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St. Ignatius Parents Group Presentation: Living What We Believe

Objective: to share a few reflections from the social tradition of the Church to expand our imagination beyond the temptation to think living out our faith concerns Sundays only; rules only; charity only ('be nice').

Outline:

- I. Key principles of Catholic Social Thought that orient how we live out our faith
- II. Public orientation of our faith (what means for politics, charity vs justice)
- III. Catholic tradition's expansive notions of sin and conscience

I. Social Teaching of the Church

Definition: Documents on the environment, family life, economic justice...also understood as a dialogue between God's action in history (we hear about in Scripture) and tradition *and* God's ongoing activity in present realities, including in our family lives, workplace or political scene

Foundational theme: life and dignity of the human person

- *Pinnacle of creation story in Genesis we read Gen 1: In the divine image God created them—male and female God created them*
- Every person—regardless of race, sex, age, sexual orientation, or status—is worthy of respect.
- It is not what you do or what you have that gives you a claim on respect; it is simply *being* human that establishes your dignity. Given that dignity, the human person is, in the Catholic view, never a means, always an end.
- Incarnation: God came into the world taking on human form in Jesus of Nazareth, so how much more consecrated or sacred or worthy are all humans in light of the incarnation or God becoming flesh
- Ensuring our kids know they are loved into being by God, and inhabit this sense of inherent worth, as primary task of parenting

Dignity of work and rights of workers

- The very first social encyclical was written to defend the dignity and economic rights of factory workers during the industrial revolution
- U.S. bishops have written: If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected—rights to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and join unions, to private property, and to economic initiative
- Parenting: How we approach own work, compensate caregivers, help our kids think about vocation and those on whose labor they depend

Common Good/ Call to family, community, and participation

- Humans are intrinsically *social* creatures—biologically, emotionally, relationally and economically—we are radically dependent upon one another.
- To be imaged in the Trinity means that to be a person is to be in relationship

- Common Good flows from this: a countercultural idea, not just concerned about what's best for me and my family or most of us (majority rule), but commitment to ensure the flourishing of ALL members of a given community
- Because every member of our communities has a vested interest in the COMMON GOOD of such things as the education of our young people, the availability of basic needs such as water, food, and housing, we have a corresponding obligation to participate in the full range of activities and institutions of social life.
- Appreciation of certain global COMMON GOODS that transcend the interests of individual communities and nations, such as international peace, debt relief, famine, and global commerce

Option for the poor & vulnerable

- Biblical justice is measured by a society's treatment of the most vulnerable: the widow, the orphan, the sojourner
- Hebrew Scriptures: Through the prophets (Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah etc.), God calls his people to care for those on the margins of society
- New Testament: Jesus sought out the poor and vulnerable in a special way
 - Matthew 25 (shows how love is made real through effective action (clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, visiting the imprisoned))
 - The very outcasts Jesus himself associated with during his life on earth, the marginalized and the despised of society like tax collectors or sinners or women
 - Lazarus, Prodigal Son, parables of God's mercy to the poor and vulnerable
- Pope Francis' example going out to the margins, peripheries (migrants and refugees, Lampedusa, Lesbos)
- Pope John Paul II lifted up the virtue of "solidarity" (a firm and persevering commitment to the common good at every level) as the key ethical response to the fact of human interdependence.

Care for God's creation

- Creation story in Genesis or psalms proclaims that: all creation is made by God and it is good, very good
- All creation reflects God's presence/love— this is a sacramental view of creation, then, and the proper response is therefore care, respect, and awe, not exploitation or degradation
- Humans have a special role within creation: cultivate/care for earth, stewardship: the earth created by God has been entrusted to us for our care not just our own benefit
- Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* has drawn attention in particular to how marginalized disproportionately suffer from and contribute to environmental degradation

II. Orientation of Catholic faith: Not as a church in withdrawal from the dangers of the secular world (or sausage making of politics) but as a PUBLIC CHURCH

- *Gaudium et spes* (key document of Vatican II) starts out with a beautiful meditation on the "joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties" of people as being the very concerns of the church
- Charity vs. justice

- The life and ministry of Jesus do call Christians to feed the poor, to acts of charity: we can think of charity as St. Ignatius' ministry at Shattuck Shelter. Jesus healed the sick, fed the hungry, welcomed outcasts—his very explanation of Christian love of neighbor was the Parable of Good Samaritan.
- But if on the 52nd week in a row, the Good Samaritan stops to aid the stranger on the side of the road and does not look into the cause of repeatedly robbed and beaten victims, he is probably not fully responding to the Christian call.
- The church of the 21st century supplements *charitable* efforts with efforts that contribute to the notion of *justice* - attempts to change social structures so that all people may have a better and fairer chance of living a good life
- Today the church sponsors not only orphanages and shelters as they did in the past, but is involved with lobbying and community organizing on behalf of the disadvantaged.
- DISCIPLESHIP REQUIRES FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP—even if Catholic “position” on political issues does not always easily map onto a standard political party’s platform, withdrawal is not an option

III. Sin & Conscience

- Sin is more than simply avoiding bad choices/wrong actions
- Sins of omission (James Keenan, SJ’s “failure to bother to love”)
- Social sins (modes of harmful structures/attitudes influence us and facilitate injustice)
- Discernment of what may be even blocking our awareness of participation in evil/wrongdoing, what’s not even arising on our horizons
- Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*: “Church called to form consciences not replace them”
- Conscience is not merely about being passively obedient, but rather it issues a call to be proactive, discerning, and creative in response to life’s challenges and God’s invitation
- PARENTING EXAMPLE: A photo of Colin Kaepernick on the cover of *Time* in our pediatrician’s office last year offered an entrée into an honest conversation about racial justice, patriotism, and conscience with our son. Beyond parenting, it may be equally tough to ask whether we ourselves are “settling” in aspects of our own lives, where it’s perhaps easier to condemn others or coast along, pushing aside searching thoughts about whom we are called to become.