



Caritas in Veritate



Group Study Session 1: Charity, Justice, and the Common Good

PREPARATION

Total Session Time: 75 Minutes

Before the meeting

Distribute Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. You can order copies of the encyclical from www.usccbpublishing.org, or get the text of the encyclical online at www.vatican.va.

Copy and distribute the handout included with this session, which provides quotes from *Caritas in Veritate* on charity, justice, and the common good (pp. 8-9). Encourage participants to become familiar with the entire encyclical prior to the session, and especially, to read those paragraphs from which the quotes on the handout are taken.

Arrange the chairs in a circle and set up a prayer space with an open Bible on a low table in the center of the circle. Decorate the prayer space with a cloth, candles, and flowers (but be sure that these items do not obstruct the view of those around the circle when seated).

Open the Bible to James 2:14-18, and select two persons ahead of time to read, at the appropriate times, 1) the Scripture passage, and 2) the selected paragraphs from *Caritas in Veritate* on "Charity, Justice, and the Common Good." Ask them to read slowly, and for the Scripture reader to return the bible to its place of honor after the reading.

For additional group study of *Caritas in Veritate*, see the other study sessions at www.usccb.org/jphd/caritasinveritate. For additional group study of Catholic social teaching, order *In the Footsteps of Jesus Resource Manual on Catholic Social Teaching* and the USCCB video of the same name from USCCB Publishing at www.usccbpublishing.org/productdetails.cfm?sku=5-499, and see the educational materials at www.usccb.org/sdwp/foreducators.shtml.

Remind everyone that the purpose of the gathering is to reflect in faith on Pope Benedict's encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth)*. Explain to participants that an "encyclical" is a letter that is a "teaching document" by the Holy Father. A "social encyclical" applies the consistent, traditional moral teachings of the Church to the social and economic challenges of the current day. The teaching letter *Caritas in Veritate* was written to address the current economic crisis, and deals with moral aspects of economic life, poverty and development, human rights and duties, environmental responsibility, and other moral and economic issues.



Caritas in veritate and Charity, Justice, and the Common Good



INTRODUCTIONS

5 minutes

OPENING PRAYER

5 minutes

Invite everyone to briefly introduce himself or herself, and to share one word that captures how he or she feels when hearing the title of the session “Charity, Justice and the Common Good.” Keep the introductions brief.

Invite everyone to place herself or himself in the presence of God.

Ask the first reader, selected before the session, to read James 2:14-18.

Pause for silent reflection on the Word of God for about 20 seconds.

Next, the Leader should *pray*:

*Father, your truth is made known in your Word.
Guide us to seek the truth of the human person.
Teach us the way to love because you are love.*

*Jesus, you embody Love and Truth,
Help us to recognize your face in the poor.
Enable us to live out our vocation to bring love and justice to
your people.*

*Holy Spirit, you inspire us to transform our world.
Empower us to seek the common good for all persons.
Give us a spirit of solidarity and make us one human family.*

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: Let us open ourselves to God’s will for our world by praying in the words that Jesus taught us.

All: (recite in unison the Lord’s Prayer)

If this is your group’s first study session, ask participants to look at the “Social Encyclical Primer” handout (pp. 6-7). Ask them to read it prior to the session. Invite participants to discuss the following three questions:

- 1. How do the scriptures and the teaching and example of Jesus call us to live our faith in the practice of charity, the pursuit of justice, and the search for peace?*
- 2. Why does the Church speak out on social issues? What can the Church and its teaching offer our society and world?*
- 3. How familiar are you with the Church’s social teachings and the documents listed in the summary? Do any of the topics covered by past encyclicals catch your attention in particular? Why?*

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

10 minutes



Caritas in Veritate and Charity, Justice, and the Common Good



ENCYCLICAL EXCERPTS

5 minutes

Explain that participants will now hear some excerpts from *Caritas in Veritate* related to the theme of “charity, justice, and the common good.”

After the excerpts are read, participants will be invited to respond to some discussion questions. (See handout at the end of this session.)

DISCUSSION

35 minutes

After the reader has read the excerpts on charity, justice, and the common good, provide some guidelines for the discussion. Be sure that everyone has an opportunity to respond to each question. Remind the participants that the purpose of the discussion is to explore our faith, not to debate with one another. Some groups find it helpful to use the “mutual invitation” method to move the sharing along. Each participant shares his or her reflections to a question, and then invites another person who has not shared to do so.

To help create a positive space for faith sharing, ask the participants to observe these simple guidelines:

Listen carefully.

Use “I” statements. (Take responsibility for what you express. Do not speak for “them.”)

Help all to participate. (Do not dominate.)

Stay on the topic and stay focused on the Pope’s message.

Be respectful and charitable at all times.

After sharing these guidelines, use these questions for discussion on charity, justice and the common good:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Pope Benedict describe “charity” in *Caritas in Veritate*? What did he mean by “micro-relationships” and “macro-relationships”?
2. What does Pope Benedict mean by the “common good”? Why is it a requirement of justice and charity?
3. How are justice and charity related? If we practiced both justice and charity, what impact would this have on our lives and world?
4. What does the Holy Father mean when he says the Church has a “public role”? What can we do as Catholics to support this public role?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

5. Pope Benedict refers to the “structures” and “institutional” causes of hunger and also says “commercial logic” cannot solve all social problems like hunger. Why?
6. According to Pope Benedict the global common good includes a concern for the environment. What can we do to act on this concern?

FOLLOW-UP ACTION

8 minutes

In response to this brief discussion of the Holy Father’s 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, we are called to practice charity and justice to secure the common good (7). Invite members of the group to share ways they can act on what they have learned as family members, workers, owners, consumers, and voters. For example, participants could

- Advocate for the fulfillment of charity, justice and the common good of all in the human family by acting on alerts from the USCCB’s Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development (www.usccb.org/sdwp/takeaction.shtml).
- Visit the Catholic Campaign for Human Development to learn more about the root causes of poverty in our nation (www.usccb.org/cchd/povertyusa/index.htm). Contact the diocesan representative for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development to see how your community can support local groups that are working to ensure the common good of all.
- Visit Catholics Confront Global Poverty, an initiative of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services at www.usccb.org/globalpoverty or www.crs.org/globalpoverty, to learn more about global poverty.

Find other ideas for action on the *Caritas in Veritate* Web page of the USCCB Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development, at www.usccb.org/jphd/caritasinveritate.



CLOSING REFLECTION

5 minutes

Invite the participants to listen once again to the reading from James 2:14-18 with this question in mind: What is the Word of God asking of me today?

Re-read James 2:14-18

After reading, pause for silent reflection on the question.

Invite the participants to share a word or a phrase that answers the question: "What is the Word of God asking of me today?"

CLOSING PRAYER

2 minutes

Leader: Let us again open ourselves to God's will for our world by praying in the words of Jesus.

All: (recite in unison the Lord's Prayer)

OR

Leader: Let us close by offering intentions based on today's reflections and conversation. In a moment, I will start us off with a couple of examples. I invite you to then add your own. After each intention, we will respond, "Lord, hear our prayer."

We pray that as Christians, we may apply true charity when advocating for the poor, the vulnerable, and the unborn. We pray to the Lord . . .

After participants are done offering intentions, conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

DISMISSAL or FELLOWSHIP

Thank the participants for sharing their reflections and wish them safe travel home. Or, you may wish to invite participants to share in refreshments and fellowship after the session. Some groups may want to close with sharing the sign of peace.



Social Encyclical Primer



Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* was signed and released in June 2009. This encyclical, or teaching document, is the latest in a series of social encyclicals written by our popes over the last 120 years, as the Church sought to apply its moral principles and social teaching to emerging economic and social problems.

Jesus Christ is both divine and human. In his person, he embodies what it is to live a fully human life. He is the model of how we are called to live. His teaching has both personal and social implications. These social encyclicals shine the light of the Gospel of Christ and the Church's moral teaching on changing social circumstances, to provide guidance and support to Christians as we seek to live our faith in the world. In this way, the teaching is both very traditional and ever new. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate*:

The Church's social doctrine illuminates with an unchanging light the new problems that are constantly emerging. This safeguards the permanent and historical character of the doctrinal "patrimony" which, with its specific characteristics, is part and parcel of the Church's ever-living Tradition. Social doctrine is built on the foundation handed on by the Apostles to the Fathers of the Church, and then received and further explored by the great Christian doctors. This doctrine points definitively to the New Man, to the "last Adam [who] became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45), the principle of the charity that "never ends" (1 Cor 13:8). It is attested by the saints and by those who gave their lives for Christ our Savior in the field of justice and peace. It is an expression of the prophetic task of the Supreme Pontiffs to give apostolic guidance to the Church of Christ and to discern the new demands of evangelization (12).

Here are highlights from some of the encyclicals that are part of the Church's modern body of social teaching:

[*Rerum Novarum*](#) (*On the Condition of Labor*) 1891, Pope Leo XIII – Essentially the beginning of modern Catholic social teaching, truly groundbreaking, and a foundational document for many subsequent encyclicals (see below). This encyclical addresses the plight of workers in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, touching on issues that include socialism, unbridled capitalism, a living wage, workers' rights, support for unions, and a rejection of class struggle. Pope Leo first articulated the principles that underlie the preferential option for the poor.

[*Quadragesimo Anno*](#) (*On the Reconstruction of the Social Order*) 1931, Pope Pius XI – Commemorating the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical offers an update on the state of labor and industrialization, and strong critiques of communism, unrestrained capitalism, class conflict, and inequalities. Pope Pius denounces the concentration of wealth and economic power, and calls for the reconstruction of the social order based on subsidiarity.

[*Mater et Magistra*](#) (*Christianity and Social Progress*) 1961, Pope John XXIII – Issued 70 years after *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical looks to the Church as the "Mother and Teacher," calling the world to salvation and better social relationships. It looks at science and technology, noting their power to improve the human condition, but also to limit human freedoms, and calling on governments to safeguard human rights. Pope John expressed concerns for the growing gap between rich and poor



Social Encyclical Primer



nations, for the plight of farmers and rural areas, and for the arms race. The encyclical calls on wealthier nations to help poorer ones.

[*Pacem in Terris*](#) (*Peace on Earth*) 1963, Pope John XXIII – Issued only two months before the pope's death, this encyclical is the first to be directed to "all men of good will," instead of just to Catholics. In a response to the Cold War, the encyclical outlines necessary conditions for lasting world peace, looking at respect for human rights and disarmament. Pope John calls for the development of a world authority to protect the universal common good, condemns the arms race, and supports efforts to build peace.

[*Populorum Progressio*](#) (*On the Development of Peoples*) 1967, Pope Paul VI – This encyclical, which Pope Benedict's new encyclical commemorates, examines the economy on a global level, and addresses the rights of workers to decent work, just wages, decent working conditions, and to form and join unions. Pope Paul VI calls development the new name for peace, criticizes unjust economic structures that lead to inequality, and supports new international and social relationships.

[*Laborem Exercens*](#) (*On Human Work*) 1981, Pope John Paul II – Issued to mark the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical once again emphasizes the dignity of work and the rights of workers, and the priority of labor over capital. Pope John Paul also addresses disabled workers, emigration, materialism, and the spirituality of work.

[*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*](#) (*On Social Concern*) 1987, Pope John Paul II – This encyclical honored *Populorum Progressio* on its 20th anniversary, offering solidarity as a central requirement of our faith and times. Pope John Paul critiques East-West blocs and other "structures of sin" that compromise the progress of poor nations, and calls for solidarity between rich and poor nations.

[*Centesimus Annus*](#) (*The Hundredth Year*) 1991, Pope John Paul II – On the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul II reflected on the current state of issues that Leo XIII had addressed in his day. It focuses on the moral dimensions of economic life, the advantages and limitations of the market, the role of business, and the responsibilities and limitations of government.

[*Evangelium Vitae*](#) (*The Gospel of Life*) 1995, Pope John Paul II – An affirmation of the gift of human life and the need to protect it, this encyclical explored many threats to human life, including the evils of abortion, euthanasia, and the use of the death penalty. It called the Church to be "a people of life and for life."

[*Deus Caritas Est*](#) (*God is Love*) 2005, Pope Benedict XVI – Benedict's first encyclical emphasized the connections between love of God and love of neighbor. Pope Benedict said the Church could no more neglect charity than it could Scripture or the sacraments. He located love of the poor at the center of Catholic life.

[*Caritas In Veritate*](#) (*Charity in Truth*) 2009, Pope Benedict XVI – Anticipated since 2007, this encyclical follows up on the themes of Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, calling it the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age. It deals with the ethics of contemporary economics; poverty and development; global solidarity; charity, justice and the common good; rights and duties; and care for creation, among other topics.



Quotes from *Caritas in Veritate* on Charity, Justice, and the Common Good



“Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36- 40). It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with neighbour; it is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones). For the Church, instructed by the Gospel, charity is everything because, as Saint John teaches (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16) and as I recalled in my first Encyclical Letter, “God is love” (*Deus Caritas Est*): *everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it*. Love is God's greatest gift to humanity, it is his promise and our hope” (2).

“To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is the good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of “all of us”, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is the good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the *common good* and strive towards it is a *requirement of justice and charity*” (7).

“If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity¹, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI's words, “the minimum measure” of it², an integral part of the love “in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18), to which Saint John exhorts us. On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the *earthly city* according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving³” (6).

“The [Second Vatican] Council probed more deeply what had always belonged to the truth of the faith, namely that the Church, being at God's service, is at the service of the world in terms of love and truth. Paul VI set out from this vision in order to convey two important truths. ... [T]he whole Church, in all her being and acting — when she proclaims, when she celebrates, when she performs works of charity — is engaged in promoting integral human development. She has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities: all the energy she brings to the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity is manifested when she is able to operate in a climate of freedom” (11).

“*Feed the hungry* (cf. Mt 25: 35, 37, 42) is an ethical imperative for the universal Church, as she responds to the teachings of her Founder, the Lord Jesus, concerning solidarity and the sharing of goods.

¹ Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), 22: AAS 59 (1967), 268; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 69.

² *Address for the Day of Development* (23 August 1968): AAS 60 (1968), 626-627.

³ Cf. John Paul II, *Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace*: AAS 94 (2002), 132-140.



Quotes from Caritas in Veritate on Charity, Justice, and the Common Good



Moreover, the elimination of world hunger has also, in the global era, become a requirement for safeguarding the peace and stability of the planet. Hunger is not so much dependent on lack of material things as on shortage of social resources, the most important of which are institutional. What is missing, in other words, is a network of economic institutions capable of guaranteeing regular access to sufficient food and water for nutritional needs, and also capable of addressing the primary needs and necessities ensuing from genuine food crises, whether due to natural causes or political irresponsibility, nationally and internationally. The problem of food insecurity needs to be addressed within a long-term perspective, eliminating the structural causes that give rise to it and promoting the agricultural development of poorer countries” (27).

“Economic activity cannot solve all social problems through the simple application of commercial logic. This needs to *be directed towards the pursuit of the common good*, for which the political community in particular must also take responsibility. Therefore, it must be borne in mind that grave imbalances are produced when economic action, conceived merely as an engine for wealth creation, is detached from political action, conceived as a means for pursuing justice through redistribution” (36).

“Development is impossible without upright men and women financiers and politicians whose consciences are finely attuned to the requirements of the common good” (71).

“Human beings legitimately exercise a *responsible stewardship over nature*, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits and to cultivate it in new ways, with the assistance of advanced technologies, so that it can worthily accommodate and feed the world's population. On this earth there is room for everyone: here the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity, through the help of nature itself — God's gift to his children — and through hard work and creativity. At the same time we must recognize our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it. This means being committed to making joint decisions ‘after pondering responsibly the road to be taken, decisions aimed at strengthening that *covenant between human beings and the environment*, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying’⁴” (5).

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace*, 7: AAS 100 (2008), 41.