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ABOVE: Participants in the first Diocesan Symposium on Catholic Social Teaching last fall.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING, OR CST, IS A TERM WE OFTEN HEAR BANDIED ABOUT DURING ELECTION TIME. BUT THERE IS NO MAGICAL TIME TO TALK ABOUT CST. AS THE NAME INDICATES, IT ACTUALLY RELATES TO ALL ASPECTS OF THE LIFE WE LIVE IN SOCIETY EACH AND EVERY DAY.

CST is the body of Church teaching (compiled primarily since the late 19th century) that seeks to shine the light of the Gospel on life in the modern world. It addresses building a just society within the framework of faith.

We might think of CST as the roadmap in our work for the Kingdom of God “on earth as it is in heaven.” It has four foundational principles:

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HUMAN DIGNITY:

Each person is created in the image and likeness of God, possessing an immense dignity that cannot be diminished or erased. This is why we oppose evils like abortion, racism, antisemitism and human trafficking.

COMMON GOOD:

This principle encompasses elements like the defense of basic human rights (such as food, housing and health care), helping migrants and refugees, freedom of religion and conscience, the dignity of work and workers and care for God's creation.

SOLIDARITY:

The “firm and persevering determination to commit oneself ... to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all,” as Pope St. John Paul II said in Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. The Good Samaritan is our model here.

SUBSIDIARITY:

All persons and associations (particularly families) have a right and a duty to actively assist in shaping society and promoting the well-being of all people. Thus, decisions and actions must be made at the lowest level where they can be carried out effectively.

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“THE SOCIAL MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL MUST NOT BE CONSIDERED A THEORY, BUT ABOVE ALL ELSE A BASIS AND A MOTIVATION FOR ACTION.”

Pope St. John Paul II

This is strong stuff, and I suspect that most of us are drawn only toward pieces of this teaching. We gravitate toward the parts we find attractive or that fit within our own political or world views, and then we ignore the other parts. Or perhaps we have such a strong focus on one specific area that we simply don't have time to think about the other pieces.

But the Gospel doesn't let us off that easily.

Unlike the various ideologies that are afloat in our culture, CST is a complete and integral whole. All of its principles are interconnected, and the principles do not stay in their own lanes. Think of the way CST works like a swirling hockey game, not the rigid lanes of a 100-yard dash.

In an effort to show how all these concepts, ideas and principles work together, we convened our first Diocesan Symposium on Catholic Social Teaching last fall.

This event grew out of discussions within the Diocesan Public Policy Commission about our Eucharistic mission. The commission felt that, in order to effectively focus our transformative work in the public square around the fullness of CST, we needed to get people involved in diverse ministries together in one place.

And so, we convened 15 people at St. Methodios Retreat Center in Contoocook to pray, share fellowship and learn more about CST and the work being done by other Catholics in New Hampshire. Professor Dan Daly of the Boston College School of Theology served as facilitator.

The participants work on behalf of the poor and the hungry, the unborn, the environment,

immigrants and refugees, new mothers and would-be mothers, prisoners, the sick and victims of war and human trafficking.

Several things stand out for me about this inspiring gathering.

First, I think all of us learned just how much we did *not* know about some of the incredible things that our fellow Catholics are doing in every corner of New Hampshire. In all sorts of ways, without fanfare, legions of New Hampshire Catholics are making an offering of themselves on behalf of their brothers and sisters every day.

Second, the Holy Spirit was palpably present. As one participant told me afterward, “This short time together was truly blessed. I felt sort of like Peter, who wanted to build three tents and stay a while.”

Third, the participants left with a sense of how revolutionary this integral vision of CST can be. Some participants have already started to converse about ways that people in diverse ministries can cross-pollinate.

Pope St. John Paul II said, “The social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and a motivation for action.”

There are many platforms and ideologies that will try to lay claim to our allegiance in this election year, but it is Catholic Social Teaching that really must guide us on our way in 2024. ■



Our companion podcast is in production. Check catholicnh.org/parable for updates.