



## A Letter to Catholics in Wisconsin on Faithful Citizenship

First in a five-part series

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We write to you as our state recovers from a prolonged period of strife. Recent events have revealed just how fragile our lives are and how essential it is to make sacrifices for the sake of others. As another national election season will soon be upon us, we presume that elections too will look different. One constant, however, is our Catholic teaching.

As in the past, we urge you to review *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)) and our summary of Catholic Social Teaching found on the reverse of this letter. Both serve to guide Catholics as they exercise their rights and duties as citizens.

We also commend to you Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, a model of what it means to be a faithful citizen. He was a university professor, politically engaged Catholic, and most important, founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The Society this year is celebrating the 175th anniversary of its foundation in the United States. In 1851, during a period of great social and political turmoil, when democracy in France seemed doomed, he wrote:

“Let us learn, first of all, to defend our belief without hating our adversaries, to appreciate those who do not think as we do, to recognize that there are Christians in every camp, and that God can be served now as always! Let us complain less of our times and more of ourselves. Let us not be discouraged, let us be better.”

Ozanam showed that our political participation must be influenced by our Catholic faith and not the other way around. May we follow his example, remembering that in the long run, and as his legacy proves, political regimes come and go, but Christian commitment to human dignity and the common good have a lasting impact. Through the exercise of our political responsibility, may we uphold the dignity of the born and unborn, especially those who are destitute, abandoned, oppressed, or vulnerable.

In another way, Ozanam has a lesson for our times, for he lived through a terrible cholera epidemic and yet with his friends continued to serve the poor of Paris. Even as we face personal challenges, we are called to look for ways to help those in need. We cannot forget those whose isolation caused by cruelty is constant and will extend beyond a time of pandemic. Now is the time to act on behalf of those who through abortion, xenophobia, racism, poverty, and materialism, society fails to recognize as fully human. May we use what we have learned during recent challenges to better model the love of Christ in what we say and do.

We urge Catholics to use this time to engage in prayer, formation, conversation, and action. Now is the time to safely reach out with love, compassion, and understanding, even to those with whom we may disagree. Please also consider aiding those who cannot vote due to fear or circumstance. Help them to learn about candidates and how to safely cast their vote. For complete information on voting options and assistance, including absentee voting information, please visit <https://myvote.wi.gov/>.

We thank you for reading this. May God bless you and may He help us rebuild a more just and loving society.

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

July 2020

# 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](http://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. 2019) (<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.



# FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP 2020

To learn more about the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship (FCFC)*, visit [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org). For additional questions, see the Wisconsin Catholic Conference 5-part Faithful Citizenship series at [www.wisconsinatholic.org](http://www.wisconsinatholic.org).

## Our Call as Catholic Citizens

### What are fundamental moral issues that need to be addressed?

As the U.S. bishops explain in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship (FCFC)*, the challenges facing our nation are many. However, as the 2019 *FCFC* "Introductory Note" points out, the following areas are particularly pressing:

- Abortion because it directly attacks life itself.
- The inhumane treatment and lack of due process for immigrants at our border, the heightened barriers for those seeking refuge and asylum, and xenophobia.
- Racism, which continues to fester, as the bishops of the United States have written in their recent pastoral letter, *Open Wide Our Hearts*.
- Religious freedom both at home and abroad.
- Poverty, both domestically and internationally.
- Violence, whether by guns, war, or capital punishment.
- The family based on marriage between a man and a woman and upholding the rights of children in that regard.
- Care for God's creation, especially those most impacted by climate change—the poor—and protection for our common home.

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."

(*FCFC*, 41)

### Why is protecting the unborn of such great importance?

As Pope Francis explains, "Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenceless and innocent among us. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this.... [T]his defence of unborn life is closely linked to the defence of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 213)

### What about other human rights?

"The right to life implies and is linked to other human rights – to the basic goods that every human person needs to live and thrive. All the life issues are connected, for erosion of respect for the life of any individual or group in society necessarily diminishes respect for all life. The moral imperative to respond to the needs of our neighbors – basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work – is universally binding on our consciences and may be legitimately fulfilled by a variety of means. Catholics must seek the best ways to respond to these needs." (*FCFC*, 25)

"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 protect the right to life by seeking effective ways 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. We revere the lives of children in the womb, the lives of persons dying in war and from starvation, and indeed the lives of all human beings as children of God. We stand opposed to these and all activities that contribute to what Pope Francis has called 'a throwaway culture.'" (*FCFC*, 45)

### **What is a just economy?**

“Economic decisions and institutions should be assessed according to whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person. Social and economic policies should foster the creation of jobs for all who can work with decent working conditions and just wages. Barriers to equal pay and employment for women and those facing unjust discrimination must be overcome. Catholic social teaching supports the right of workers to choose whether to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal. It also affirms economic freedom, initiative, and the right to private property.” (FCFC, 73)

### **What is the state of religious liberty in the U.S.?**

“In the United States, religious freedom generally enjoys strong protection in our law and culture, but those protections are now in doubt. For example, the longstanding tax exemption of the Church has been explicitly called into question at the highest levels of government, precisely because of her teachings on marriage. Catholics have a particular duty to make sure that protections like these do not weaken but instead grow in strength. This is not only to secure the just freedom of the Church and the faithful here but also to offer hope and an encouraging witness to those who suffer direct and even violent religious persecution in countries where the protection is far weaker.” (FCFC, 72)

### **What immigration reform does the Church support?**

“Comprehensive reform ... should include a broad and fair legalization program with a path to citizenship; a work program with worker protections and just wages; family reunification policies; access to legal protections, which include due process procedures; refuge for those fleeing persecution and violence; and policies to address the root causes of migration. The right and responsibility of nations to control their borders and to maintain the rule of law should be recognized but pursued in a just and humane manner.” (FCFC, 81)

### **What can we do to protect the natural environment and to assist the poor?**

“Protecting the land, water, and air we share is a religious duty of stewardship and reflects our responsibility to born and unborn children, who are most vulnerable to environmental assault. ... The United States should lead in contributing to the sustainable development of poorer nations and promoting greater justice in sharing the burden of environmental blight, neglect, and recovery. It is important that we address the rising number of migrants who are uprooted from their homeland as a consequence of environmental degradation and climate change. They are not currently recognized as refugees under any existing international convention and are thus not afforded legal protections that ought to be due to them.” (FCFC, 86)



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### **Which public policies help families?**

Policies on taxes, work, divorce, immigration, and welfare should uphold the God-given meaning and value of marriage and family, help families stay together, and reward responsibility and sacrifice for children. Wages should allow workers to support their families, and public assistance should be available to help poor families to live in dignity. Such assistance should be provided in a manner that promotes eventual financial autonomy. (FCFC, 70)

For more resources on these issues, please visit our website at <https://stddomnic.net>. To read the full text of the US Bishop's document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, please visit [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org).

# CIVILIZE IT



## DIGNITY BEYOND THE DEBATE

2020

### What does it mean to form my conscience?

Catholics have a long tradition of engagement in the public square. Sometimes that engagement requires making difficult moral decisions that impact our own lives and those of others. Our conscience can help guide the decisions we make. The Second Vatican Council guides us: “Always summoning [one] to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience can when necessary speak to [one’s] heart more specifically: do this, shun that” (*Gaudium et Spes* 16). However, our conscience doesn’t just come to us when we are born. We must work throughout our lives to form it through prayer, learning, and conversation.

#### How do I form my conscience?

It takes time to form our consciences so that we can make well-reasoned judgments about particular, real-life situations. The Church teaches that it is important to work continually on conscience formation so we can be prepared to make decisions whenever the opportunity arises. Some specific ideas to form your conscience are:

- 1) Begin by **being open to the truth** and what is right.
- 2) **Study Sacred Scripture** and the **teaching** of the Church.
- 3) **Examine the facts** and **background information** about various choices and be discerning in where we gather information.
- 4) **Prayerfully reflect** to discern the will of God (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 18).

Additionally, it is important to consider how

our community of faith can help us form good consciences through some of these steps:

- 1) Seek the **prudent advice** and **good example** of trusted leaders and others to support and enlighten our conscience.
- 2) Learn about the **authoritative teaching** of the Church.
- 3) Pray for the **gifts of the Holy Spirit** to help us develop our conscience.
- 4) Regularly partake in an **examination of conscience** to hear God’s voice in your life.<sup>1</sup>

Doing the work of forming our consciences can seem daunting. Fortunately, we have many church teachings that can help us in this important task. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* is an important resource for U.S. Catholics and helps us prayerfully reflect on how we can apply Church teaching in our civic life. “Conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere “feeling” about what we should or should not do. Rather, **conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart**, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil.”<sup>2</sup>

Here are some questions for further reflection:

1. When has my conscience guided me to “do good and avoid evil”?
2. What are some key resources I can use to form my conscience?
3. Forming conscience is a “lifelong task.” What do I do to *regularly* form my conscience? What more should I do?

<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana–United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000, no 1777

<sup>2</sup> USCCB. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. Washington, DC: 2015, no. 17



### **With separation of church and state, why does the Catholic Church engage political issues?**

As Pope Francis explains, “The Church’s pastors, taking into account the contributions of the different sciences, have the right to offer opinions on all that affects people’s lives, since the task of evangelization implies and demands the integral promotion of each human being. ... An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters. If indeed ‘the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics’, the Church ‘cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice’.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 182-3)

### **What are fundamental moral issues that need to be addressed?**

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- The family based on marriage between a man and a woman and upholding the rights of children in that regard.
- Care for God’s creation, especially those most impacted by climate change – the poor – and protection for our common home.

### **What if no party or candidate adequately addresses these moral issues?**

“Catholics often face difficult choices about how to vote. This is why it is so important to vote according to a well-formed conscience that perceives the proper relationship among moral goods. A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to sub-human living conditions, redefining marriage in ways that violate its essential meaning, or racist behavior, if the voter’s intent is to support that position. In such cases a Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in grave evil. At the same time, a voter should not use a candidate’s opposition to an intrinsic evil to justify indifference or inattentiveness to other important moral issues involving human life and dignity.” (*FCFC*, 34)

“There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate’s unacceptable position even on policies promoting an intrinsically evil act may reasonably decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil.” (*FCFC*, 35)

“When all candidates hold a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, the conscientious voter faces a dilemma. The voter may decide to take the extraordinary step of not voting for any candidate or, after careful deliberation, may decide to vote for the candidate deemed less likely to advance such a morally flawed position and more likely to pursue other authentic human goods.” (*FCFC*, 36)

“In making these decisions, it is essential for Catholics to be guided by a well-formed conscience that recognizes that all issues do not carry the same moral weight and that the moral obligation to oppose policies promoting intrinsically evil acts has a special claim on our consciences and our actions. These decisions should take into account a candidate’s commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue. In the end, this is a decision to be made by each Catholic guided by a conscience formed by Catholic moral teaching.” (*FCFC*, 37)



# FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP 2020

This series has been prepared by the Wisconsin Catholic Conference as a guide for those who wish to inform their consciences in order to participate more fully in the political process. To learn more about the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship (FCFC)*, visit [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org) and [www.wisconsinatholic.org](http://www.wisconsinatholic.org).

Third in a five-part series

## Life & Dignity of the Human Person



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### Why is protecting the unborn of such great importance?

As Pope Francis explains, “Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenceless and innocent among us. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this. ... [T]his defence of unborn life is closely linked to the defence of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 213)

**HUMAN BEINGS ARE ENDS IN THEMSELVES AND NEVER A MEANS OF RESOLVING OTHER PROBLEMS. ONCE THIS CONVICTION DISAPPEARS, SO DO SOLID AND LASTING FOUNDATIONS FOR THE DEFENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS....**

(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 213)

### What about other human rights?

“The right to life implies and is linked to other human rights – to the basic goods that every human person needs to live and thrive. All the life issues are connected, for erosion of respect for the life of any individual or group in society necessarily diminishes respect for all life. The moral imperative to respond to the needs of our neighbors – basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work – is universally binding on our consciences and may be legitimately fulfilled by a variety of means. Catholics must seek the best ways to respond to these needs.” (*FCFC*, 25)

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# Poverty & Economic Justice

## What is a just economy?

The Church calls on us to use all our spiritual, moral, and intellectual energies to create a new order – “a society of free work, of enterprise and of participation. Such a society is not directed against the market, but demands that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the State, so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole of society are satisfied.” (St. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 35)

“Economic decisions and institutions should be assessed according to whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person. Social and economic policies should foster the creation of jobs for all who can work with decent working conditions and just wages. Barriers to equal pay and employment for women and those facing unjust discrimination must be overcome. Catholic social teaching supports the right of workers to choose whether to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal. It also affirms economic freedom, initiative, and the right to private property.” (*FCFC*, 73)

## Why is there a growing gap between the rich and the poor?

As Pope Francis has written, “This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. ... Debt and the accumulation of interest also make it difficult for countries to realize the potential of their own economies and keep citizens from enjoying their real purchasing power. To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 56)

To learn more about the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship (FCFC)*, visit [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org) and [www.wisconsinatholic.org](http://www.wisconsinatholic.org).

## What can we do about poverty?

Jesus told us that the poor will always be with us. But this does not absolve us from our responsibility to help liberate those living in poverty. “Welfare policy should reduce poverty and dependency, strengthen family life, and help families leave poverty through work, training, and assistance with child care, health care, housing, and transportation. Given the link between family stability and economic success, welfare policy should address both the economic and cultural factors that contribute to family breakdown. It should also provide a safety net for those who cannot work. Improving the Earned Income Tax Credit and child tax credits, available as refunds to families in greatest need, will help lift low-income families out of poverty.” (*FCFC*, 75)

**THE DIGNITY OF EACH HUMAN PERSON AND THE PURSUIT OF THE COMMON GOOD ARE CONCERNS WHICH OUGHT TO SHAPE ALL ECONOMIC POLICIES.**

(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 203)

## What are the effects of consumerism?

As Pope Francis has written, “Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading. ... To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 53-54)