TRINITY HEALTH
CATHOLIC SENSIBILITIES

CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE
is founded upon and guided by the principles of Catholic social teaching. These teachings inform sensibilities that respond concretely to the world with distinctively Catholic behaviors. Richly witnessed in scripture, the Christian tradition, and more recently a growing body of documents from popes, bishops and church councils, the Church social teaching provides deep wisdom for building just organizations, sustaining an ethical society amid the challenges of modernity, growing in holiness, and remaining people-centered through continued scientific and technological advancement. These brief reflections highlight key themes at the heart of the Catholic social tradition.

Dignity of the Person
The dignity of the human person has different meanings for different cultures and religions. In Western Society this dignity is described in terms of the self-determination and autonomous decision-making of the person. The Judeo-Christian tradition has a richer understanding of the dignity of the person. Because persons are made in the image of God they have inestimable worth and inalienable rights. Human dignity is the basis of all human rights—rights that cannot be granted but are inherent by simply being a person. Human dignity and the common good are the focus of all the other social principles. Both these principles become the measure of a just society.

The Common Good
The human person is inherently social. We live in community as members of families and societies in an interconnected network of relationships. Thus, all persons have an obligation to foster that which is good, not only for oneself, but also for the good of all. How we structure society—in terms of economics, politics, law, and policy—impacts human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The tradition describes the common good as more than a collection of goods; rather it encompasses an entire social context that enables human flourishing. Thus, the individual has claims on society, and yet for the common good to be realized, the reverse is also true—the individual must contribute to the benefit of the whole. The Catholic tradition highlights that those in positions of authority, especially elected officials and public servants, ought to work for the good of all, not a limited few.
Care for the Poor  The prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures called for the community to care for the widows, orphans and poor. The early Christians also included an attentiveness and care for the poor. It remains that a basic moral test of society is how the most vulnerable are treated and faring. The prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures called for the community to care for the widows, orphans and poor. In a world torn by inequalities and deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition turns to the Gospel story of the Last Judgment (Mt. 25:31-46), describing a judgment based on how we responded to the needs of the poor and vulnerable. In recent decades, the Church has adopted the theological concept of a “preferential option for the poor.” This means that the poor and vulnerable receive a privileged, but not exclusive hearing in matters of pastoral concern.

Solidarity  God walks in solidarity with creation and humanity. All persons, particularly those oppressed by the structures of sin, are created and loved by God, members with us in one human family that transcends all differences—national, racial, economic and more. Solidarity reminds us that we are so interconnected that “we are all really responsible for all.” It calls us to concrete, persevering action and self-emptying love, on behalf of others. It calls us to walk together with others, working to overcome oppression and injustice, working for peace.

Stewardship  Many world religions teach that human beings are to be caretakers of the earth and of each other. In Catholicism this teaching is based upon the principle of the universal destination of goods, wherein God made earth and all of its resources for the benefit of all human beings. We are called to protect, nurture and grow these resources responsibly. We can be responsible caretakers—good stewards—of each other, ourselves, the environment, time, one’s gifts and talents, finances and many other aspects of God’s creation.

Subsidiarity  The concept of subsidiarity arises in the context of groups and organizations in determining at what level decisions should be made. The principle holds that a higher authority should not assume responsibility for a decision until those closer to the decision have exhausted the ability to address the problem. Promoting decision-making to those closest to a problem protects human dignity because it fosters association and participation and the ability of people to become co-creators of their destiny.

Association and Participation  Western society tends to view association and participation in terms of labor and political groups, however, the terms have a much richer meaning in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the Catholic tradition, the person is not only sacred but social. We are called to associate with one another to create the social conditions that enable everyone to participate in their own destiny. How we organize our society directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.

Caritas/Gratuitousness  Charity, gift—is the essence of God’s identity. From the beginning, gratuitous love has been the hallmark of God’s relationship with creation and humanity. It should, therefore, shape the actions of all Christians, everyday. Gratuitous love is at the heart of Catholic social doctrine, reminding us that at the center of reality is a gift and calling us to think and act differently when it comes to economics, politics, and social interactions.