

### **CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING FOCUS: SACREDNESS AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

When God created us, he made us in his image and likeness. That means that every human being has a special value and purpose. We need to care for each other so that we can all be the people God calls us to be.

#### **ODETTE'S STORY**

Odette's daughter Olga could have easily become one of the many children in Rwanda who don't receive the nutrients they need to develop and grow.

But Odette started working with Catholic Relief Services even before she gave birth—to ensure her child would get the care she needed during the crucial first 1,000 days of life. The nutrition a child receives from the time he or she is in the womb until his or her second birthday can mean the difference between a promising future and one of poor health and limited opportunities.

CRS is working with communities in Rwanda to end child malnutrition by supporting health and nutrition programs, and teaching families to grow crops that add nutritious variety to their meals.

Because poverty is a major cause of malnutrition, CRS helps families find opportunities to earn an income. With a loan from her microfinance group, Odette started a business selling agricultural fertilizer so she could support her family.

Odette attends weekly classes that are helping her grow healthy crops on her farm. She's also taking courses on how to prepare nutritious meals from those crops. And she takes Olga to regular checkups to measure her weight and growth, and ensure she is healthy.

This year, Olga will reach a milestone: Her second birthday. Because Odette has been feeding her a variety of nutritious foods—many of which were grown in the family garden—Olga is growing up strong and healthy.



#### **FACTS TO CONSIDER**

- Approximately 80% of people in Rwanda are subsistence farmers.
- Approximately two-thirds of Rwandans live on less than \$1.25 a day.
- Young children often have difficulty getting good and healthy food—44% of children under the age of 5 are severely malnourished.
- In 2010, CRS and our local partners in Rwanda began working to reduce stunting rates of children under age 5 from 44% to 28% by 2017.
- CRS is teaching parents how to feed their children nutritious meals—and teaching them how to grow it.
- Mothers like Odette are benefiting from regular baby checkups, cooking demonstrations, agricultural trainings and microfinance meetings.

For downloadable photos, visit [csrricebowl.org/photos](https://csrricebowl.org/photos)

## PURPOSE

To help young people understand the Catholic social teaching, or CST, principle Sacredness and Dignity of the Human Person through the story of Odette and Catholic Relief Services' programs in Rwanda, and to challenge young people to foster their own dignity and promote the dignity of others in their local communities.

## CST PRINCIPLE: SACREDNESS AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

When God created us, he made us in his image and likeness. That means that every human being has a special value and purpose. We need to care for each other so that we can be the people God calls us to be.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Opening and Closing Prayers
  - *A Lenten Prayer*
  - *A Social Justice Blessing*
- *Contribution Scavenger Hunt* handout (1 per participant)
- Pens or pencils
- 1 copy per small group of handouts:
  - *Putting the Pieces Together*
  - *Story of Hope: Rwanda*
  - *Respecting Human Dignity* handout
- 1 copy for each small group—and one for the facilitator—of the handout *All Human Life Is Sacred*. Prior to the session, save one copy for the facilitator and cut the others into 10 pieces. Be sure to cut them so no word is complete on any piece. Lay the handouts on top of each other and cut them all at the same time—this way they will all be the same.
- 10 pieces of plain white paper cut into 10 pieces each. If you want to make this activity even more difficult, cut the pieces into the same patterns as the printed copies.
- 2 electric fans, the bigger the better, that can be aimed at the floor
- Newsprint and markers

## OPENING PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

- *A Lenten Prayer*

## GAME (10 MINUTES)

- *Contribution Scavenger Hunt*
- Use as an icebreaker to help students learn about the Catholic social teaching principle Sacredness and Dignity of the Human Person.

## STORY OF HOPE: RWANDA

- Read or watch Odette's story in small groups or a large group.
- As a group, brainstorm a list of injustices or things that disrespect human dignity and devalue life. Be sure to remind them of some of the injustices in the story of Odette. Write these on a separate piece of newsprint. When you have a list of 10 or more, ask the group which one they think is most destructive. Then ask them if they can think of something they could do about that injustice.

## OPENING ACTIVITY (10-15 MINUTES)

- *Putting the Pieces Together*
- Read Odette's story, and then challenge the groups to identify the steps Odette took to ensure her daughter's well-being. Write each step on one of the puzzle pieces.
- Possible answers include:
  - Working with Catholic Relief Services
  - Prenatal nutrition
  - Community classes
  - Family garden
  - Nutritious meals
  - Health exams

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### **DISCUSSION** (20 MINUTES)

- *Respecting Human Dignity*
- As the foundational principle of Catholic social teaching, we learned that promoting and protecting human dignity and the sacredness of life is a complex process. There are difficult and complicated injustices that disrespect human dignity and devalue life, but there are also simple steps we can take to uphold the rights of others.

### **SUMMARY** (1 MINUTE)

- As we learned from Odette's story, when we are willing to stand up for the dignity of all people and the sacredness of all life, we can change the world.
- This Lent, let us take time to recognize our own dignity and worth, and commit to standing up for the life and dignity of others.

### **CLOSING PRAYER** (5 MINUTES)

*A Social Justice Blessing*

### **FAMILY ACTIVITY**

Look at one issue in your local community or school that adversely impacts the sacredness of life or does not uphold the dignity of people. As a family, determine one action you can take—and then take it!



Photo by Laura Elizabeth Pohl for CRS

**Creator Spirit,**

*Help us respond to your call  
to be members of one family.  
Guide us to constant, peaceful  
concern for sisters and brothers  
throughout the world.*

*Make us mindful of the needs of those  
who must endure day by day the  
injustice of hunger and poverty.*

*Bless us all this Lenten season that  
we may live in harmony and unity  
with others.*

*Renew our Christian commitment  
to the global family.*

**Amen**



Photo by Laura Elizabeth Pohl for CRS

By adding up things that belong to each person in the group, participants see that each person's contribution is important and necessary to the group's outcome.

**MATERIALS:**

Copies of the lower portion of this page, one per group

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

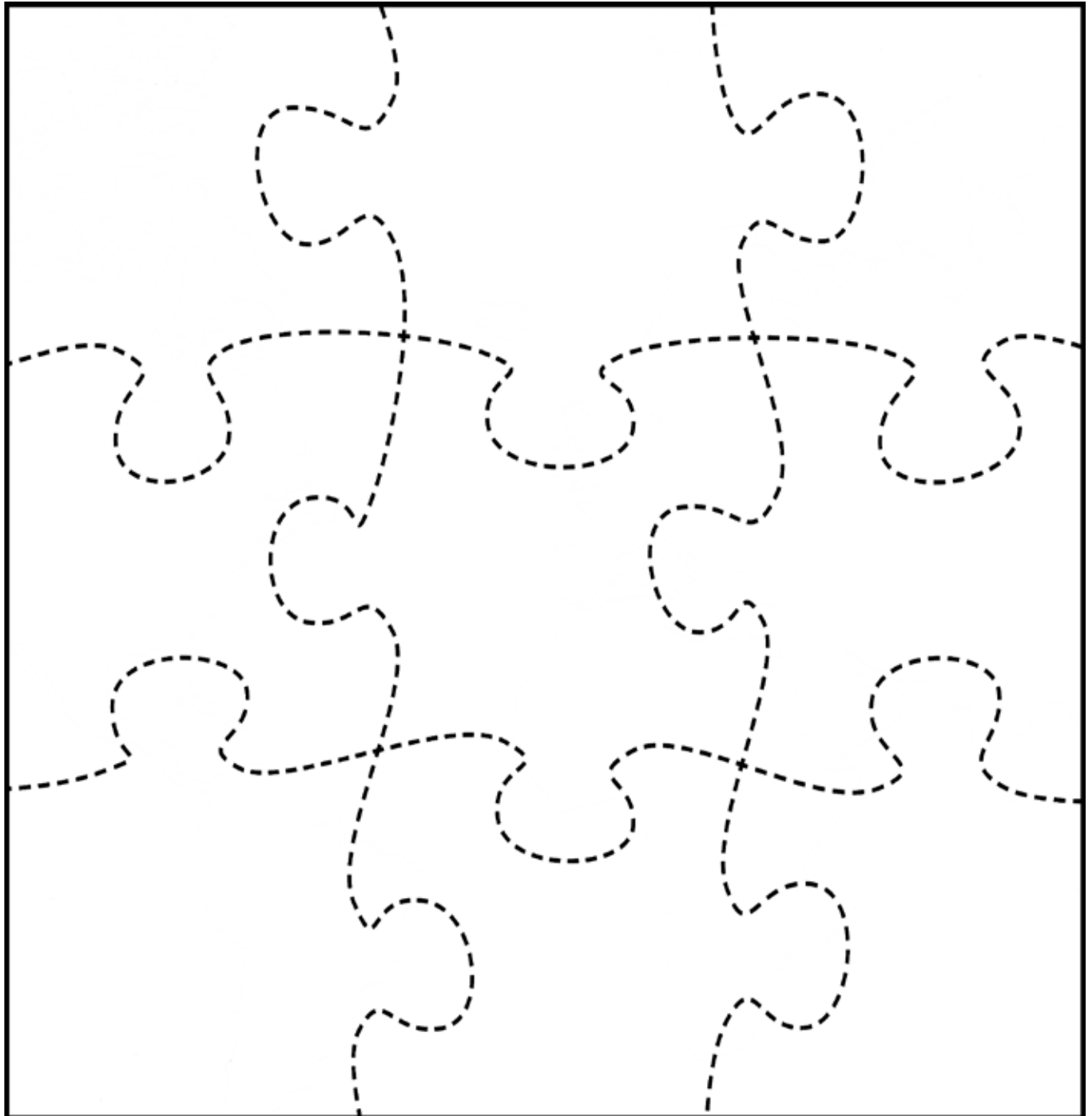
- Divide participants into groups, with the same number of people in each group. Distribute one handout to each group. After 10 minutes, ask groups to tally their points.
- Your group can acquire points ONLY from the items on people in your group. (You cannot leave your place to find items.)

**COMMENTS:**

It was the combined contributions of simple items that achieved each group's final score. Each person's contribution was important and necessary to the group's outcome.

1 point for every belt loop	_____	1 point for every brown eye	_____
1 point for every shoelace	_____	1 point for every library card	_____
1 point for every button	_____	1 point for every pair of jeans	_____
1 point for every piece of jewelry	_____	1 point for every sweatshirt	_____
1 point for every cell phone	_____	1 point for every item with school logo	_____
1 point for every painted nail	_____	1 point for every key	_____
1 point for every penny	_____	2 points for every religious item	_____
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF POINTS</b>	_____		

**Instructions:** Read the story of Odette and her daughter Olga. Identify some of the pieces she had to put together to ensure a better future for her daughter. Write one item on each puzzle piece. See if you can identify one item for each piece of the puzzle.



## MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- Make copies of the handout *All Human Life Is Sacred*—1 copy for each small group and 1 copy for the facilitator.
- Cut all but one copy—the facilitator’s—into 10 pieces, as well as the plain paper, making sure no word is complete on any piece. Lay the copies on top of each other and cut them all at once. This will make the pieces uniform.
- Place 2 electric fans on the floor of the activity area.
- Post a copy of the handout where all participants can see it.
- Mix all the pieces from the copies and the plain paper, and scatter them on the floor.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Have participants gather around the pieces on the floor.
- Point to the posted copy of the handout and ask participants in each small group to assemble one copy of the handout from the pieces on the floor.
- They may not use tape or anything other than their bodies to hold the pieces in place.
- Invite them to begin.
- Turn on the fans.
- The first group to assemble the handout is the winner.

## PROCESSING

- What made assembling the handout difficult?
- What are some of the difficulties people face in protecting the sacredness of life?
- There were lots of blank pieces of paper to mislead you. What are some of the things that are false indicators of a person’s value?
- Even when you were able to find and put together a few pieces, it was hard to keep them together. What are some of the things in your life that make it hard to remember that all people, including yourself, possess an inherent dignity that comes directly from God? What are some things that can chip away at your sense of self-worth or how you see others?
- What can you do this Lent to remember your own value and worth? And what can you do to respect the dignity and sacredness of others?

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**ALL  
HUMAN  
LIFE  
IS  
SACRED**



**May God bless you with discomfort**

*at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships— so that you will live deep within your heart.*

*May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people—so that you will work for justice, equity and peace.*

*May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war—so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them and change their pain to joy.*

*And may God bless you with the foolishness to think that you can make a difference in the world—so that you will do the things that others tell you cannot be done.*

**Amen**

By Elaine Menardi  
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Photo by Laura Elizabeth Pohl for CRS