



A Letter to Catholics in Wisconsin on Faithful Citizenship

July 2014

First in a seven-part series

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As the 2014 election season will soon be upon us, we wish to share the words of Pope Francis about the importance of the Catholic faith to civic life:

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*, 183)

The Church does not have specific solutions for every problem. Instead, she offers believers and non-believers alike a set of basic principles, known as Catholic social teaching. This teaching provides a consistent moral framework to guide public decision-making. At its core, it upholds the full dignity and development of every human being and the common good of all humanity. Whether you are aware or unfamiliar with Catholic social teaching, we urge you to read the reverse of this letter. We also urge you to pray for guidance and form your consciences in light of this social teaching. Only in properly forming our consciences can we hope to build a more just society. As Pope Francis has written, “We should recognize how in a culture where each person wants to be bearer of his or her own subjective truth, it becomes difficult for citizens to devise a common plan which transcends individual gain and personal ambitions.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 61)

None of us can do everything, but all of us can do something. Please exercise your fundamental right to vote, but equally important, become actively engaged in the life of your community. Bring to bear all the wisdom and experience that Catholic social teaching and your faith have to offer. Ask yourselves and those who govern our nation, “Does this social program, economic plan, or public policy respect the dignity of the person, created in the image and likeness of God? Does it further the common good?”

Whatever our circumstances are, in everything we do, let us first look to Christ. Let us enter the public square with a spirit of humility and with love for our fellow human beings, even and especially when we disagree with them. Though everything we do is incomplete, with God’s grace we are planting His seeds and building His kingdom.

Thank you for reading this and may God bless all your efforts.

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 Peter F. Christensen
Diocese 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 to be good and faithful servants who serve the hungry and the thirsty, who welcome the stranger, who clothe the naked and visit the ill and the incarcerated – all these and more are the basis for this social teaching (Matthew 25).

From the late nineteenth century to the present day, popes, councils, and bishops have condensed this teaching into the seven (sometimes more, if organized differently) fundamental principles described below. The Church asks Catholics, and all people of good will, to evaluate current conditions and public policies according to these principles. As Pope Benedict XVI has said, "Christianity, Catholicism, isn't a collection of prohibitions: it's a positive option. It's very important that we look at it again because this idea has almost completely disappeared today. We've heard so much about what is not allowed that now it's time to say: we have a positive idea to offer" (Interview with German broadcasters, August 5, 2006)

Through the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the bishops of Wisconsin have created four bulletin inserts which cover the principles of CST in greater detail. These are available on the WCC website (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 (2007/2011)* (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship>). 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 Right to Life and the Dignity of the Human Person*

Human life is sacred. Direct attacks on innocent human beings are never morally acceptable. Within our society, life is under direct attack from abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, and destruction of human embryos for research. These intrinsic evils must always be opposed. This teaching also compels us as Catholics to oppose genocide, torture, unjust war, and the use of the death penalty, as well as to pursue peace and help overcome poverty, racism, and other conditions that demean human life.

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The family, based on marriage between a man and a woman, is the fundamental unit of society. This sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children must not be redefined, undermined, or neglected. Supporting families should be a priority for economic and social policies. How our society is organized—in economics and politics, in law and public policy—affects the well-being of individuals and of society. Every person and association has a right and a duty to participate in shaping society to promote the well-being of individuals and the common good.

Rights and Responsibilities

Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible. Each of us has a right to religious freedom, which enables us to live and act in accord with our God-given dignity, as well as a right to access the things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

While the common good embraces all, those who are in greatest need deserve preferential concern. A moral test for society is how we treat the weakest among us—the unborn, those dealing with disabilities or terminal illness, the poor and marginalized.

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Economic justice calls for decent work at fair, living wages, opportunities for legal status for immigrant workers, and the opportunity for all people to work together for the common good through their work, ownership, enterprise, investment, participation in unions, and other forms of economic activity.

Solidarity

We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Our Catholic commitment to solidarity requires that we pursue justice, eliminate racism, end human trafficking, protect human rights, seek peace, and avoid the use of force except as a necessary last resort.

Caring for God's Creation

Care for the earth is a duty of our Catholic faith. We all are called to be careful stewards of God's creation and to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for vulnerable human beings now and in the future.

* Descriptions of the seven principles are taken from a USCCB *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* bulletin insert.