



A Letter to Catholics in Wisconsin on Faithful Citizenship

First in a five-part series

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In his 2015 address to the Bishops of the United States, Pope Francis urged us to “confront the challenging issues of our time”:

The innocent victim of abortion, children who die of hunger or from bombings, immigrants who drown in the search for a better tomorrow, the elderly or the sick who are considered a burden, the victims of terrorism, wars, violence and drug trafficking, the environment devastated by man’s predatory relationship with nature – at stake in all of this is the gift of God, of which we are noble stewards but not masters. It is wrong, then, to look the other way or to remain silent.

While it is our duty as bishops to proclaim this message of human dignity and common good, it is the work of the laity to translate this message into concrete economic, political, and social policies. One, but by no means the only, way of doing this is by voting.

Therefore, as another election season approaches, we write to encourage all Catholics to reflect on their role as faithful citizens. In an age marked by divisiveness and confusion about what is true and good, it is all the more necessary to return to the Church’s guiding principles. To this end, the U.S. bishops have written *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (www.faithfulcitizenship.org). We urge all parishes to make this document available and to facilitate presentations and discussions on what it means to be a faithful citizen.

Pope Francis asks, “How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit or if it stems from the spirit of the world or the spirit of the devil? The only way is through discernment, which calls for something more than intelligence or common sense. It is a gift which we must implore. If we ask with confidence that the Holy Spirit grant us this gift, and then seek to develop it through prayer, reflection, reading and good counsel, then surely we will grow in this spiritual endowment.” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 166)

Catholic social teaching, a summary of which is on the reverse of this letter, is crucial to proper discernment. Its proper application can lead to finding effective solutions for many of today’s most pressing problems. This is why it is so vital for the laity to know and live this teaching. Some people may disagree at times with this social teaching, but they acknowledge that it is consistent. As Catholics we support the unborn child and the mother. We support individual rights and the common good. We support the rule of law and mercy.

Despite the challenges we will face in living the Gospel, we are called as Catholics to be joyful, bold, and courageous. Let our faith, hope, and love become so attractive that others will be drawn to what we stand for and to those we serve.

We thank you for reading this and for your Christian witness. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May He look upon you kindly and give you peace.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Jerome E. ListECKI
Archbishop of Milwaukee

Most Reverend David L. Ricken
Bishop of Green Bay

Most Reverend Robert C. Morlino
Bishop of Madison

Most Reverend William P. Callahan
Bishop of La Crosse

Most Reverend James P. Powers
Bishop of Superior

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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 four bulletin inserts which cover CST in greater detail (www.wisconsinatholic.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* (rev. 2015) (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship>), 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.