

## **Reading, Reflection & Discussion Guide**

for

*We are One in Christ: A Pastoral Letter on Fundamentals of Christian Anthropology*

by

The Most Reverend Charles C. Thompson

Archbishop of Indianapolis

This brief guide is an aid to help the faithful of central and southern Indiana, and beyond, as well as all people of good will, prayerfully reflect on the teaching in Archbishop Thompson's recent letter regarding the Christian view of the human person. In the teaching of the Church we hear the voice of Jesus; may our reading and sharing based on this pastoral letter draw us closer, by God's grace, in to the life of the Most Holy Trinity and help us grow in love of all our neighbors—in whom we encounter the Risen Lord Jesus.

### *Suggested format for reading and responding to We Are One in Christ*

Prayer provides the best context for reading, reflection and discussion. To that end please find sample opening and closing prayers for reflection and discussion sessions below.

For each section of the pastoral letter, questions to think about then use as a basis for sharing are suggested. It is often helpful for initial sharing to occur between pairs of participants before the broader group starts its discussion.

Individual reading and reflection can also be enhanced by this guide if an additional person or a group is not available for faith sharing. Questions that might arise about Church teaching can usually be addressed by consulting these resources:

[ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/uscca/index.html](http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/uscca/index.html)

[www.vatican.va/archive/compendium\\_ccc/documents/archive\\_2005\\_compendium-ccc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html)

[www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html)

## **Prayers**

Heavenly Father, as I read and reflect on the teaching of your servant Archbishop Charles Thompson, I ask for the grace of understanding and compassion. Jesus, True God and True Man, help me to grasp the truth about the human person. Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, enlighten my mind and heart so that I will love and respect each person at all times—at all stages of life. Holy Trinity, One God, gather our human family in to one community of love, life and truth. Amen.

O Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the whole human family, intercede for us as we strive to put the teaching of We Are One in Christ in to action. Pray that we will see clearly, judge rightly and act compassionately based on an accurate understanding of the human person. You, who love each of us even as we struggle to avoid sin and grow in virtue, plead for our peace and salvation to your beloved Son, Jesus, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

*Questions for reflection and discussion*

### **Human dignity**

For adults in general:

1. "We can (and sometimes must) disapprove of the behavior of others, but we may never belittle, disrespect or abuse others simply because of our differences, no matter how serious." Compare and contrast this statement with the term *tolerance* as it is being commonly used.
2. What are some of the particular challenges and threats to human dignity you have recognized in Indiana, in your town or city?

For youth and young adults:

1. Archbishop Thompson mentions two forms of evil that are at the root of sins against the dignity of persons; what are they, and what are some examples of each?
2. Who if anyone do my actions, words or attitudes look down on, or with whom it is a challenge for me to have a respectful dialogue?

One thing I'd like to know more about in this section (Human dignity) is: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Whatever we do to the least of these brothers and sisters we do to Christ**

For adults in general:

1. Why is it that we are called to exist for others?
2. How have I been blessed by those who I did not expect to serve me?

For youth and young adults:

1. Why does the sin of indifference weigh heavily on the heart of a missionary disciple?
2. How do I seek to serve all, even in the midst of disagreement?

One thing I'd like to know more about in this section (Whatever we do to the least of these brothers and sisters we do to Christ) is: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Plight of immigrants, migrants and refugees**

For adults in general:

1. Considering Archbishop Thompson's thoughts and the *Compendium* excerpt immediately below, what is the relationship between a Natural Right and a Legal Responsibility?

464. What are the duties of citizens in regard to civil authorities? (CCC 2238-2241,2255)

Those subject to authority should regard those in authority as representatives of God and offer their loyal collaboration for the right functioning of public and social life. This collaboration includes love and service of one's homeland, the right and duty to vote, payment of taxes, the defense of one's country, and the right to exercise constructive criticism.

465. When is a citizen forbidden to obey civil authorities? (CCC 2242-2243,2256)

A citizen is obliged in conscience not to obey the laws of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts of the Apostles 5:29).

2. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph were once refugees..." What does it look like to show concern for human dignity above political or practical expediency? In my own life, how is God inviting me to live this out more fully?

For youth and young adults:

1. (Ideally after reading Matthew 25:31-46, please discuss:) Why are Christians challenged to look beyond "abstractions or statistics" when responding to the "millions of people worldwide who are fleeing war, persecution and poverty"? What should our response be?
2. "Christ is not content with half-hearted gestures..." What does it look like to show warm, enthusiastic, authentically human contact with the poor and vulnerable? How am I living this out?

One thing I'd like to know more about in this section (Plight of immigrants, migrants and refugees) is: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Drug abuse**

For adults in general:

1. In what ways, is drug abuse a life issue?
2. How has drug abuse and addiction affected my family, friends, and neighbors? In what practical ways, have I or can I serve those who have been affected?

For youth and young adults:

1. Why is there no simple solution to the opioid crisis or the problem of drug addiction?
2. How do I serve those in poverty? In what practical ways am I called to reach out?

One thing I'd like to know more about in this section (Drug abuse) is: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Religious liberty**

For adults in general:

1. What happens when "religious liberty is threatened or denied"? What is different or the same when we compare and contrast "inalienable rights" and "inalienable dignity"?
2. God speaks to us in several ways such as:
  - the Bible (Sacred Scripture)
  - the teachings of the Church (Sacred Tradition)
  - the witness of the Saints
  - the Liturgy and Sacraments
  - the other people in our life as well as various life events
  - the silence of our hearts (a well-formed conscience).

We all try to listen to God and have some success and some failures. What has worked for you? Where is God inviting you to grow?

For youth and young adults:

1. Catholics believe that every freedom we have is for a purpose. Religious freedom exists to fulfill what duty or purpose?
2. The Catholic Church exists to bring Christ to the world. "Religion is personal" because each of us accepts Christ individually, but it is "never private" because love (especially God's love) is meant to be given away and bear much fruit. How are you bringing Christ to the world in your own family, neighborhood, work, or vocation?

One thing I'd like to know more about in this section (Religious liberty) is: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Respect for human life**

For adults in general:

1. Archbishop Thompson presents a formula, SEE, JUDGE, ACT. Identify some opportunities that exist in a particular way for adults to be a part of identifying those systemic issues, and helping to reduce the long term impact of poverty?
2. Before we can do anything to help, we have to SEE the other person in front of us. Of the particularly vulnerable that Archbishop Thompson mentions, are there some for whom I have a particular affinity, and am or would be interested in serving in a particular way?

For youth and young adults:

1. Archbishop Thompson presents a formula: SEE, JUDGE, ACT. Identify (investigate if you need to) some of the actions your parish and/or school takes to be more attentive to the poor in our communities, and to alleviate the effects of poverty.
2. Archbishop Thompson challenges us, as Jesus challenged his friends to "recognize the poor and not remain unmoved" who, in your parish, school, workplace, are the ones who seem to be unnoticed, and what are some concrete things you can do to reach out to them?

One thing I'd like to know more about in this section (Respect for human life) is: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Concluding thoughts**

For adults in general:

1. The sense of a distinctively Christian anthropology was a bit deficient in catechetical textbooks for a couple of decades. How familiar or new are Archbishop Thompson's basic points about a Christian view of the human person to you? How does his guidance compare to what you were taught when you were younger?
2. Archbishop Thompson focuses on several key issues in this pastoral, knowing that additional questions are also addressed well only based on a firm foundation of Christian anthropology. What other current topics come to mind, and how does a Christian view of the human person form a basis for addressing them?

For youth and young adults:

1. All of us are exposed to messages all day long about the human person: what's supposed to be important to us, what will make us happy, how we should relate to God and neighbor etc.. What are the main messages of the entertainment media that you consume about what a person is and what your aspirations should be?
2. Based on your answer above, what in Archbishop Thompson's letter affirms any positive messages you hear often about the human person? In what ways does our archbishop's letter correct and clarify some of the influences that we encounter in daily life— messages that define who and what a human person is?

One thing I'd like to know more about in this section (Concluding thoughts) is: \_\_\_\_\_

*We hope this reading, reflection and discussion guide has been helpful to you. For additional resources in the areas of learning and growing in our Catholic faith, please consult your pastor, parish catechetical leader or the Archdiocesan catechetical office:*

[www.archindy.org/catechesis](http://www.archindy.org/catechesis).