



## A Letter to Catholics in Wisconsin on Faithful Citizenship

First in a five-part series

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Every two years, in advance of state or national elections, we are reminded of our vocation to be faithful citizens and we reflect on this civic witness in the statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* ([www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org)).

We recognize that at times our political and economic problems can seem overwhelming. In those moments we must remember that every age has its challenges. As people of faith, we are called to place our hope and trust in God. We are called to utilize our individual and collective gifts to promote justice and peace for all.

If individually and as a nation we focus on God's love for every human being, we can turn despair into hope, poverty into well-being, and war into peace. Our faith and reason also supply us with a rich Catholic social teaching, which can help us put God's love into action. The first principle of this teaching is the dignity of the human person, created in God's image and loved by Him beyond measure. In his 2015 address to Congress, Pope Francis reminded Americans, "All political activity must serve and promote the good of the human person and be based on respect for his or her dignity." Full recognition of human dignity requires the promotion of the remaining major principles of our social teaching — common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity. To learn more about Catholic social teaching, we encourage you to read the description on the reverse of this letter and to study the resources listed there.

It is essential that Catholics live out this profound social teaching, by following ethical principles of reflection, criteria for making judgments, and directives for action. All of these can aid in discerning not only how to cast our votes, but how to address the pressing issues that face our world. We must pray for wisdom and strength — the wisdom to know that with God's strength we can meet today's challenges. Faithful Citizenship offers sound advice: "Catholic voters should use the framework of Catholic social teaching to examine candidates' positions on issues affecting human life and dignity as well as issues of justice and peace, and they should consider candidates' integrity, philosophy, and performance. It is important for all citizens — to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose their political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest" (41).

In everything we do, let us all be Catholics first because as such we have a special duty and a unique ability to strengthen our families, our local communities, and our nation. No matter who is elected to public office, let us follow what Pope Francis urged our members of Congress to do, "Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities."

We thank you for reading this and may God bless you.

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

# 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.wisconsinincatholic.org](http://www.wisconsinincatholic.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](http://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.