



## Fair Trade and Catholic Social Teaching

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**“Every perspective on economic life that is human, moral, and Christian must be shaped by three questions:  
What does the economy do for people?  
What does it do to people?  
And how do people participate in it?”**

**—Economic Justice for All**

As Catholics, we are called to ask these three questions about all of our economic activities. Fair Trade offers us the opportunity to answer them in ways that honor core principles of Catholic Social Teaching on economic justice.

Through our purchases of Fair Trade items we:

- Exalt the **HUMAN DIGNITY** of small-scale producers overseas;
- Exercise a preferential **OPTION FOR THE POOR**;
- Act in **SOLIDARITY** with our brothers and sisters in need;
- Ensure that farmers and artisans earn a **JUST WAGE**;
- Contribute to a more just **DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH**;
- Apply the principle of **SUBSIDIARITY**; and
- Practice responsible **STEWARDSHIP** of our natural resources.

These themes are pillars of Catholic Social Teaching—together they represent the foundation of a truly just economic order. Get involved in the CRS Fair Trade Program, and start building a better world, one purchase at a time!

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## Human Dignity

**“The basis for all that the Church believes about the moral dimensions of economic life is its vision of the transcendent worth—the sacredness—of human beings. The dignity of the human person, realized in community with others, is the criterion against which all aspects of economic life must be measured.”**  
—Economic Justice for All

## Fair Trade & Human Dignity

Unbridled competition in the international trading system has unleashed a “race to the bottom” in which exploiting weak labor standards, eroding environmental regulations and suppressing commodity prices are the surest paths to profitability. The big winners in this race have been multinational corporations. The big losers—poor and marginalized people overseas.

Fair Trade represents a deliberate alternative to this system, one that is rooted in respect for human dignity. The core principles of Fair Trade—fair pricing, direct purchasing, and long-term relationships—all reflect a commitment to uphold the human dignity of small-scale producers overseas.

Kwabena Ohmeng-Tinyase is the Managing Director of Kuapa Kokoo, a Fair Trade cocoa cooperative in Ghana. For him, the relationship between Fair Trade and human dignity is simple: “We all have to go shopping. Fair Trade is just shopping with respect.”



Photo: Michael Sheridan



Photo: Michelle Frankfurter

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## Option for the Poor

**“As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental ‘option for the poor’—to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor...As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of all our brothers and sisters, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response.”**

**—Economic Justice for All**

## Fair Trade & The Option for the Poor

Our faith calls us to demonstrate a special concern for the most vulnerable members of the human family through action on behalf of the poor. Many of us make an “option for the poor” through occasional acts of generosity, such as donations to the Church or other organizations working to alleviate poverty and promote economic justice. These acts are noble, but isolated.

Fair Trade provides us with the opportunity to integrate our principles with our purchasing patterns—the opportunity to exercise an option for the poor **every day** through the choices we make about what to eat, drink and buy. By purchasing fairly traded items, we make a conscious choice to buy from poor people in a way that promises to help lift them out of poverty.



Photos: Michelle Frankfurter

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## Solidarity

**“[Solidarity] is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good.”**

**—Sollicitudo Rei Socialis**

## Fair Trade & Human Solidarity

More than ever before, the choices we make about what we consume here in the United States impact the lives of people around the world we may never meet. Unfortunately, under the “free trade” system, we often have no way to know how our purchases affect the people who create the things we buy.

Fair Trade changes all that. Fair Trade builds direct relationships between us and low-income farmers and artisans overseas. We buy our Fair Trade items from Fair Trade companies here in the United States. These companies, in turn, work directly with Fair Trade farmers and artisans in Africa, Asia and Latin America. So when you buy Fair Trade coffee, chocolate or handcrafts, you enter a network of human relationships—*right relationships* that cultivate global solidarity.



Photo: Michael Sheridan

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## Just Wage

**“The remuneration of work is not something that can be left to the laws of the marketplace; nor should it be a decision left to the will of the more powerful. It must be determined in accordance with justice and equity; which means that workers must be paid a wage which allows them to live a truly human life and to fulfill their family obligations in a worthy manner.”**

**—Mater et Magistra**

## Fair Trade & Just Wages

Today, over two billion people live on less than \$2 per day, and the international trading system is making many of them **more** vulnerable, not less.

Millions of small-scale producers around the world have been plunged into poverty by international market forces over which they have no control, like sudden changes in demand for the items they produce. This is an inversion of the Catholic tradition, which holds that the economy exists to serve people, and not the other way around.

Fair Trade guarantees prices that enable producers to cover their costs of production **and** provide a decent standard of living for their families, regardless of what is happening in the market.



Photo: Michelle Frankfurter

# Fair Trade and Catholic Social Teaching

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## Distribution of Wealth

**“God intended the earth and everything in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should flow fairly to all.**

**All other rights, whatever they may be, including the rights of property and free trade, are to be subordinated to this principle.”**

**— Populorum Progressio**

## Fair Trade & Distribution of Wealth

In the statement above, Pope Paul VI applies Gospel values to the economy to generate a powerful vision of a just distribution of wealth. Unfortunately, the international trading system is not governed by the Golden Rule of the Gospel but by the “invisible hand” of the market. And the invisible hand has distributed “the earth and everything in it” very unevenly—the wealthiest five percent of the world’s population controls the majority of its wealth, while more than two billion people still live on less than \$2 per day.

Fair Trade moves us toward a more just arrangement. By purchasing directly from small-scale producers, Fair Trade ensures that everyone in the production chain receives a fair share of the wealth created through trade.



Photo: Michelle Frankfurter



Photo: Michael Sheridan



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## Subsidiarity

**“Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.”**

**— Quadragesimo Anno**

## Fair Trade & Subsidiarity

With these words, Pope Pius XI articulates the principle of “subsidiary function,” or subsidiarity. The principle of subsidiarity tells us that no organization should perform any function that can be handled more effectively at a lower level, by people who better understand the issues involved. Unfortunately, the international trading system does not create incentives for its application. For many multinational companies, moving down the supply chain widens profit margins—by absorbing functions that could be better performed by the producers themselves, companies capture more of the end-value of the products they sell and leave less for the people who produced them.

Fair Trade actively promotes subsidiarity. Fair Trade eliminates the intermediaries who take value-added opportunities away from low-income producers. And it provides technical assistance to enable low-income producers to perform more of the value-added functions currently controlled by actors higher on the supply chain.

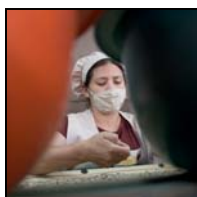


Photo: Michelle Frankfurter



Photo: Michael Sheridan

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## Stewardship

**“All creation is a gift. Scripture tells us that, “the earth is the Lord’s, and all it holds” (Ps 24:1). All of us, especially those closest to the land, are called to a special reverence and respect for God’s creation...While rural communities are uniquely dependent on land, water, and weather, stewardship is a responsibility of our entire society.”**

**—For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food**

## Fair Trade & Environmental Stewardship

By instructing Adam to care for the Garden of Eden, God makes responsible stewardship of Creation an ethical imperative. In recent years, the Church has expanded and refined that seminal environmental mandate. The end result is a sophisticated body of teaching that recognizes Creation’s intrinsic sanctity and its instrumental importance.

Fair Trade demonstrates a dual concern for the environment and the people who rely on it for their livelihood. Fair Trade farmers are prohibited to use certain environmentally hazardous pesticides, required to adopt integrated pest management systems that provide sustainable alternatives to chemical-intensive farming, encouraged to adopt shade-growing techniques that preserve local habitats, and offered significant financial incentives for organic farming.



Photo: Michelle Frankfurter



Photo: Michael Sheridan