



CATHOLIC CHARITIES  
*of St. Paul and Minneapolis*

# **Reflection/Action Process**

## **Examining Social Issues with a Theological Perspective**

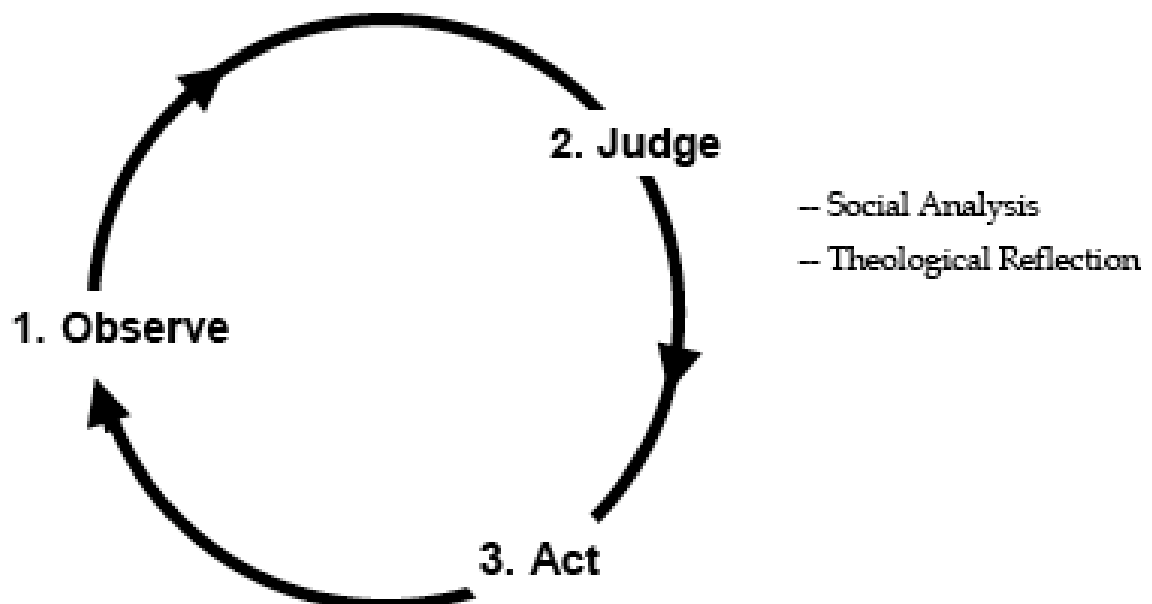
**Office for Social Justice**  
**Catholic Charities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis**  
**[www.cctwincities.org/advocacy](http://www.cctwincities.org/advocacy)**

## A Process to Examine an Issue with a Theological Perspective

The **Reflection/Action Process** of seeing, judging, and acting can be extremely helpful in examining and discussing issues from a theological perspective. The accompanying materials are meant to be a resource for individuals or groups (i.e., Social Justice Committee, parish discussion group) that models the process of

- observing the signs of the times,
- reviewing what we see through the lens of social analysis and faith, and
- seeking faith-filled and meaningful ways of responding to what we've reflected upon.

Here is a visual representation of the Reflection/Action Process:



Using this basic reflection process, along with the accompanying resources, we hope to foster important community conversations and inspire action on critical social justice issues of today according to the structure described below and outlined on the accompanying worksheets.

The **Reflection/Action Process** includes:

1. **Step One: Experience and Seeing the *lived* reality.**  
Briefly examine a particular social justice issue and the reality of injustice in society today. It is important to understand the “signs of the times” affecting our lives, our families, and our greater community.
  
2. **Step Two: Brief Social Analysis (Looking Beneath the Surface).**  
This is a brief opportunity to examine the WHY behind an issue. It is important to understand the deeper systemic and structural aspects creating, impacting, instilling, and institutionalizing the particular social injustice.
  
3. **Step Three: Theological Reflection (Looking with the Lens of Faith).**  
This is an opportunity to examine the issue through the perspective of faith using resources from scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, and our own faithful experiences.
  
4. **Step Four: Action**  
This is an opportunity respond the needs and injustices considered in our reflection and analysis. Clearly, just societies do not just happen. Concrete actions addressing the root causes of poverty and systemic injustices are needed. There are various actions or ways in which we may be called to respond (including but not limited to works of charity, service, community organizing, economic development, leadership development, education and trainings, and advocacy). Ideally, we are all called to act with and for justice.

(NOTE: Accompanying worksheets can be useful tools to assist with the above outlined Reflection/Action Process of examining particular social issues.)



**Reflection/Action Process**  
(OBSERVE: Identifying the Issue)  
Worksheet #2

**Post-OBSERVATION: Identifying your feelings and the social “Issue”**

1. How do you feel after this experience? Describe a feeling that this encounter has surfaced in you?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  
2. Identify some of things about this encounter/experience that you find particularly interesting, compelling, shocking, problematic, has raised additional questions for you, or raises wrongs within the story/experience that disturbs or upsets you.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  
3. Name any perceived injustices or conflicts with your values?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  
4. What are some potential counter arguments or varying view-points/perspectives on this issue?
  - a.
  - b.

## Reflection/Action Process

(JUDGE: Social Analysis)

Worksheet #3

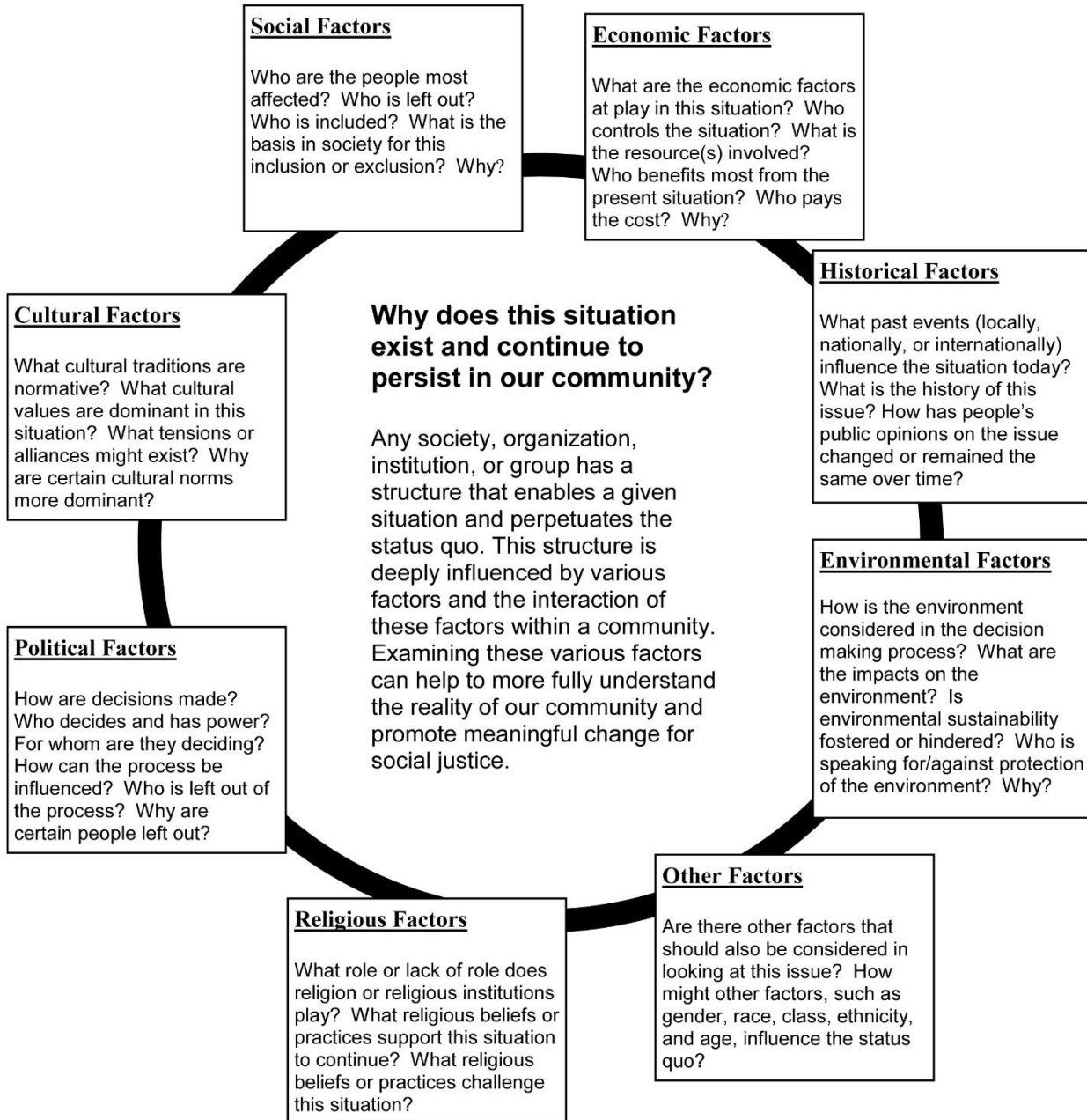
### JUDGE: Challenge of Social Analysis to look beneath the surface

1. Name the Social Justice Issue(s):
  
2. Why does this situation exist and continue to persist in our community?
  
3. Identify some of the deeper structural causes  
– SEE ACCOMPANYING Social Analysis chart –
  - a. **Social factors:** Who are the people most affected? Who is left out? Who is included? What is the basis in society for this inclusion or exclusion? Why?
  
  - b. **Economic factors:** What are the economic factors at play in this situation? Who controls the situation? What is the resource(s) involved? Who benefits most from the present situation? Who pays the cost? Why?
  
  - c. **Political factors:** How are decisions made? Who decides and has power? For whom are they deciding? How can the process be influenced? Who is left out of the process? Why?
  
  - d. **Cultural factors:** What cultural traditions are normative? What cultural values are dominant in this situation? What tensions or alliances might exist? Why are certain cultural norms more dominant?

- e. **Religious factors:** What role or lack of role does religion or religious institutions play? What religious beliefs or practices support this situation to continue? What religious beliefs or practices challenge this situation?
  
- f. **Historical factors:** What past events (locally, nationally, or internationally) influence the situation today? What is the history of this issue? What are people's public opinions on the issue and how have opinions changed or remained the same over time?
  
- g. **Environmental factors:** How is the environment considered in the decision making process? What are the impacts on the environment? Is environmental sustainability fostered or hindered? Who is speaking for/against protection of the environment? Why?
  
- h. **Other factors:** Are there other factors that should also be considered in looking at this issue? How might other factors, such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, and age, influence the status quo?

# Social Analysis

(A tool for examining social realities in our community)



Adapted from the *Structural Analysis*  
@ 1984 Sisters of Mercy of the Union  
Updated by Catholic Charities  
Office for Social Justice—2014





**JUDGE: Challenge of Catholic Social Teaching (CST)**

1. Identify any CST themes that can be a helpful lens in examining the issue  
– SEE ACCOMPANYING “Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching” –
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  
2. Is the Church speaking on this issue or has it ever addressed this issue in the past? What are some CST documents that come to mind and could be a resource?  
– NOTE: Check out many helpful CST resources at the OSJ website –
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  
3. Identify notable quotes of Catholic Social Teaching related to this issue:

# KEY PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

## **Human Dignity**

Belief in the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all Catholic social teaching. Human life is sacred, and the dignity of the human person is the starting point for a moral vision for society.

The principle of human dignity is grounded in the idea that the person is made in the image of God. The person is the clearest reflection of God among us. We are required to honor the human person, to give priority to the person.

## **Community and the Common Good**

In a culture driven by excessive individualism, our tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. Human dignity can only be realized and protected in the context of relationships with the wider society.

How we organize our society – in economics and politics, in law and policy – directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The obligation to "love our neighbor" has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society, to the common good.

## **Rights and Responsibilities**

Human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency – starting with food, shelter and clothing, employment, health care, and education. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

## **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

A basic moral test of society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. The poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation.

The option for the poor is a perspective that examines personal decisions, policies of private and public institutions, and economic relationships in terms of their effects on the poor - those who lack the minimum necessities of nutrition, housing, education, and health care. Those who are marginalized and whose rights are denied have privileged claims if society is to provide justice for all.

The obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless arises from the radical command to love one's neighbor as one's

self. The option for the poor is an essential part of society's effort to achieve the common good. A healthy community can be achieved only if its members give special attention to those with special needs, to those who are poor and on the margins of society.

### **Participation**

All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community.

It is wrong for a person or a group to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to participate in society. In the words of the U.S. bishops, "The ultimate injustice is for a person or group to be treated actively or abandoned passively as if they were non-members of the human race. To treat people this way is effectively to say they simply do not count as human beings."

### **Dignity of Work/Rights of Workers**

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. All workers have a right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, and to safe working conditions. They also have a fundamental right to organize and join unions.

People have a right to economic initiative and private property, but these rights have limits. No one is allowed to amass excessive wealth when others lack the basic necessities of life.

### **Stewardship of Creation**

Catholic tradition insists that we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. The goods of the earth are gifts from God, intended for the benefit of all.

We humans are not the ultimate owners of these goods, but rather, the temporary stewards. We are entrusted with the responsibility of caring for these gifts and preserving them for future generations.

### **Global Solidarity**

Catholic social teaching proclaims that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Solidarity means that "loving our neighbor" has global dimensions in an interdependent world.

John Paul II has called solidarity a virtue. It is the virtue, he says, by which we demonstrate "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good ... because we are all really responsible for all."

## **Constructive Role for Government**

Because we are social beings, the state is natural to the person. Therefore, the state has a positive moral function. It is an instrument to promote human dignity, protect human rights, and build the common good.

One of the key functions of government is to assist citizens in fulfilling their responsibility to others in society. Since, in a large and complex society these responsibilities cannot adequately be carried out on a one-to-one basis, citizens need the help of government in fulfilling these responsibilities and promoting the common good.

According to the principle of subsidiarity, the functions of government should be performed at the lowest level possible, as long as they can be performed adequately. If they cannot, then a higher level of government should intervene to provide help.

## **Promotion of Peace**

Catholic teaching promotes peace as a positive, action-oriented concept. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "Peace is not just the absence of war. It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements."

There is a close relationship in Catholic teaching between peace and justice. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings.

## Reflection/Action Process

(JUDGE: Theological Reflections for Group Discussion)  
Worksheet #5

This **Reflection/Action Process** is ideally done in the context of community, a faith-filled community in which we continue to reflect, pray, inform and challenge each other. The dynamic should be an open-ended process. The following questions can be used to initiate community conversations which will hopefully inspire individual and communal action on critical social justice issues of today.

### **JUDGE: Challenge of Engaging Community Conversations in the context of our faith:**

Various suggestions for group discussion starters or processing questions:

1. Select one meaningful and challenging verse from scripture or CST. Read it slowly as a group. Discuss what resonates with you. What is confusing or disturbing you about the passage? How does this text challenge your understanding of this social issue and our understanding of God and faith? How has the passage revealed the connection(s) of your faith with this issue?
2. Do you feel this issue presents an opportunity for lasting systematic change? Why or why not? This response is grounded in examining this issue using social analysis and a theological perspective.
3. What are challenges you face in responding personally to this issue? What might this mean for all of us as a faith community and the challenges we face collectively? How might a faith community support you in acting more justly on this particular issue?
4. What questions are you left with or struggling with?
5. Where might God be drawing or leading you?
6. What has surprised you most in examining this issue through a lens of faith?
7. What are you feeling (as you walk through this process)? How has this process challenged you? What has been challenging about this process?
8. What has this process made you aware of about yourself, about your faith, about your faith community, and/or about the reality of the world in which we live?
9. What are our hopes for what tomorrow (the future) might bring?

## Reflection/Action Process

(ACT)

Worksheet #6

### ACT: The Challenge of Responding with Faithful Action



1. Do you have enough information, analysis, and reflection on this issue to act and respond faithfully? What do you feel should be addressed first or that you have the ability to address? How could you support the empowerment of those experiencing poverty in order to be a part of the solution? What support do you need in responding faithfully?

2. How do we/can we respond to this issue? How do we walk the social mission of both charity and justice in regards to this issue?

**A. Acts of direct service and charity**

Brainstorm ideas of how we might respond to this issue by addressing the needs in charity such as:

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**B. Acts promoting systemic change and justice**

Brainstorm ideas of how we might respond to this issue by promoting the general welfare of people living in poverty, systemic change, and justice such as:

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