UNCC100 MODULE 5:  
THE COMMON GOOD

Introduction  
The common good: what people say  
Exploring the idea of the common good  
Understanding the common good and inequality  
The common good goes beyond the needs of any individual  
What the common good is not  
Challenging the common good – Case Study  
Activity
Activities and materials in this module will help you to meet:

Learning Outcome 1: Describe coherently in writing the principles of Catholic Social Thought (CST), and through a personal written commentary on each one, explain that the concepts of ‘self’ and ‘community’ are interrelated.

Learning Outcome 2: Analyse and evaluate the principles of CST in order to write an argument that shows how issues relating to the dignity of the human person and the realisation of the common good may be addressed by you in your professional practice (ie. the degree program you are studying) now and in the future.

- Graduate Attribute 1: demonstrate respect for the dignity of each individual and for human diversity
- Graduate Attribute 2: recognise your responsibility to the common good, the environment and society
- Graduate Attribute 4: think critically and reflectively.
- Graduate Attribute 7: work both autonomously and collaboratively.
- Graduate Attribute 8: locate, organise, analyse, synthesise and evaluate information.
- Graduate Attribute 9: demonstrate effective communication in oral and written English language and visual media

WARNING
Topics considered in UNCC LEO materials and in class discussions may be disturbing for some students.

If you are affected, please contact your Campus Leader and/or the University Counselling Service.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are advised that this site may include voices or images of people who have passed away. It may also contain links to sites that may use images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now deceased.
5.1 THE COMMON GOOD

In module 1, you were introduced to the good life and the golden rule, and to a series of principles designed to promote that flourishing. UNCC100 is designed to focus particularly on one of those themes—the common good. For that reason, we will spend time exploring that theme in more detail.

5.1.1 WHAT DO PEOPLE SAY ABOUT THE COMMON GOOD?

Dr Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer: What does it mean? (transcript):

Many of the world's great leaders have thought about their goals in terms of bringing about the common good. Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, gave a 2008 speech at the John F. Kennedy School of Government in which he said:

Now more than ever we must be bold. In these times of crisis, when we are tempted to look inward, it is precisely the time when we must move pursuit of the common good to the top of the agenda. Global solidarity is necessary and in the interest of all. Pursuing the common good will require addressing a set of global challenges that hold the key to our common future. 1

Nelson Mandela, prisoner of conscience in South Africa for some 27 years, and the first democratically elected president of the nation post-apartheid, also speaks of the nature of the common good in his address during a joint sitting of Parliament to mark 10 years of democracy in South Africa.
ACTIVITY 1

The resource below will help you to gain a basic understanding of the concept of the common good.

Before you read, go to this guide and use the questions to help you unpick the texts below as you read.

Make key critical notes as you read the resource.

After reading the resources, write a 100 word definition of the common good.


Read Watts, T & O’Neil, C "Chapter 2 of Two Futures: Australia at a Critical Moment ."

1 Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, "Securing the Common Good in a Time of Global Crises" (speech, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA, October 21, 2008).
5.2 EXPLORING THE IDEA OF THE COMMON GOOD

5.2.1 FURTHER REFLECTION ON THE COMMON GOOD

What the common good means to Margaret Fyfe (transcript):

What the common good means to Nicole Dobrohtoff (transcript):
5.3 UNDERSTANDING THE COMMON GOOD AND INEQUALITY

5.3.1 CHOOSING THE COMMON GOOD

Promoting the common good cannot be achieved by treating an individual separately and looking for the highest ‘total benefit’. Due to the interdependency of people, the common good resembles a multiplication sum, where if anyone number is zero then the total is always zero. If any one is left out and deprived of what is essential, then the common good has not succeeded.

At its core the common good is about how to live well together. Referring to the diagram above: It is the whole network of social conditions which enable human individuals and groups to flourish.

The common good succeeds when politics serves it. Politics is lifted above self-interest and dignified as a truly honourable profession.

5.3.2 INEQUALITY

When the common good is not achieved, where people are deprived and 'left out' what are the results?
5.4 THE COMMON GOOD GOES BEYOND THE NEEDS OF ANY INDIVIDUAL

5.4.1 THOMAS MASSARO

A prominent Catholic thinker on the common good, writes:

To speak of the common good is to recognise that there are numerous proper goals in life beyond our own private benefits. Responsible people look for opportunities to contribute to worthy causes and to improve society however possible, even when the benefits of this progress will go primarily to others.... Everyone has an obligation to promote the common good by making whatever contributions are necessary to improve the lives of all ².

He gives the example of an elderly or childless couple arguing that they should not have to pay the portion of their taxes that would go to support education, since they will not personally benefit from it. This is an argument purely based on self-interest. If we consider this from the perspective of promoting the common good, we would say that all people contribute to a society simply because they are members of that society, and that all will ultimately benefit from a good education system.

This article on Creating the Good Society explores the communal nature of the common good and the implications of this for the way we structure societies.

5.4.2 THE COMMON GOOD HAS A GLOBAL DIMENSION

We can consider the common good at a global level: for example, one of the huge challenges to the common good of recent years has been environmental destruction. While some nations continue to pollute the atmosphere at a great rate, others, like small pacific islands, are severely impacted as water levels rise.

In light of the common good, all nations have a responsibility to act for the good of all (and for future generations of humans, animals and plant species!) rather than in short term self-interest. We need to note, however, that the common good can most easily be achieved in conditions of peace and security or stability in the social order. Further, we need to consider the impact that globalisation has on the common good.

5.5 WHAT THE COMMON GOOD IS NOT

The common good does not mean "the greatest good for the greatest number" (this is part of what philosophers sometimes refer to as utilitarianism). Watch the following video which explains utilitarianism. A utilitarian system can be blind to the well-being of individuals or minority groups.

Watch Ethics Defined: Utilitarianism (transcript available):

Accessibility: Turn on captions to view subtitles/transcript.

5.5.1 TO SUMMARISE:

Working for the common good implies that we work to create the social and political conditions for many different people to thrive within a common space. That may mean working for clean water and affordable health care; it may mean resisting unjust laws that create economic disadvantages for certain groups within society; it may also mean helping other groups to preserve their culture and identity - for example, respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' claims as the traditional owners of this land.

- The common good concerns the life of all: it is common because it applies to everyone by virtue of what we share in common—our humanity.
- It presupposes respect for all persons and for each person.
- It concerns the flourishing of human life in all its dimensions.
- The flourishing of individuals is linked closely to the well-being of society (and the world) as a whole - the quality of a communal life together.
- Building strong, stable and cohesive societies aids in achieving the common good.
5.6 CHALLENGING THE COMMON GOOD – CASE STUDY

5.6.1 SIMULATION ACTIVITY

You will be undertaking a Simulation Activity with your tutorial group on the issue of a Mega Worship Centre, where you will be asked to present the perspective of your given stakeholder and discuss with your group how the common good might best be served in relation to the issue.

The Simulation Activity will provide you with a valuable opportunity to practise the skills necessary to do well in your final paper.

During the Simulation Activity, you will be put into groups to discuss the issue. Each group member will be given one of the following identities:

- Supporters of Mega Worship Group
- Residents Against Mega Worship
- Imaginary Chamber of Commerce
- Sustainable Development Action Group
- Imaginary Residents Action Group

Instructions: You will need to do some preparation so you are able to adequately present the perspective of your identity

- Read the briefing paper above.
- Then, click on the identity that you have been allocated (from the list above).
- Read the perspective of your allocated identity and the background material provided below it (including the links). Spend some time thinking about the perspective you have been given. You will need to draw on common sense, and you will need to do some critical thinking. Try to step into the shoes of someone in this situation. What is the perspective and how might the person have arrived at this?
- You will need to present this perspective to your group in the Simulation Activity.
- Print the page relating to the identity you have been given and bring it with you to the Simulation Activity.
5.6.2 KEY QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION AS YOU PREPARE FOR THE ACTIVITY

- How might the positive cultural and social value of a mega worship centre be weighed against the costs to the wider community as a result of the industry?
- How can we reconcile the opposing viewpoints of the supporters and residents regarding the Mega Worship centre?
- If we follow the singular perspective of each stakeholder in turn, who loses?
- Consider the scenario posed at the beginning of the briefing paper:

Your role as a group is to discuss a course of action which might best serve the common good. In doing so, consider:

a. Which perspectives promote the common good?
b. Which perspectives pose a threat to the common good?
c. What might need to change (both in the short term and in the long term) in order to serve the common good? Do particular stakeholders need to make sacrifices? If so, how?
d. Which principles of human flourishing are relevant to this debate?
e. How might these principles assist us to analyse the perspectives and move towards a course of action which best serves the common good?
5.7 ACTIVITY

5.7.1 ACTIVITY 2

The resources below will help you to explore further the concept of the common good.


TASK:

1. Describe the four obstacles that Velasquez, Andre and Shanks raise in relation to the achievement of the common good.
2. With reference to Herr, explain the difficulties involved in governments seeking to achieve it.
3. Now, consider the debate in the United States between the right to bear arms and the need for gun control. Using insights from the two readings, why is it so difficult for the common good to be achieved in this situation?

5.7.2 RESOURCES TO PURSUE IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST

Listen to this ABC Radio podcast on The Common Good and religion in Australian society.