

## Where Do Our Rights Come From?



*Though only one signer of the Declaration was Catholic, the document contains a basic restatement of a key Catholic principle: that all people have equal God-given rights.*

**CCC**  
1700

**Standards**  
CCE (5-8): V.B.1-4

**Key Term**  
► Rights

### Teacher Background:

The U.S. national government and all U.S. state governments are based on the foundation that all people have certain natural rights by virtue of their humanity. Governments do not grant us our natural rights; rather, governments are instituted in order to protect rights that are pre-existing. While the Enlightenment principles that animate our founding documents base this claim to rights on an abstract Creator, or “Nature’s God,” the Catholic Church teaches very clearly that our rights flow from our human dignity that comes from being made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, every single human being is equal in rights and dignity. This is a basic restatement of the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as well as the Declaration of Independence.

## To do with your students:

-  Share the key points from the information above with your students.
-  Write on the board a selection from the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Ask your students to put this phrase in their own words. If needed, define the following words for your students:

- › To be **endowed** with something means to have been given that thing.
- › **Inalienable** rights are rights that can never be taken away. (We cannot be *alienated* from them.)
- › The **pursuit** of something is the attempt to find or capture it.

Call on a few students to share their responses. Then, ask the class: from where did the Founding Fathers believe we get our rights? *They are the gift of our Creator, or God.*

-  Provide a clear definition of “rights” – rights are those things to which we have a just claim. Therefore, there can be no such thing as a “right” to anything that is sinful or harmful to others. Thomas Jefferson said in his famous Letter to the Danbury baptists (studied in unit 8) that he was “convinced [man] has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.”

## Our Human Dignity and Natural Rights

# The Source of Our Human Dignity: Human Nature

### CCC

1930, 1934

### Standards

CCE (5-8): V.B.1-4

### Key Term

► Natural Rights



*Of all God's creatures, only human beings are made in the image and likeness of God.*

### Teacher Background:

Of all God's creatures, only human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. This is the source of our rights; our rights flow from our human dignity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, "Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature" (CCC 1930). No other creatures have these rights in the same way human beings do.

### To do with your students:

- 🗣️ Remind your students about the information in the previous activity, and go over the key points from the information above.
- 📖 Write a selection from paragraph 1934 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin."

Be sure your students understand that "all men" means all people.

Underline the words *the same nature* and ask the class what that means. Make sure your students understand this phrase means that that we all have a human nature, and our nature includes the rights that flow from our being created in the image and likeness of God.

Write on the board “nature = natural rights”. Make sure students understand the connection between our human nature and natural rights, i.e., rights that come from our nature as human beings.

**Extending** Extend this conversation by going over what having the same nature does NOT mean. For example, it does not mean we all have the same interests, talents, physical abilities, and so forth.

## The Source of Our Human Dignity: God

### CCC

1930, 1934

### Standards

CCE (5-8): V.B.1-4



*Our rights flow from our human dignity.*

### Teacher Background:

The background for this activity is a review: of all God's creatures, only human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. This is the source of our rights; our rights flow from our human dignity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, "Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature" (CCC 1930). No other creatures have these rights in the same way human beings do.

### To do with your students:

-  Go over the key points from the information above.
-  Rewrite CCC 1934 on the board: "Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin."  

Underline the words *the same origin* and ask the class what that means. Make sure your students understand this means that that we were all created by God.
-  Extend this conversation by going over what having the same origin does NOT mean. For example, it does not mean we all have the same parents, or the same backgrounds, or ethnicities, races, and so forth. But despite all these differences, we have the same human nature, and we were all created by God. Every member of the entire human race is God's creation.

# Our Equality of Rights Comes from God

CCC

1945

Standards

CCE (5-8): V.B.1-4

## Teacher Background:

The American commitment to equality, beautifully articulated in the Declaration of Independence, is rightly admired. This idea is at the heart of Catholic teaching on the human person. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it” (CCC 1945). Since being created in the image and likeness of God gives us human dignity, and our natural rights flow from our human dignity, all people have the same (or an equality of) natural rights – rights that come from our human nature.



Equality is at the heart of Catholic teaching on the human person.

## To do with your students:

- 📖 Go over the key points from the information above.
- 📖 Write the quote from the *Catechism* on the board. If needed, remind your students that “all men” means all people.
- 📝 Have students imagine they are writing to a friend in another country who does not believe all people have the same rights. Have them write a paragraph explaining how they know that all human beings have the same natural rights.