



A Letter to Catholics in Wisconsin on Faithful Citizenship

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

“As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.” (John 13:34) This profound commandment from our Lord has inspired men and women in every generation to build a more just and peaceful world, a world in which all human beings are loved and respected because they are made in the image of God.

Here in the United States, we Catholics have long heeded this call to be active in the public square. Together with other citizens, we have worked to lift immigrants out of poverty, support pregnant women and their unborn children, nurse the sick and the elderly, adopt orphans, shelter the homeless, visit the imprisoned, feed the hungry, promote civil rights, and challenge legislation and judicial decisions that would deny the dignity of human life from conception to natural death.

By contributing in so many ways to the welfare of our vibrant American democracy, we Catholics have gained a broad and unique perspective on matters of public policy. Every four years, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) draws on this experience and our rich heritage of Church social doctrine to strengthen our vocations as “faithful citizens.” Through our various documents on political responsibility, we bishops have tried to help you discuss the principles that should govern our nation’s policies and to encourage you to take part in bringing love, hope, and justice to the world.

The USCCB’s latest statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2007), discusses the principles of Catholic social doctrine and their application to the political sphere. This statement explains the importance of a well-formed conscience, which moves us to love more deeply, to do what is right, and to avoid what is wrong.

As in past years, we, the bishops of Wisconsin, have asked the staff of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) to prepare a series of bulletin inserts based on *Faithful Citizenship*. We invite you to read this series, and encourage you to discuss it with family, friends, and fellow parishioners. We hope you will find the series useful when analyzing specific policy proposals or when questioning candidates about their positions.

The series begins with a condensed version of our *WCC Guidelines for Church Involvement in Electoral Politics*, which describes how parish communities and other Church institutions can participate in the political process without engaging in partisan political activities.

In encouraging all Catholics to be faithful citizens, we wish to distinguish between the role of the Church institutionally and the role of the laity in political life. Vatican II taught that, “the Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound

to any political system.” (*Gaudium et spes / The Church in the Modern World* #76) As Pope Benedict has explained, the role of the Church institutionally in the political order is “indirect,” operating “through the purification of reason and through ethical formation.” (*Deus caritas est / God is Love* 28-29)

On the other hand, the laity has the “direct duty to work for a just ordering of society.” (*Deus caritas est* 29) This duty goes beyond casting a vote or serving in public office to touch every aspect of public and private life. For to be faithful citizens is to be sound stewards of all the social, political, and economic goods entrusted to us by the Creator.

Faithful citizenship is a communal effort and therefore requires respectful discourse. At times, of course, faithful Catholics will disagree on matters of policy or practice and will vigorously state their positions, but we should never denigrate one another.

“Love one another.” These words give us the valiant hope that our faithful citizenship can transform the world. As Pope Benedict has said, “The one who has hope lives differently.” (*Spe salvi / Saved by Hope* #2) Through reasoned arguments, spiritual energy, and public witness, let us all work together to build a civilization of hope, love, and justice.

We thank you for reading this letter and the series that follows. May Christ, our hope and our salvation, bless all our efforts.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



The Most Reverend Timothy M. Dolan
Archbishop of Milwaukee
Administrator of Green Bay Diocese



The Most Reverend Robert C. Morlino
Bishop of Madison



The Most Reverend Jerome E. Listeck
Bishop of La Crosse



The Most Reverend Peter F. Christensen
Bishop of Superior

OUTLINE OF FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP SERIES

- Week 1: Guidelines on Church Involvement in Electoral Politics
- Week 2: Forming Consciences I
- Week 3: Forming Consciences II
- Week 4: Right to Life & Dignity of Human Person
- Week 5: Family / Participation / Rights & Responsibilities
- Week 6: Option for the Poor & Vulnerable /
Dignity of Work & the Rights of Workers
- Week 7: Solidarity / Care of God’s Creation
- Week 8: USCCB *Faithful Citizenship*

www.faithfulcitizenship.org

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