

Study, Reflection & Discussion Guide  
for  
“Dignitas Infinita”  
Declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith  
on Human Dignity

## Contents

Introduction.....	1
Suggestions for reading and using this study, reflection and discussion guide.....	2
Further resources .....	2
Prayers .....	3
Study and discussion questions .....	4
<i>Dignitas Infinita</i> – Presentation and Introduction .....	4
Growing Awareness of the Centrality of Human Dignity .....	4
The Church Proclaims, Promotes, and Guarantees Human Dignity.....	5
Dignity, the Foundation of Human Rights and Duties.....	5
Freeing the Human Person from Negative Influences in the Moral and Social Sphere .....	5
Some Grave Violations of Human Dignity .....	6
The drama of Poverty, War, the Travail of Migrants, Human Trafficking.....	6
Sexual Abuse, Violence Against Women, Abortion, Surrogacy .....	6
Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide, The Marginalization of People with Disabilities, Digital Violence.....	7
Gender Theory, Sex Change .....	7
<i>Dignitas Infinita</i> – Conclusion .....	8
For further study and discussion.....	8
Personal reflection questions .....	9

## Introduction

The Catholic Church has always upheld the dignity of each and every human being, stirring the faithful to recognize and affirm it and insisting that those in power acknowledge and protect it. Seeing the concept of human dignity misunderstood and even discarded, the Church in her wisdom decided to write about human dignity in order to clarify, educate, and exhort the faithful and the world on this subject. As a result, the Declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita*, was issued. Since we are all human beings made to live in relationship with

one another, this topic is of interest to all of us, and this study, reflection and discussion guide is meant to help you gain a deeper understanding and connect the topic to your own life and environment.

### **Suggestions for reading and using this study, reflection and discussion guide**

You are invited to read *Dignitas Infinita* either as a group or individually. The study questions should help you identify the core of the message and can serve as a basis for sharing and discussion. It might be helpful to first answer the questions for yourself before sharing in a broader group.

This text is best studied prayerfully. For this purpose, you will find a sample opening and closing prayer below.

Please note that the numbers at the end of the questions refer to the paragraph numbers in the document. A few questions are grouped together so that the paragraph numbers may not be in sequence.

### **Further resources**

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults:  
[ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/uscca/index.html](http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/uscca/index.html)

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:  
[https://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium\\_ccc/documents/archive\\_2005\\_compendium-ccc\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html)

Catechism of the Catholic Church  
[https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)

Encyclical letter Fratelli Tutti:  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html)

Archbishop Thompson's Pastoral Letter We Are One in Christ:  
<https://www.archindy.org/archbishop/pastoral-2018.html>

## Prayers

### Opening

Good and gracious God, as I read and reflect on the infinite dignity of the human person that you have bestowed on us, give me understanding of your plan for us. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, you have revealed to us what being human means. Help me to see your love for us and to be compassionate towards my brothers and sisters. Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten me with your wisdom and inspire me to take action to uphold the dignity of every human being. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### Closing

Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the whole human family, bring us a new awareness that we are all children of God, made with infinite dignity and bound for glory. Help us to create the conditions necessary for every human life to be treated as sacred, as we pray with you your Magnificat:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his Name.  
He has mercy on those who fear him  
in every generation.  
He has shown the strength of his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.  
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,  
and has lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.  
He has come to the help of his servant Israel  
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,  
the promise he made to our fathers,  
to Abraham and his children forever.  
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

# Study and Discussion Questions

## ***Dignitas Infinita* - Presentation and Introduction**

How is the five-year process of publishing this declaration an indication of the gravity and centrality of the theme of dignity in our Church's faith?

The United Nations affirmed human dignity in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and *Dignitas Infinita* claims that the principle of inalienable, infinite dignity is "fully recognizable even by reason alone". What rational arguments speak for the universal dignity of human beings? (#2, 6,10)

Why is ontological dignity (defined in the document) the most important among the four different kinds of human dignity? (#7)

How can moral dignity be lost? What does losing moral dignity mean for a person's ontological dignity? (#7)

What is the difference between social dignity and existential dignity? (#8)

Does a human being without rational capacities (e.g. an unborn child, an unconscious person, or an older person in distress) possess dignity? Why? (#9)

## **Growing Awareness of the Centrality of Human Dignity**

Which of the Old Testament examples of prophets defending human dignity stands out to you? Why? (#11)

How did Jesus affirm the value and dignity of all people? (#12)

Christian thought prompted and accompanied humanity's reflection on the concept of dignity, and in the interplay with philosophy has come to the understanding that the dignity of every human being prevails beyond all circumstances. What is the concept of "person" that contributed to this development? (#13-16)

## **The Church Proclaims, Promotes, and Guarantees Human Dignity**

What does it mean that dignity refers to the person as an inseparable unity of body and soul? (#18)

Why did it take Christ's elevating human dignity by his Incarnation for humanity to come to the conclusion that individuals are even more worthy of our respect and love when they are weak, scorned, or suffering? (#19)

How is the dignity of human life linked to both its beginning and its eternal destination? (#20, 21)

What does our response to God's love and His goodness mean for our dignity? (# 22)

## **Dignity, the Foundation of Human Rights and Duties**

What is the difference in meaning between "human dignity" and "personal dignity", and what could be the consequences if "human rights" were to be interpreted as "personal rights"? (#24)

What arbitrary freedoms might some people want to include as human rights that are not demands of human nature? Why is it important to base the concept of human dignity on the demands of human nature rather than individualistic standards? (#25)

Which characteristic of our human nature lets us understand that human dignity does not equal complete freedom from dependence on and obligation to others? (#26-27)

Why are we called to care for the environment and all other living things, even though the concept of dignity is reserved for human beings? Through what actions do we affirm the goodness of creation? (#28)

## **Freeing the Human Person from Negative Influences in the Moral and Social Spheres**

Our human dignity is marked by our freedom to control our own actions. What influences cause us to choose evil over good in our actions? (#29)

In what sense do some people enjoy more freedom than others? What injustices do we need to remove to promote human freedom and dignity? (#31)

How does our society demonstrate advancement in understanding human dignity? (#32)

### **Some Grave Violations of Human Dignity**

Why does the Church reject the death penalty, forbid torture, and demand dignified living conditions for the incarcerated? (#33-34)

### The drama of Poverty, War, the Travail of Migrants, Human Trafficking

How does the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth, even in richer countries, cause the dignity of the poor to be “doubly denied”? (#36)

What are the ways war attacks human dignity in the short and in the long term? (#38)

Considering human dignity, what are the reasons that the possibility of a ‘just war’ according to the Church’s just war theory is diminishing? (#39)

How is the dignity of migrants often violated both in their homelands and the countries that accept them? (40)

How does human trafficking deny human dignity in at least two ways? (#41)

Do you agree that “in a world in which so much is said about rights, it seems that the only thing that has any rights is money”? Why or why not? (#42)

### Sexual Abuse, Violence Against Women, Abortion, Surrogacy

Given that dignity refers to the person as an inseparable unity of body and soul, what consequences does this have in the context of sexual abuse? In what way do the consequences of sexual abuse represent an obstacle to the Church’s mission? (#43)

Inequalities, discrimination, sexual violence, and the killing of women are points in a spectrum of attacks against the human dignity of women. How can dedication to the Blessed Mother spur on calls for legislation and a change of culture? (#44-46)

Considering the four types of human dignity (ontological, moral, social and existential, see #7), how is the protection of unborn life a prerequisite for the affirmation of the dignity of any human person? (#47)

“Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems.” How does this concept explain how surrogacy violates the dignity of the child and of the woman carrying it? (#48-50)

#### Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide, The Marginalization of People with Disabilities, Digital Violence

What mistaken concept of human dignity underlies calls for assisted suicide as “death with dignity”? How else should the weak and suffering be cared for? (#51-52)

What is the sole fact that bestows dignity upon each human being, including those with physical or mental limitations? What are the implications for societies where a “throwaway culture” manifests itself? (#53-54)

What is the apparent contradiction of digital communication and social media regarding interpersonal relationships? How may technology serve human dignity and not harm it? (#61-62)

#### Gender Theory, Sex Change

Gender theory claims that biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be separated. How is a self-determination of gender and/or a sex-change intervention contrary to the dignity of the human person as an inseparable unit of body and soul? (#57-60)

How can the need to respect the natural order of the human person be communicated while avoiding at the same time discrimination and a violation of the dignity of a person because of their sexual orientation? (#55-56)

### ***Dignitas Infinita* - Conclusion**

How important is the continued and renewed commitment to authentic human rights for the world and the Church? Why? (#63-64, #66)

What is the responsibility of society and of the State regarding human dignity? (#65)

## For further study and discussion

*Dignitas Infinita* strives to show that it is a universal truth that “human dignity exists beyond all circumstances”, to illuminate facets of human dignity that might be obscured in people’s consciousness, and to maintain an awareness of human dignity.

How are you more aware of human dignity after reading *Dignitas Infinita*?

Which facets of human dignity do you think need to be illuminated even more?

“Acknowledging human dignity forms the basis for upholding fundamental human rights, which precede and ground all civic coexistence.” How is this reflected in the American Declaration of Independence? (see <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>)

What would happen if we promoted faith without defending human dignity, evangelized without promoting a dignified life, and separated spirituality from a commitment to the dignity of every human being?

## Personal Reflection Questions

How would I describe the concept of infinite dignity to a friend or neighbor if called upon?

In what circumstances do I have trouble recognizing the infinite dignity of a human being?

Has my own dignity been violated?

Whose dignity have I violated?

Have I lost some of my own moral dignity?

What do I consider undignified living, and what are the remedies?

What concrete action will I take to affirm the goodness and value of creation?

What concrete action will I take so that another human being is treated in a more dignified way?

*We hope this study, reflection and discussion guide has been helpful to you. For additional resources for learning and growing in our Catholic faith, please consult your pastor, parish catechetical leader, or the Archdiocesan Office of Catechesis: [www.archindy.org/catechesis](http://www.archindy.org/catechesis)*