to existing conditions and responds by alleviating the situations creating the conditions. The social justice concept of rights and responsibilities challenges international social workers to implement other perspectives of social justice: commutative justice, distributive justice, and contributive justice. The initiatives of international social workers require first and foremost that the delivery of services be given preference to the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized people in society.

The international organization, Caritas, as a socio-pastoral expression of the social work in the Catholic Church, promotes the social mission of the Church in its service to the poor. Caritas empowers the poor to become catalysts to eradicate poverty, unacceptable living conditions, and unjust political, social, and cultural structures.

In implementing its policies, the organizational operations Caritas incorporates the seven themes of social justice teachings in international social work of human rights: Life and Dignity of the Human Person is its foundational moral value. Its method of work is one of partnership, which is a Call to Family, Community, and Participation, Rights and Responsibilities in that it implies "a long-term commitment to objectives based on shared values, strategies, and information between member organizations"(Caritas Internationalis, 2005. p.2). In implementing the themes: Option for the Poor, the Vulnerable and the People at Risks, Caritas is "committed to combating dehumanizing poverty and promoting the rights of the poor and respects the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers in their development to transform structures that respect management and workers and programs and services which benefit the poor (Caritas Internationalis, 2005. p.3). Caritas commits itself to being in, Solidarity, and Stewards to Care for God's Creation in "respecting the resources in an effective and efficient manner to safeguard a sustainable development for all global communities" (Caritas Internationalis, 2005. p.4.)

These seven themes of the Catholic Church's teachings of social justice and human rights are promulgated and lived within the culture of the people in the church throughout the world.

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