

SVP ☩
1833



CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING





Catholic Social Teaching: An Overview

In essence, Catholic Social Teaching is the application of Jesus' Way to society. At its core is Jesus' command to 'love your neighbour as yourself'. While the principles have been elaborated at length, each one clearly relates to Jesus' teaching. Expressed more formally, Catholic Social Teaching is a body of doctrine developed by the Catholic Church dealing with social justice, poverty and wealth. The basis of the doctrine was laid out in Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum*, with principles rooted in the Gospel. The doctrine was influenced by the writings of Catholic thinkers such as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine of Hippo, and from the practical actions of men like Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, the founder of the SVP. The themes outlined in Catholic Social Teaching are ways of expressing both our love for God and our love for neighbour.

The St Vincent de Paul Society: An Overview

The St Vincent de Paul Society (England & Wales) is part of an international Christian voluntary network dedicated to tackling poverty in all its forms by providing practical assistance to people in need. Founded in Britain in 1844, we foster diverse and inclusive connections, as a Society that is welcoming of people of all faiths and none. We joyfully extend our hand in the care and personal service of individuals and families who need support.

Our 10,000 members, motivated by faith, visit vulnerable or isolated people across England and Wales and offer them friendship and practical support. The essence of our work is person-to-person contact and spending time with people is our greatest gift.





Catholic Social Teaching: Session Outline

Session Outline:

This session is offered as an example of how the SVP:
Catholic Social Teaching resources could be used.

Session Objectives:

- To help young adults connect with different aspects of Catholic Social Teaching through the examples of work being undertaken by the St Vincent de Paul Society in England and Wales.
- To give the young adults a chance to grow in confidence and understanding around the CST and its links to lived reality.

What you will need:

- CST Cards (a set for each group)
- Scripture Cards (a set for each group)
- SVP Vincentian Quotes (a set for each group)
- CST Presentation **[Click here.](#)**
- To divide the young adults into smaller discussion groups
- Paper and pens for each group

Outline:

- Using the PowerPoint go through the different stories.
- For each story give the young adults time to discuss and pick one of each of the cards in their pack with the story.
- At the end give them chance to go through and double check they are happy with their choices.
- For the purposes of this task every card can only be used once.
- Take some time to allow discussion. Groups can explain why they picked what they did and how they explain it fitting.





HUMAN DIGNITY



We are all brothers and sisters, knowing this means we must respect, value and uphold a common dignity for ourselves and each other. As human beings we are created in the image and likeness of God so therefore we have an inherent worth and distinction.

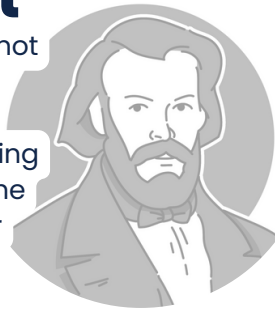
The SVP Response

The SVP responds to the need of those in the community who need support without judgement or question. The homeless, the elderly, prisoners, struggling families, people who are sick and lonely are amongst some of those they work alongside.

Founders Thought

Knowledge of the poor and needy is not gained by pouring over books or in discussions with politicians, but by visiting the slums where they live, sitting by the bedside of the dying, feeling the cold they feel and learning from their lips the causes of their woes.

–Blessed Frédéric Ozanam–



Jeremiah 1:5

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."



Human persons are willed by God; they are imprinted with God's image. Their dignity does not come from the work they do, but from the persons they are.

**The Hundredth Year
(Donders translation), #11**

Case Study: Cake and a Chat

The SVP works with individuals with dementia, but also with their carers, who are often under immense stress. Pamela is one of the lovely ladies regularly visited by the volunteers of the Dementia Befriending Programme run by St Vincent's Southend-on-Sea. She hasn't been out of her house since her husband died last year and is now frightened to go out. "We talk regularly on the phone, and she proudly talks about her life and how she managed several restaurants in the town. She loves cake, but she isn't able to cook now, so she really appreciates it when we deliver a homemade piece of cake," says one of the dedicated team of Dementia Befriending Programme volunteers. For people like Pamela, loss of human interaction is one of the most serious problems facing older people.

As a grassroots organisation, the SVP has always seen befriending as one of the most important things we, as Vincentians, can do for someone who needs our help. It demonstrates unity, kindness and compassion. Simple acts of kindness such as a chat over the phone, delivering a puzzle book, a jigsaw, some craft materials, or, like Pamela, a piece of cake, make a huge difference to their lives. We should nurture and appreciate our older generation for their knowledge and wisdom.

**Dementia Befriending Programme
St Vincent's Southend-on-Sea**

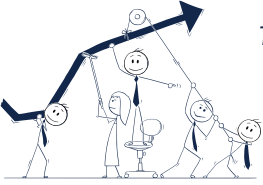


Question Point

- How would you explain the idea of dignity?
- In what ways did the SVP celebrate human dignity in the case study?



DIGNITY OF WORK



The Dignity of Work in Catholic Social Teaching declares that all humans have a right to work, safe working conditions and living wages. Workers have a right to organise and form unions. In turn, workers are responsible for giving a day of fair labour that works toward the common good of the society.

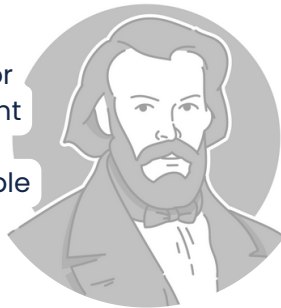
The SVP response

The SVP offers support to those who are out of work and provides opportunities to support individuals who want to volunteer in the interim. In some of our support centres those who are seeking asylum and have not been given the right to work volunteer and support the work of the centres. Some of our permanent staff started out as people we helped.

Founders Thought

Exploitation occurs when the master considers his workers not as a partner nor even as an assistant, but as an instrument out of which he must extract as much service as possible at the smallest possible price. Yet the exploitation of a man by another man is slavery.

–Blessed Frédéric Ozanam–



Genesis 2:15

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”



Case Study: A letter of Thanks

Dear St Vincent de Paul

3 years ago I had nothing; no roof over my head, no money, no friends and no hope.

I slept in an empty wheelie bin in a church car park. You helped me find a home, you gave me someone to talk and you treated me like a human being.

The training in your café helped give me skills, confidence and I am now working again. I dread to think where I would be today if I hadn't walked into St Vincent's. I genuinely believe you saved my life.

David, Café Volunteer



'Work is fundamental to the dignity of the person. Work, to use an image, 'anoints' with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God who has worked and still works, who always acts.'

Pope Francis, May 2013



Question Point

- Do you think these teachings about the dignity of work remain important?
- Can you think of or find examples where workers in the UK or across the world are treated unfairly e.g. due to gender or age?



CARE FOR CREATION



Caring for the environment we live in is to extend justice to all of creation including both human and non-human. We should also understand that our place on earth is interdependent on all other life as it is the natural world which provides us with food, medicines, resources and clothing. Jesus inspires Catholics to address issues to reverse the destruction of God's creation.

The SVP response

We can see that climate change is having a devastating effect on our communities. It is always the poorest who suffer the hardest and we are determined to do all we can to use the resources available to us in the best way we can. Many of our projects support community allotments and the SVP has over 40 shops across England and Wales. These community shops help the society to support more people who are in need. We also run St Vincent's furniture stores and depots across England and Wales with free deliveries of donated furniture and household items to those most in need. Helping them to turn their houses into homes and keeping good furniture out of landfill.

Patron Thought

"Nature makes trees put down deep roots before having them bear fruit, and even this is done gradually."

– St. Vincent de Paul –



Psalm 65:9

You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it.



Case Study: Recycled furniture & fresh starts

'Some years ago I found myself in hospital. The doctor told me, "Give up the drink, or you will be dead within three months." I went into the rehab clinic. I had lost my partner, my friends and my self-esteem, but was still supported by my family. On leaving rehab I had got a flat, but needed some furniture. I was told about the St Vincent de Paul Furniture Store in Sheffield and made an application. At the time I had only a two-seater and my bits and pieces and was looking at four walls. I felt the need, after some time, to give back to society. I approached the Coordinator at the Furniture Store and volunteered my services. I had reservations as to whether I'd be suitable, but she told me to come along for a day and try it out. On my first day I told the senior driver a little about my history. He said, "Nobody is judgemental here mate, just do your best. You've even got your first promotion, you are number one tea maker!" I now do two days a week. I keep the warehouse tidy, stack furniture and load the vans. Having been given a house or a flat, people often need the basics. The Furniture Store gives them a start, just as they did for me. The opportunity of working for the SVP Furniture Store was a Godsend. I'm finally putting something back into the community.'

A client & volunteer, Sheffield Furniture Store



"Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness."

Pope Francis, Laudato Si (#230)

? Question Point

In your own community and country, are there any examples of climate change affecting vulnerable people?

- What attitudes need to change in our society to safeguard our environment? How do we play a role in that?



SOLIDARITY



Being in solidarity is recognising others as our brothers and sisters and actively working for their good. From the food we eat and the clothes we buy, to the news we read and the websites we browse, we are connected to people and places all over the world. It is about recognising others as our brothers and sisters and actively working for their good. In our connected humanity, we are invited to build relationships and to understand what life is like for others who are different from us.

The SVP response

Social justice campaigning is a cornerstone of our grassroots approach to tackling poverty and inequality. We seek to raise awareness of issues brought to light through our frontline encounters, which are increasing. 'We believe in giving practical assistance to anyone who needs it – the lonely, the hungry, the homeless, the sick, anyone, without judging them. All of us work together to achieve this as effectively as possible ... Inspired by St Vincent de Paul, we are fired up to feed those in need, clothe them, befriend them and fight for them. Anyone who, to use Pope Francis' word, is 'indignant' about the suffering in the world should consider joining the SVP, working in solidarity to make a difference – brothers and sisters all.'

Helen O'Shea (National President 2018–22) on 'Fratelli Tutti'

Vincentian Spirituality

Be kind and love. For love is the first gift to the poor. They will appreciate your kindness and love more than all else you can bring them.

–Blessed Rosalie Rendu–



1 Peter 3:8

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.



Case Study: Helping and speaking out

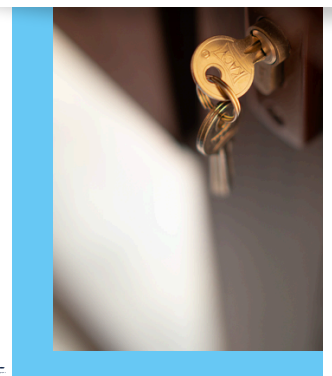
An SVP conference in the south of England, are finding a problem that is affecting lots of people: people are being rehoused in flats and houses, where the property is completely stripped out, including carpets, curtains, all furniture. So although a person or family is housed, they then have to find all the items they need to live. Just to kit a house out with the basics for one person is £1500, and a great deal more for a family.

Robert, is a young man, who has been in care for much of his life. Once he left care he ended up homeless. The council eventually rehoused him, in a property with hardly any furnishings. The local SVP were able to find some second hand items, and found money for a new cooker and floor coverings.

The local SVP are also now lobbying councillors and social services about this, as it is a serious issue, affecting people's wellbeing and dignity, and jeopardising the stability of people who have often already suffered a great deal in life.

'The unity of the human family has very real repercussions for our life. It means that we commit ourselves to a new solidarity, a new relationship, the social solidarity of all'

Saint Pope John Paul II (1987)



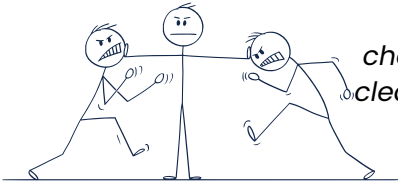
Question Point



- What does St Paul mean when he wrote, 'if one member suffers, all suffer together?'
- How does the SVP show practical ways we can be in solidarity with people in need?



PEACE & RECONCILIATION



The Church teaches us that peace is central to the gospel and represents a challenge to many contemporary attitudes and assumptions. The Church's line is clear: we should all use non-violent methods to resolve conflicts. Pope Francis has also challenged Christians to be true peacemakers bringing forgiveness and non-violent solutions to situations of hurt and violence.

The SVP response

The SVP have two Approved Premises projects and have been involved in this work since 1947 with the opening of Ozanam House, followed by St Christopher's House in 1967. These premises in Tyneside accommodate high-risk offenders on statutory orders and engage with them in order to reduce their likelihood of re-offending. The ultimate aim is to resettle them safely back into community. The funding for these projects is provided entirely by the Ministry of Justice. As a result of this funding, the Approved Premises provide highly trained staff teams. These SVP projects do not just fulfil the aims and objectives the Ministry of Justice, they have far exceeded expectations with the help of the wider SVP network providing a full wrap around service giving those who find themselves here best chance to resettle safely back in the community.

Other projects include visiting those in prison, supporting those who are on probation and working on restorative justice opportunities for offenders, their families and their victims.

Patron's Thought

Make it a practice to judge persons and things in the most favourable light at all times and under all circumstances.

–St Vincent de Paul–



Colossians 3:13

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Case Study: Restorative Justice and becoming the person I can be

Connor from Cardiff came to the SVP Ely Bridge Centre whilst on probation. [Here](#) he tells his story in his own words.



"God's forgiveness is what we all need, and it is the greatest sign of His mercy. A gift that every forgiven sinner is called upon to share with every brother and sister he or she meets. It is beautiful to be forgiven, but you too, if you wish to be forgiven, forgive in turn. Forgive!"

Pope Francis, General audience, March 30, 2016

Question Point

- What is your experience of forgiveness?
- What can be the positive outcomes of forgiveness?
- Why might some people not want to show forgiveness?
- What does forgiveness mean to you?



PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR



The option for the poor is simply the idea that, as reflected in Canon Law, "The Christian faithful are also obliged to promote social justice and, mindful of the precept of the Lord, to assist the poor." It indicates an obligation on our part to care for the poor and vulnerable, which includes all those who are disadvantaged, isolated or marginalized in society: widows, children, people with disabilities, the elderly, and victims of oppression, among others.

The SVP response

The SVP look to help anyone experiencing poverty in England and Wales or overseas at any point before, during or after a crisis, through a network of local conferences run by members and staff. Best summed up in this short video as a society the challenge is to adapt and remain open minded to the needs we encounter. [Click here!](#)

Founder's Thought

Knowledge of the poor and needy is not gained by pouring over books or in discussions with politicians, but by visiting the slums where they live, sitting by the bedside of the dying, feeling the cold they feel and learning from their lips the causes of their woes. –**Blessed Frédéric Ozanam** –



Matthew 25:40

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'



More than by a fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by fear of remaining within structures that give us a false sense of security...while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: 'Give them something to eat' (Mk 6:37)

Pope Francis: Evangelii Gaudium, paragraph 49, 2013.

Case Study: We all need a helping hand sometimes

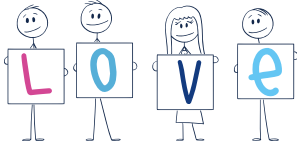
Holly, is a 999 phone operator. She contacted the SVP in tears saying that she had not eaten in two days and had resorted to stealing food from the office fridge. The SVP were able to provide her with a food parcel. It also became apparent that Holly was struggling to pay her electricity bill and as a result was in debt. This had created a vicious cycle for Holly: she was unable to pay for food as well as her gas and electricity bills. She had also been saving money by showering at work instead of at home. Holly was shocked that she was struggling to make ends meet on her salary which she had previously managed to live on. She is not alone: with the cost of food items rising sharply, and UK food prices inflation at 12.4%, we are seeing more and more people use our services, many of whom had never relied on foodbanks before.

? Question Point

- What is your definition of poverty?
- Can you give any of Jesus' teachings on how we should respond to the poor?
- What poverty do you see where you live?



COMMUNITY & PARTICIPATION



As humans we were not created to live alone, but in community. We should therefore pursue the common good for a community. Every member of society has a duty to develop this common good and every member has a right to enjoy the benefits brought about by it.

The SVP response

The SVP has from the very beginning believed that befriending and accompaniment are the way to help people. When we walk alongside we begin to understand the complex nature of poverty and its effects. For many who are supported have found 'a sense of belonging', which has led in turn to them supporting others in need through becoming members or volunteering.

Founder's Thought

I beg you not to think of the distance between us. Rather, think of us as strongly united, incapable of ever being separated, because separation is impossible in the close union created by holy charity.

-St Louise de Marillac -



1 Corinthians 12:26-27

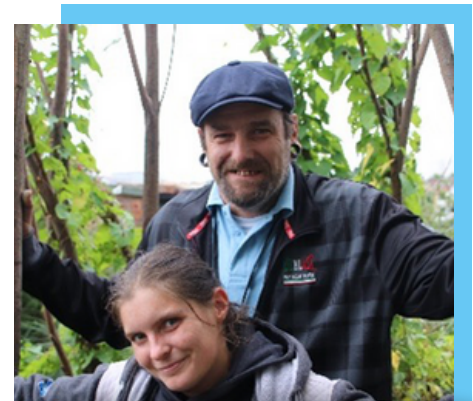
If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honoured, every part shares in its joy. You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it.



Case Study: Working together to make a change

When Darren's relationship broke down, he found himself homeless, jobless, and sleeping on the streets. But when he heard from other homeless people about the local SVP community centre, his life began to turn around. "Meeting and speaking to other homeless people in a safe place was great. I loved the feeling of comradery between everyone."

It was there he met Emma, who was also homeless after leaving an abusive relationship. The SVP team supported both Emma and Darren in getting off the streets and moving into permanent accommodation. Now they live in their own flat and volunteer for the SVP together. "Being part of this SVP community has helped me a lot and I now have my life back."



We are all one family in the world. Building a community that empowers everyone to attain their full potential through each of us respecting each other's dignity, rights and responsibilities makes the world a better place to live.

Pope John Paul II

? Question Point



- In what ways do you think charity work fosters belonging?
- Can you give an example of when have you felt like you had a role to play and how it felt to be needed?
- Is there an example you can think of in the life of Jesus where he helps someone to belong?