

Catholic Social Teaching: The Preferential Option for the Poor

Goals

1. To clarify the meaning of the principle of the preferential option for the poor
2. To apply the principle of the preferential option for the poor to the problem of global climate change

Begin first by helping participants to articulate their understanding of the preferential option for the poor.

Ask: What do you think “the preferential option for the poor” means? Listen for and affirm the following points:

- The life of Jesus embodies the option for the poor.
- Those who have access to resources should use this privilege to help those who have little or no access to resources.
- The church has a prophetic role as a voice for the poor and marginalized.
- The church puts its weight on the side of social reforms in favor of the poor and deprived.
- The church challenges those who accumulate wealth through circumstances that make others suffer.
- The option for the poor does not tolerate exploitation at the hands of other people.
- People who are weak must be protected even while they are encouraged to take initiative and power.
- Materialism is one of the root causes of poverty.
- We should be willing to make sacrifices of our own to help those who are poor.
- Faith needs to be connected to action.

To clarify or flesh out the meaning of the preferential option for the poor, read one or more of the brief quotes that follow.

Quotes about the preferential option for the poor from Catholic social teaching

“You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich.”

- St. Ambrose quoted in *On the Development of Peoples*, #23

In teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and the special situation they have in society: the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others.

- *A Call to Action*, #23

“The needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion...”

- *Justice in the World*, #5

Assist participants in applying the principle of the preferential option for the poor to the problem of global climate change by using one or both of the discussion questions that follow.

For Discussion

1. Because of the blessings God has bestowed on our nation and the power it possesses, the United States bears a special responsibility in its stewardship of god's creation to shape responses that serve the entire human family. . . . Therefore, we especially want to focus on the needs of the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable in a debate often dominated by more powerful interests. . . . Action to mitigate global climate change must be built upon a foundation of social and economic justice that does not put the poor at greater risk or place disproportionate and unfair burdens on developing nations.

- *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*

As we advocate for policies to stop global climate change, what questions should we be asking about how these policies will impact people who are poor and vulnerable?

2. In Part three of the DVD "*This is Your Home*" you learned how your own personal lifestyle choices and patterns of consumption contribute to global climate change. What lifestyle changes are you most willing to make in order to combat global climate change? What changes are you more reluctant to make and why? How does your thinking about these choices change when you consider that it is the poor that will be the most adversely affected by global climate change?

Conclude by asking participants to identify specific actions they can take to apply the principle of the preferential option for the poor to the problem of global climate change.

Personal choices

Challenge yourself and your family to replace one or two meat meals a week with vegetarian meals. Go to www.vegcooking.com for recipes.

Consumer power

Check out the Co-op America's green pages, a directory listing nearly 3,000 businesses that have made firm commitments to sustainable, socially just principles, including the support of sweatshop-free labor, organic farms, fair trade, and cruelty-free products. <http://www.coopamerica.org/pubs/greenpages/index.cfm>.

Political Action

Sign "The Heat Is On" petition urging the 2008 presidential candidates to make global climate change a priority in their campaign. <http://www.heatison.org/>