



A Letter to Wisconsin Catholics on Faithful Citizenship

March 2024

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On the eve of a new election cycle, may we all be inspired by the example of the Good Samaritan, who in mercy encountered, accompanied, and helped heal a stranger. He did so by ignoring divisiveness, anger, fear, and misinformation. How can we follow his example in these troubled times? We propose four ways.

Put Christ at the center of everything. As the U.S. Bishops have written, “Take time away from social media and spend time with Holy Scripture and the Blessed Sacrament. Turn off the TV and the podcast, and listen in silence. Volunteer at a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter, a crisis pregnancy center. Serve the poor, the needy, the outcast. Pray often, letting faith inform your political participation.” (“Introductory Note,” *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, faithfulcitizenship.org).

Learn about the Church’s Catholic Social Teaching (CST). This nonpartisan and nonsectarian teaching helps to discern which public policies and politicians best embody a respect for human dignity and the common good (see reverse for an overview of CST). As the U.S. bishops write in their “Introductory Note”:

The threat of abortion remains our pre-eminent priority because it directly attacks our most vulnerable and voiceless brothers and sisters and destroys more than a million lives per year in our country alone. Other grave threats to the life and dignity of the human person include euthanasia, gun violence, terrorism, the death penalty, and human trafficking. There is also the redefinition of marriage and gender, threats to religious freedom at home and abroad, lack of justice for the poor, the suffering of migrants and refugees, wars and famines around the world, racism, the need for greater access to healthcare and education, care for our common home, and more.

Become politically engaged. Because politics is one of the main ways citizens can serve their neighbors by advancing the common good, “it should always be understood not as an appropriation of power, but as the ‘highest form of charity’” (Pope Francis, Audience with the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the exchange of greetings for the New Year, 1/8/2024). Only faithful and engaged citizens can motivate candidates and lawmakers to serve the common good and not narrow special interests.

Be peacemakers. It is anger and fear that lead to injustice and violence. Only love, mercy, and compassion can bring forth life-giving solutions to our world’s many problems. As President Lincoln said, “with malice toward none with charity for all,” we must “bind up the nation’s wounds.” Especially in the most challenging circumstances, let us draw strength from the lives of the saints and the words of Our Lady of Guadalupe: “Am I not here, I, who am your mother? ... Let nothing else worry you, disturb you.”

We thank you for reading this. May God bless you and may the spirit of the Good Samaritan guide all our thoughts and actions.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Jerome E. ListECKI
Archbishop of Milwaukee

Most Reverend David L. Ricken
Bishop of Green Bay

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

Most Reverend Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison

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 is nonpartisan and nonsectarian, reflecting fundamental ethical principles that are common to all people.

For more information on CST, visit the bishops of Wisconsin's public policy website (wisconsincatholic.org) under "Faithful Citizenship Resources." These are based on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) national statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (faithfulcitizenship.org), from which the descriptions below are taken. The most comprehensive summary of CST can be found in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, available on the Vatican website (vatican.va) or from booksellers.

To put CST into action, we invite you to register for the Wisconsin Catholic Conference's advocacy updates (wisconsincatholic.org/advocacy-network). You will receive regular news updates and action alerts so that you can be confident in approaching your elected officials on crucial legislative matters.

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.