



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) 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

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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. 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) 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.