The following summary highlights ten major themes from Catholic Social Teaching (CST) of the last century or more. It’s informed by various publications including documents by popes, bishops and synods. These principles are not exclusive to the Catholic Church of course but are common to many religious traditions and humanist approaches to full human development. They have come to be known as the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching because they are articulated and enshrined in many of the official documents of the Church.

_Dignity of the Human Person_

Belief in the intrinsic dignity of the human person is the basis of all Catholic social teaching. Human life is sacred and the dignity of the human person is the starting point for an ethical vision of society. This principle is grounded in the idea that the person is made in the image of God. The dignity of the human person is not diminished by age, ability, ethnicity, economic status or any other factor. Human dignity belongs to all people at all times simply by virtue of their being human.

_Common Good and Community_

The human person is both holy and social. Humans realise their dignity and human rights in relationship with others, in community. Human beings grow and achieve completion in community. Human dignity can only be realised and protected in the context of relationships with the wider society. How we arrange 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 neighbour’ has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social obligation. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society, to the common good.

_Preferential Option for the Poor_

The moral test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. The poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation. We are called to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor. The ‘preferential option for the poor’ is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community. 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 consideration to those with special needs, to those who are poor or on the margins of society.

**Subsidiarity**

The State has a positive moral function. It is an instrument to promote human dignity, protect human rights and build the common good. All people have a right and a responsibility to participate in political institutions so that government can achieve its proper goals. The principle of subsidiarity holds that the functions of government should be performed at the lowest level possible (that is, at the level closest to those people who are affected by decisions and policies) as long as they can be performed adequately. When the needs in question cannot be adequately met at the lower level, then it is not only necessary but crucial that higher levels of government intervene. In other words, the Principle of Subsidiarity holds that no responsibility should accrue to a higher body that can rightly and satisfactorily be undertaken by a lesser body.

**The Universal Purpose of Goods**

The goods of Earth are for all people to share. People have the right to own private property, however, this right comes with a caveat: we may not accumulate excess wealth for ourselves alone. Justice demands that all people should have access to the goods of society and that these must be equally shared in order to allow all to flourish.

**Stewardship of Creation**

The goods of Earth are gifts from God and they are intended for the benefit of everyone. There is a ‘social mortgage’ that guides our use of the world’s goods, and we have a responsibility to care for those goods as stewards and trustees, not as mere consumers and users. How we treat the environment is a measure of our stewardship, not only for the present but for generations yet to come. Earth is home not only to the human family but to a wide diversity of plant and animal life as well. Stewardship means safeguarding the diversity of all life and recognising the interdependence of all life forms on the planet.

**Promotion of Peace**

Christian values promote 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 between peace and justice. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings. The common good is able to flourish more readily in a peaceful context.

**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 of a minimum level of participation in the community. It is wrong for a person to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to participate in society.

*Global Solidarity*

We are one human family. Our responsibilities to each other cross national, racial, economic and ideological differences. We are called to work globally for justice. Authentic development must be fully human development. It must respect and promote personal, social, economic and political rights, including the rights of nations and of peoples. It must avoid extremes of underdevelopment on the one hand and ‘super development’ on the other. Accumulating material goods and technical resources will be unsatisfactory and debasing if there is no respect for the moral, cultural and spiritual dimensions of the human person.