



A Letter to Wisconsin Catholics on Faithful Citizenship

August 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Every two years, ahead of the elections, we invite you to consider what it means to be a Catholic citizen who is faithful to Christ. Our Catholic teaching holds that protecting human life and dignity and advancing the common good are central tasks of good government. The recent *Dobbs* decision demonstrates that faithful and determined citizens and lawmakers can protect innocent lives and correct injustice. Nevertheless, now that abortion laws are a state matter, we must remain vigilant to ensure that unborn children can be carried safely to term and mothers can access the resources they need to thrive.

As you pray and discern which candidates best advance life, dignity, and the common good, we urge you to turn to Catholic Social Teaching. This set of principles, which we have summarized on the reverse of this letter, is essential to help form our consciences. It is the fruit of over 2,000 years of observation and reflection on the part of the Church. No other institution today, religious or secular, has developed a body of social principles that is so broad and deep. We urge you to learn more by reading the fuller explication found in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (faithfulcitizenship.org).

Voting is an essential part of being a faithful citizen, but the real work of governing happens between elections. Therefore, it is vital that citizens remain engaged and hold their public officials accountable. To do so, please register for the Wisconsin Catholic Conference's advocacy network at wisconsincatholic.org/electronic-advocacy. You will receive regular news updates and action alerts so that you can be confident in approaching your elected officials on crucial legislative matters.

It is essential that we both exercise our right to vote and ensure that others have the same opportunity. As the U.S. Bishops wrote to Members of Congress on June 24, 2021, "protecting voting rights is a moral imperative for the common good of a just society." Congress must "ensure that legal and other hurdles do not obstruct any eligible Americans from exercising their right to vote in form or effect." Where the effects of unjust discrimination persist, society must "give special protection of voting rights for people of color." For voting information, please visit myvote.wi.gov.

Now more than ever, Catholics must take an active role in standing up for the voiceless and the marginalized, in protecting freedom of religion and conscience, in countering violence with peacemaking, in opposing racism with love, and in resisting extremism of all kinds with reason, compassion, and true tolerance.

We thank you for reading this. May God bless you and may Our Lady of Guadalupe intercede for everyone in our nation and our world.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Jerome E. Listecki
Archbishop of Milwaukee

Most Reverend David L. Ricken
Bishop of Green Bay

Most Reverend Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison

Most Reverend William P. Callahan, OFM Conv.
Bishop of La Crosse

Most Reverend James P. Powers
Bishop of Superior

The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic social teaching (CST) is one of our Church's greatest treasures. Since the time of the Apostles, Church leaders have sought to relate the Gospel to the conditions of their age. Jesus's call in Matthew 25 to be good and faithful servants who serve the hungry and the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the ill and the incarcerated – all these and more are the basis for this social teaching. From the late nineteenth century to the present day, popes, councils, and bishops have condensed this teaching into the four fundamental principles described below. These four principles and related themes from CST provide a moral framework that does not easily fit liberal or conservative ideologies or political party platforms. They are nonpartisan and nonsectarian, reflecting fundamental ethical principles that are common to all people.

Through the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the bishops of Wisconsin have created bulletin inserts which cover CST in greater detail (wisconsincatholic.org under "Faithful Citizenship Resources"). The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has produced a national statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2019) (faithful-citizenship.org), from which the descriptions below are taken. The most comprehensive summary of Catholic social teaching can be found in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, available on the Vatican website (www.vatican.va) or from booksellers.

The Dignity of the Human Person

Human life is sacred. The dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Direct attacks on innocent persons are never morally acceptable, at any stage or in any condition. In our society, human life is especially under direct attack from abortion, which some political actors mischaracterize as an issue of "women's health." Other direct threats include euthanasia and assisted suicide (sometimes falsely labelled as "death with dignity"), human cloning, in vitro fertilization, and the destruction of human embryos for research. Catholic teaching about the dignity of life calls us to oppose torture, unjust war, and the indiscriminate use of drones for violent purposes; to prevent genocide and attacks against noncombatants; to oppose racism; to oppose human trafficking; and to overcome poverty and suffering. Nations are called to combat evil and terror without resorting to armed conflicts except as a last resort after all peaceful means have failed, and to end the use of the death penalty as a means of protecting society from violent crime.

Common Good

The common good refers to the social and community dimension of the moral good. Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met. Every human being has a right to access those things required for human decency – food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society. Every economic system serves the dignity of the human person and the common good when it respects the dignity of work and protects the rights of workers. Employers contribute to the common good through the services or products they provide and by creating jobs that uphold the dignity and rights of workers – to productive work, to decent and just wages, to adequate benefits and security in their old age, to the choice of whether to organize and join unions, to the opportunity for legal status for immigrant workers, to private property, and to economic initiative. Workers also have responsibilities – to provide a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, to treat employers and co-workers with respect, and to carry out their work in ways that contribute to the common good. The common good also includes caring for God's creation and for the poor who suffer "the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment."

Subsidiarity

The human person is not only sacred but also social. Full human development takes place in relationship with others. The family – based on marriage between a man and a woman – is the first and fundamental unit of society and is a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. It should be defended and strengthened, not redefined, undermined, or further distorted. Respect for the family should be reflected in every policy and program. It is important to uphold parents' rights and responsibilities to care for their children, including the right to choose their children's education. Every person and association has a right and a duty to participate actively in shaping society and to promote the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. The principle of subsidiarity reminds us that larger institutions in society should not overwhelm or interfere with smaller or local institutions, yet larger institutions have essential responsibilities when the more local institutions cannot adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, and advance the common good.

Solidarity

Solidarity recognizes that we are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions and requires us to eradicate racism and address the extreme poverty and disease plaguing so much of the world. Solidarity also includes pursuing peace and justice, and showing a preferential option for the poor, who include unborn children, orphans, persons in poverty, persons with disabilities, the elderly and terminally ill, victims of injustice and oppression, immigrants and refugees, and prisoners.