



# Formative Parenting

*Cultivating Character in Children*

*A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania*

## WORKS OF MERCY & SOCIAL JUSTICE

English writer John Heywood remarked: “They do not love that do not show their love.” In response, many of us wonder, how would one show love? As children, we learn how to transfer the abstract concept of love into practical and observable actions through the teaching and example of our parents. It is a parent’s major responsibility.

This newsletter, one of a six-part series, presents **the WORKS OF MERCY and the PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING** as formulas for love. Other newsletters spotlight Spirituality of Communion and the Ten Commandments as expressions of love.

### WORKS OF MERCY

Generations of Catholics can recite from memory the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy. These are basic charitable actions that aid another person in **physical, or spiritual** ways, such as *feeding the hungry and visiting the sick* or in **spiritual, psychological** ways such as *counseling the doubtful*. When these works are demonstrated in behaviors, love becomes visible.

The **corporal works of mercy** implore us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, help those imprisoned, shelter the homeless, care for the sick, and bury the dead. The **spiritual works of mercy** encourage us to counsel the sinner, share knowledge of God with others, advise the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and for the dead.

Teach both the literal and the creative sense of each Work of Mercy. Take, for example, “Feed the Hungry.”

- In **a literal sense** it could translate into serving at a food kitchen, donating money to a food collection, contributing canned goods to a food bank, supporting legislation to stock food pantries, deciding to give up desserts and give the saved money to the poor . . .
- In **the creative sense** it could mean phoning a shut-in who is hungry for conversation, inviting to a play date a child who is unpopular/hungry for belonging, sending a homemade greeting card to a grandparent who is lonely/hungry for companionship, speaking affirming words to someone who is starved for attention.

### PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Justice, care for the poor, and reverence for human dignity are core elements of the Gospel of Jesus. Personal commitment to social justice is, therefore, an essential part of the Catholic faith. Love requires that verbal expressions transfer into personal action.

In 1995 the Bishops of the United States summarized *Catholic Social Teaching* into seven principles. Concrete practices include but are not limited to the following suggestions:

**Life and Dignity of the Human Person:**

Demonstrate that people are precious and more important than things. Safeguard life at every stage. Be your personal best. Avoid every form of abuse, hurtful words, cheating, fighting . . .

**Call to Family, Community, and**

**Participation:** Participate in school, parish, and civic activities. Build community. Seek the common good. Create a safe environment for all, especially the poor and vulnerable. Practice responsibility and accountability. Avoid name-calling, bullying . . .

**Rights and Responsibilities of the Human**

**Person:** Exercise your rights; fulfill your duties and responsibilities. Make restitution after violating rights/duties/responsibilities. Avoid behaviors that deny or interfere with another's rights.

**Option for the Poor and Vulnerable:** Protect the poor and vulnerable – those who struggle economically, academically, emotionally, or

socially. Avoid cliques, elitism, or treating another person as inferior to you.

**Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers:**

Support the right of people to receive fair wages, to organize unions, to own property and private business. Avoid an attitude of “entitlement” that is, expecting others to pick up after you.

**Solidarity of the Human Family:**

Understand that “neighbor” is everyone, everywhere. Respect all people regardless of race, gender, nation, sexual orientation, politics, or religion. Avoid expressing verbal slurs or jokes at the expense of a person. Learn to pronounce personal names and typical greetings in the language of other cultures.

**Care for God's Creation:**

Protect the planet. Exert stewardship for the environment -- respect and responsibility for buildings, grounds, equipment... Avoid destruction or misuse of persons, places or things.

## PARENT PRACTICES THAT MENTOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

- Speak thoughtful remarks that are repeated often enough that they shape attitudes and actions, like “What did you do today that looked like love?”
- Use printed slogans (like “Do the loving thing.”) as house decorations on a wall, above a staircase, near a light switch or on a mirror.
- Post a work of mercy or principle of Catholic social teaching. Make it the focus of conversation once a week at dinner.
- Perform a family social justice service project.
- Think of ways to teach sharing, empathy, forgiveness, compassion, repentance, etc.

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