



# Human Dignity

Te Mana i te Tangata



PARISH RESOURCE



Easy as CST: Unlocking the Church's Potential  
Māmā noa, pēnei i te CST: Te Tuku i ngā Pūmanawa o te Hāhi kia Whai Hua





# Human Dignity

## Te Mana o te Tangata



## Made in God's Image

The Catholic social teaching principle of human dignity is about understanding that each of us is made in God's image. Every person has an innate human dignity no one can take away.

Human dignity is given freely to all human beings; whether saint or sinner, imprisoned or freed, powerful or marginalised. Christ died for all, so all can have fullness of life and therefore every human life is considered sacred.

Our common humanity requires that we respect and uphold the dignity of each and every human being. All our other rights and responsibilities flow from this dignity. This principle is deemed as the central aspect of our Church's social teaching. The idea that each life has value is shared with International Human Rights which are also universal, inviolable and inalienable.

## Searching the Scriptures...

Social Justice teaching is founded on firm scriptural foundations.

- 'God said, 'Let us make human-kind in our image, according to our likeness.'" **Genesis 1:26**
- 'The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.'" **Jeremiah 1:4**
- 'It was you who formed my inward parts, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made, wonderful are your works.' **Psalms 139:13-14**

...and in light of Catholic Social Teaching.



"We are united by our common humanity, created in the image of God, and called to live in active love."

**New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference,  
1997**





“

“If we are to share our lives with others and generously give of ourselves, we also have to realize that every person is worthy of our giving. God created that person in his image, and he or she reflects something of God’s glory. Every human being is the object of God’s infinite tenderness, and he himself is present in their lives.”

***Pope Francis: Evangelii Gaudium  
(paragraph 274), 2013***

”

“

“Respecting human dignity is important in any profession...because even behind the simple account of an event there are sentiments, emotions, and ultimately, people’s lives.”

***Pope Francis, Audience with National Council  
Order of Journalists, 2016***

”

“

“Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy.”

***Catechism of the Catholic Church (#1930)***

”





## Great Examples - Stories of Hope

Mental health and well-being is a very prevalent matter in our society. New Zealand has one of the worst suicide rates in the world and the stigma around mental health makes it a challenge to talk about. Whether you experience any challenges with mental health or know someone that does, it's very easy to lose sight of the innate human dignity that we all have.

Have a read through how Josh and Sinead both realised the innate dignity that they and others have despite the challenges that they have had to face.



Josh Chisholm, Dunedin

*Josh lives and is studying at Dunedin University and is a leader of CAYD (Catholic Young Adults Dunedin). Here is his story.*

Human dignity is something very important in the world and most importantly in the eyes of God. For young people today we try so hard to fit into society while trying to prove ourselves to the social normality.

For myself, I had trouble really finding my value in this world during my high school years. I always questioned why I was born the way I was which is being significantly shorter than everyone else and always compared my life with the wealth, clothes, the social activities and the apparent happiness of everyone else.

The impact this took on my mental health was catastrophic, my physical health worsened as well as my relationships with my family and friends. The way I got my mental health back on track was through understanding my worth in the eyes of God.

The Church says that the dignity of the human person is rooted in his or her creation in the image and likeness of God our creator. Even every time we celebrate the mass, the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist reminds us of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for each and everyone of us. Not just certain people of certain shape, hair colour or ethnicity. When we put our human dignity in our creator who sacrificed himself for us, we find true security and develop a healthy self-esteem and can experience His love way more.





Sinead Gilgunn, Christchurch

*Sinead lives in Christchurch and currently works as a Chaplain for a university group. She has had a lot of experience working in the pastoral care sector. This is her story.*

I was 12 when I first thought about taking my own life. I did not fully understand why, but I knew that I was broken, and sad, and the future seemed bleak. I am now 30, I have my own beautiful family, I have a job that is fulfilling, and 3 months ago out of nowhere I suffered from a mild stroke. Today, I think I have lots of excuses to be sad, to feel broken, to see a bleak future but I am not broken or sad and my future is full of hope. I am thankful for the challenges of life and the realization that I am made in the image and likeness of God and I have an innate human dignity.

When I was a child and a teenager I measured my worth on the socio-economic pressures around me. It limited my sight – my ability to see or know how I should be treated. I measured my worth on the comments or the behaviours of others. This blind-sighted me, it objectified me, it turned me into something – not someone. The high rate of suicide in our society is one of many indications that we are called to uphold and value human dignity for every individual. At its core, human dignity acknowledges that every human life is sacred.

When I was 21, I had a transformational encounter with the merciful face of Christ. It was in a Dublin city Hospital while working as a student chaplain: Christ revealed to me the image of himself in every individual I encountered. My first week walking on to the wards was overwhelming. One patient in particular always stands out. I walked into her ward, she raised her hand, she was waving furiously at me, and as I approached – before I even sat down beside her bed she said to me: “I want to die, if someone doesn’t move me soon I will take my own life”. Surprisingly to me, I was overcome with her honesty and I felt a sense of calm. I sat down, I smiled, and I started to listen to her. I soon found out that this lady had been in the hospital over 100 days. She lay on her bed day in and day out, watching people come and go, people suffer and die, and she was still here. She had been there so long, she felt she was just part of the furniture. Other than seeing medical staff, I was the first visitor in a long time who sat beside her, listened, and talked to her. It was very clear to me that she had spent so long feeling ignored, that everything seemed hopeless.

She was elderly and it did not surprise me that she wanted to prepare for death, but it did shock me that she was prepared to take her own life. I often ponder on why she felt like this. She was sitting in a ward full of people, but she was alone and isolated. As humans we are created for relationships, we need other people, we need support and love and to be cared for, and we need purpose, the ability to give back and to serve someone else. This lady had lost all of that. Her human dignity, the ability to see the sacredness of her life, to be acknowledged as a “someone” not a “something”.

I was overcome with empathy; myself and this lady were at total different stages of life, but I had felt like this before and I knew that we are all called to be responsible stewards of the gift



of life, share our experiences and uphold a common good. Jesus' ministry wills an inclusive message to those who feel withdrawn from their community. He acknowledged the suffering that people who felt like outcasts experienced. Jesus invites people who are suffering back into human society through his healing word. Christ's model of ministry was pro-active, he confronted issues when they arose.

I journeyed with this patient for two months. I sat with her and listened to her, heard her wonderful stories of her life, we entered amazing dialogue. I spoke to her about the word of God, the suffering and salvation of Christ, how suffering has immense value, and death is not our end goal - the hope and promise of eternal life is the goal. We talked about the fact that we are made in the image and likeness of the Creator. I spoke to her about the teachings and reflections of John Paul II. John Paul II emphasized in the Reflections of Humanae Vitae, "he [God] breathed into his nostrils a breath of life and thus man became a living being". We talked about the concept of the 'breath of God' as a life-giving spirit given by God in a unique manner to all human beings. John Paul II again emphasizes God's Spirit "Comes to inhabit the human being. Human dignity exists in the Bible because humans possess God's Life.'



I became a vessel of hope in her crisis of hope. We are all called to this, we are all called to acknowledge the face of Christ in everyone we encounter.

As I continue to work in living out the life and mission of the church, understanding and communicating the concept that we are all made in the image and likeness of God is key to the call to respect and to be good stewards of human dignity. I think acknowledging that human dignity is innate, and no one has the right to take that away is important. Human dignity is given freely by God through Christ's mission on earth. I think the challenge is that the pressures of life can distort this and easily make us complacent. Two things from my experience of upholding human dignity we can all commit to is (1) always search for hope – hope is an active response to negative experiences in life; (2) do not forget the significance of dialogue.





## Living out CST - Ideas for putting faith into action

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- What stood out from the testimonies above?
- Where in the past week, did you notice someone upholding the dignity of others?
- Can you think of an example in your community or NZ society where someone's human dignity was not upheld?
- How does my appreciation of how each person is made in the image and likeness of God affect the way I relate to people in need?
- In helping others, what makes the difference in terms of upholding and enhancing their own dignity as people?

Individual	Family	Community
Read and reflect on the case studies and questions above.	Affirm the strengths and victories of your family members.	Host an open dinner party in your neighbourhood! Fostering a sense of community is critical especially for people who feel isolated or lonely.
Identify 3 people whose dignity may not be upheld – especially the lonely and isolated – and reach out to them.	Read, reflect and pray with the passage from Genesis 1:26-31 as a family.	Fight the stigma and have a discussion about mental health and wellbeing with people in your community.
Be present with everyone that you encounter. Just being there to talk to is better than not know what to do or say.	Watch this great CRS <a href="#">video</a> as a family.	Research on how respect for human dignity underpins the Church's teaching on the issue of abortion and euthanasia.
Improve your own mental health and well-being. The Mental Health Foundation have great ideas <a href="#">here</a> .	Actively communicate with and engage with your family. It can be as easy as having family meals together at the dinner table.	Choose a prayer from the SJW2020 resources and use it in your parish liturgy – during Prayer of the Faithful or at the end of Communion.



## Closing Prayers

Kia ĭnoi tātou, we pray for the strength of heart and mind to look beyond ourselves and address the needs of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. God of generosity and compassion, hear our prayer.

**Leader: E te Ariki... All: whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou.**

We pray for all nations, that they may live in unity and peace and that all people may know justice and enjoy the perfect freedom which recognises a person's dignity. God of liberty and freedom, hear our prayer.

**Leader: E te Ariki... All: whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou.**

We pray that the Holy Spirit helps us to embrace the most vulnerable members of our society to ensure that we work to restore their dignity. God of all gifts and blessings, hear our prayer.

**Leader: E te Ariki... All: whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou.**

Creator God, Your image is alive in every human person  
giving to each of us an inviolable dignity.

Create in us a desire to act in solidarity, the ability to work together, and a willingness to share with others our time, our energy, our skills and talents and our wealth.

As we share and enjoy the fruits of your creation, restore in us your vision of a world made whole, and inspire us to commit ourselves to the common good.

Gracious God, give us ears to hear, eyes to see and hearts to love, so that we reflect you in our way of life, And in our choices, words and actions.

Jesus is the good news to the poor. As his followers, may we recognize the call to be the same.

Amen.

*Australian Catholic Social Justice Council*

