



The Church's social teaching helps every Catholic to live a fully just life. The teaching involves a set of principles which are based on the Gospels, and which have been developed mainly over the last hundred years. This set of fact sheets will outline the basic principles and will give examples of how they can guide our lives and our action in the world.

SOME USEFUL WEBSITES

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council
www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

Faith Doing Justice
www.faithdoingjustice.com.au

Office for Social Justice, Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis
www.osjspm.org

*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church
www.hobart.catholic.org.au

See link on left hand side under "Universal Church"

CONTACT THE COMMISSION

Catholic Diocesan Centre
35 Tower Road
New Town
GPO Box 62, Hobart, Tasmania, 7001
phone (03) 6208 6271
fax (03) 6208 6299
email tcjpc@aohtas.org
visit www.tasjustice.org.au

We have a **small library of resource** material on Catholic Social Teaching and social justice issues. You are welcome to borrow from us.

We have a collection of brochures and flyers on various social justice issues for you to take away.

Ask us for information about web resources or personal contacts on particular issues.



TASMANIAN CATHOLIC
JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION

4 principles that can
change the world

Subsidiarity



THE TASMANIAN CATHOLIC
JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION

FACT SHEET 4

Subsidiarity



The principle of subsidiarity is based on the idea that a government or higher level of authority should intervene in the affairs of citizens only when help is necessary for the individual and common good. It insists that all

functions that can be done by individuals or by lower level organisations be left to them. The government or higher authority has a subsidiary or helping role in relation to lower organisations or individuals.

(Andrew Murray, Australasian Catholic Record April 1995)

The implication of this principle is that responsibility is held as close as possible to the grassroots in any given situation. The people or groups most directly affected by a decision or policy should have a key decision-making role. Any intervention should be of a helping nature in order to promote the common good. (see ACSJC website)

To be able to apply the principles of human dignity and the common good we must understand the network of relationships which exist in society. Subsidiarity helps to strengthen those relationships and assist in building communities of respect.

The Latin root of the word subsidiarity is subsidium which means help, aid or support. Subsidiarity holds a path between the extremes of individualism

“It is one practical application of the belief that each human being has dignity.”

and totalitarianism. Government action in supporting the common good is essential but must never undermine the capacity of individuals and organisations to take action.

“The principle of subsidiarity protects people from abuses by higher-level social authority and calls on these same authorities to help individuals and intermediate groups to fulfil their duties. This principle is imperative because every person, family and intermediate group has something original to offer to the community.” (Compendium 187)

It is one practical application of the belief that each human being has dignity. As such, their dignity needs to be respected when the person is part of a community whose boundaries are smaller or whose capacity for initiative is limited by scale or circumstances.

SOURCES

The principle of subsidiarity was developed by Pope Pius XI in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* where he stated that it is a fundamental principle of social philosophy. It has been reaffirmed by subsequent popes. Subsidiarity is balanced by **socialisation** as Pope John XXIII explained in *Mater et Magistra*.



The concept of socialisation recognises “that the growing complexity of modern life and the experience of various forms of interdependence result in a tendency to form

new organisational structures both public and private.

A larger role for the state, then ... is not wrong in principle ... the proper balancing of the two procedural norms of subsidiarity and socialisation is to serve solidarity.”

(Kenneth Hines: Responses to 101 Questions of Catholic Social Teaching, 55)

SUMMARY

The principle of subsidiarity means clearly determining the right amount of help or support that is needed to accomplish a task or to meet an obligation: “not too much” (taking over and doing it for the other: thereby creating learned helplessness or overdependence) and “not too little” (standing back and watching people thrash about, thereby increasing frustration and perhaps hopelessness). “Instead of ‘the less government the better’, the principle might be better summarised as ‘no bigger than necessary, no smaller than appropriate.’”

(Catholic Social Teaching – Centacare, Brisbane www.centacarebrisbane.net.au/cst)

QUESTIONS ?

What does this mean for us in our daily lives?

- The Faith Doing Justice website has a story about solidarity with East Timor. Check out their questions and discussion starters related to subsidiarity. Look at the website of the Friends and Partners of East Timor www.fpet.org.au
- How do we apply the principle of subsidiarity in our families, workplaces, schools and organisations?
- Can you think of examples of when we fail to apply the principle?
- In what ways could this principle influence the way governments deal with social disadvantage?
- How can our participation in the social and political life of the country assist the health of our democracy?

PARTICIPATION

The practical application of this principle is participation. Each person is encouraged to fully participate in the cultural, economic, political and social life of their society, both as an individual and in association with others.

“Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility, and with a view to the common good.”

(Compendium 189)

Participation is vital to the success and health of democracy.

Overcoming barriers to participation through education, information and encouragement is important. Encouraging those who are in any way marginalised or disadvantaged to full participation is essential.

Jesus is our model in this. He affirmed, educated and encouraged people to live full participatory lives. He also admonished those who used power to reduce the ability of others to act.