

A Reflection: Remembering Our 'Why' in the Midst of COVID-19

March 2021

The following reflection has been prepared to assist staff working in Catholic social services, to reflect upon our core mission and values – to recall 'why' we do what we do; what sets us apart from other service-providers working in the same space?

As organisations working under the banner of Catholic Social Services Victoria, our roots and our work, are based on Catholic tradition. Many of our organisations were set up by women and men who were on fire with a desire to make life better for individuals or groups of disadvantage people. The gospel message of charity that Jesus preached was to be their guiding light. Today, we hope this is what is being expressed in the love people experience when they are part of our organisations or recipients of our care.

As we continue to adapt and respond to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, it is vital to recall the deeper principles that must be at the heart of our decision making and the way in which we 'do' things.

You are invited to reflect upon the following Catholic social teaching principles, which are the touchstones for our work in Catholic social services. They give meaning to our mission and values and allow us to be authentic leaders within Catholic social services.

The four key principles of Catholic social teaching are:

1. Human dignity

This principle is at the core of Catholic tradition. It affirms that each person is of infinite value and worth because each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. We all carry a spark of the divine in us and we reflect the face of God to one another. We all have a dignity that cannot be taken or given away. It does not depend on where we are, who we are, anything we do or don't do. Our dignity is God-given, inalienable and transcendent. Our dignity as human beings means we have rights and duties.

2. The Common Good

The principle of the Common Good points out that human beings are made for relationships. We live in a web of relationships, and only thrive and reach our potential in relationship with others. Promoting the common good means working for social structures, systems and institutions that enable each person and each group to meet their needs and reach their potential. This is not just the greatest good for the greatest number – the common good must include everyone and every group.

3. Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity insists that every person and group has something to offer and a role to play. It is about how we organise participation and accountability. Decision-making and responsibility should be as close as possible to the grass-roots – those who are most directly affected by a decision should have a say in it.

4. Solidarity

This principle reminds us that we are sisters and brothers because we are all children of God. We embrace the diversity of the human family and we understand we are all responsible for one another. Solidarity challenges us to try to understand other people's situations and struggles, and to imagine ourselves in their shoes, to feel for them, and to make decisions that place the needs of those who are the poorest, most

vulnerable or marginalised at the centre. Solidarity calls us to a steadfast commitment to the common good.

In conclusion, for those of us working under the banner of Catholic organisations, and in order to be faithful to our core values and mission, Catholic social teaching should be used as:

- Principles for reflection;
- Criteria for judgement; and
- Guidelines for action.

In practise, this means that all operational and logistical decisions need to be informed by and consciously reflect these principles. Whilst we may ultimately come to similar decisions as other social services providers, we cannot substitute any other basis for our business and service-delivery decisions at this time.

During this time, we are being called to 'go into the deep' both within ourselves and as a collective. We cannot forget 'why' we do what we do, and the core values upon which our organisations have been established and continue operate to this day within the broader Church. Indeed, this is a time of opportunity for Catholic social services and the broader Catholic community to work together to fulfil the gospel imperatives to stand with and serve those who are poor, disadvantaged and marginalised, and to work for a just, equitable and compassionate society.

Catholic Social Service Victoria invites you to reflect upon the following questions, and to consider how your organisation has responded and adapted to the COVID-19 crisis, in light of Catholic Social Teaching.

We would be interested to learn from your reflections and encourage you to email your thoughts and responses to Rev. Deacon Mark Kelly, CSSV Catholic Ethos and Identity Committee Member at mkelly@mscw.vic.edu.au. It is hoped that CSSV can share and develop resources based on our collective experience at a future time.

Questions for reflection

- 1) Reading the reflection on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, what has moved me, or touched me in a particular way?
- 2) Reflecting on my own practice, how do I make decisions in the workplace? What values and principles guide my decisions?
- 3) Do any aspects of the four principles of Catholic social teaching play a role in my decision-making and the way in which I treat others with whom I work and serve?
- 4) How can I deepen my understanding and appreciation for the principles of Catholic social teaching?
- 5) What sets my organisation apart from other community-based service organisations?
- 6) How can I continue to strengthen our mission and identity as a Catholic-based social services organisation?
- 7) Have you or your organisation responded in a particular way during COVID-19, which you think has been beneficial? If not, please share what the challenges have been for you and your organisation.