

Say No to Racism. We are One in Christ.

How does Catholic Social Teaching give us the strength to grow beyond the dangers inherent in social media that target racial discrimination of youth in Aotearoa, New Zealand?

Catholic Social Teaching is something incredibly important and is ingrained in Catholics right from the beginning of our education. It allows us to grow into strong rooted Catholics who preach God, not only through our words, but also through our actions with how we treat others. The Catholic Social Teaching Principles are guidelines for us to live holy Christian lives following the footsteps of Jesus in our modern context.

We live in a society dominated by the online world. Today, adults, teenagers and children all have a digital footprint. We are in a new era, and young people have largely strayed away from Catholic Social Teaching within the digital world. Predominantly, as Pope Francis has said, "Social media are anti-social, anti-human and anti-Christian when they are used to increase differences, fuel suspicion, spread lies and vent prejudice."¹ Since the rise of the age of media throughout the 2010s, New Zealand has shifted online. It has become integral in our day to day life and is a key part of political protests, campaigns and social movements. Our society has become divided between the elite, underprivileged members of society, and those who are boosted by the algorithm. Social media is an incredibly new invention, and the consequences of high screen time is having a detrimental effect on youth in New Zealand. A recent study found that teenagers who spend more than 3 hours a day with screen time are developing severe mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, antisocial and aggressive behaviour.² In 2012, 13% of youth had significant symptoms of depression. This rose to 23% in 2021 and 1 in 5 youth in New Zealand are likely to have suffered with depression by the age of 18.³ The rise of these statistics has been heavily impacted by social media which has created a false sense of community in which Christian love and compassion are no longer at the forefront of our relationships.

What we see on social media is not real, but is a crafted version of life that people want us to see. "The Truth is what we should be always aiming to find. That way, we can grow closer to Christ and live better Christian lives."⁴ Our Catholic values call us to be truth seekers and identify the mis-information on social media and reveal the truth and beauty of a life lived in relationship with God. If we are to live a truly Catholic life, Catholic Social Teaching is the gateway to what the Bible preaches - love, not hate. Pope Francis wrote *Laudato Si - Praise Be to You* - to reinforce Catholic Social Teaching in a modern context and allow us to understand Jesus and how his example can be implemented in our modern lives. Social media is a huge part of our modern life so instead of rejecting it, we as Catholics need to embrace what comes with modern life and use it the best way we can to spread the word of God.

We can use Catholic Social Teaching and social media to grow beyond the dangers inherent in social media use that promotes difference, fuels suspicion, spreads lies and vents prejudice. For example, the Mosque shootings were perpetrated by an individual who fostered his racism and prejudice against the Muslim community on social media platforms. After his actions, which were designed to isolate the Islamic community, many people took to social media to pursue action for this to never happen again. Due to the outreach and sharing of support for the Muslim community after the event, social media was a place where people

shared love and respect, teaching others that this is not the way to live. The Catholic Social Teachings of Human Dignity, Solidarity, and Participation and Peace dominated social media as a result of this event. Numerous posts and images showed our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern working alongside the Muslim community in solidarity to understand what would help them. She did her best both in New Zealand and worldwide to promote human dignity and peace in order to protect the Muslim community against racial discrimination using the values that match those of Catholic Social Teachings. Similarly, social media was used to organise food and care packages for the Muslim community as well as care and accommodation help for the victims and their communities.

Our Catholic Social Teaching helps us to understand the values of right and wrong, especially in our modern world relating to social media. Dignity of the Human Person teaches that we are all created in the image and likeness of God and concerns our wellbeing - We are One with Christ. Common Good addresses what is best for everyone and the love we must share with our neighbours. Through social media, people are able to stand together for what is right against those spreading hatred. Solidarity teaches that we are all one and interconnected as a community. When social media is used correctly, it promotes love and kindness, leading to unity and strength as One. Catholic social teaching principals are a toolkit for us to use and a lens to look through when we view and listen to social media. We can apply the Catholic social teaching principles as a litmus test upon whether the social media is being a help or a hinderance to racial equality and in fact gospel values. If we approach social media through the lens of our social teachings, we can work against divisionary ideologies that have so negatively impacted New Zealand youth.