



A Letter to Wisconsin Catholics on Faithful Citizenship

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

February 2026

Every two years, ahead of the elections, we invite you to consider what it means to be a citizen who is faithful to Christ. This year, moved by the election of the first American pope, we wish to highlight Pope Leo XIV's [Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See](#) (January 9, 2026). Inspired by St. Augustine's *City of God*, Pope Leo's address brings to the fore global issues that are especially relevant to our social and political landscape in the United States.

Protect human life. Pope Leo “considers it deplorable that public resources are allocated to suppress life, rather than being invested to support mothers and families. The primary objective must remain the protection of every unborn child and the effective and concrete support of every woman so that she is able to welcome life.” He adds, “we firmly reiterate that the protection of the right to life constitutes the indispensable foundation of every other human right. A society is healthy and truly progresses only when it safeguards the sanctity of human life and works actively to promote it.”

Protect religious freedom and human rights. Pope Leo writes that religious freedom is “the first of all human rights, because it expresses the most fundamental reality of man.” And yet in many places, “religious freedom is considered ... more as a ‘privilege’ or concession than a fundamental human right.” Christians sometimes face restriction or discrimination when they proclaim the truths of the Gospel and “defend the dignity of the weakest, the unborn, refugees and migrants, or promote the family.” We must protect against the dilution of human rights which “occurs when each right becomes self-referential, and especially when it becomes disconnected from reality, nature, and truth.”

Promote the family. Pope Leo explains that “the institution of the family faces two crucial challenges today. On the one hand, there is a worrying tendency in the international system to neglect and underestimate its fundamental social role, leading to its progressive institutional marginalization. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the growing and painful reality of fragile, broken and suffering families, afflicted by internal difficulties and disturbing phenomena, including domestic violence.”

Uphold human dignity of all, including migrants and prisoners. Pope Leo notes that “every migrant is a person and, as such, has inalienable rights that must be respected in every situation.” He hopes that “the actions taken by States against criminality and human trafficking will not become a pretext for undermining the dignity of migrants and refugees.” He adds that “the same considerations apply to prisoners, who can never be reduced to the crimes they have committed. We cannot reduce individuals to objects. We must “stand in defense of the inalienable dignity of every person.”

Promote political dialogue and build consensus. Summarizing St. Augustine, Pope Leo warns “of the grave dangers to political life arising from false representations of history, excessive nationalism and the distortion of the ideal of the political leader.” We must have “a diplomacy that promotes dialogue and seeks consensus among all parties” and not replace it with “diplomacy based on force.” This type of distortion “gravely threatens the rule of law, which is the foundation of all peaceful civil coexistence.”

To learn more about Catholic Social Teaching, please read the reverse of this letter. Read the fuller explication found in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (faithfulcitizenship.org). Sign up for the Wisconsin Catholic Conference's advocacy network at wisconsincatholic.org/advocacy-network.

Above all, pray, form your conscience, vote, and remain engaged in civic life. Inspired by St. Augustine and Pope Leo, may we all turn our hearts to the heavenly city, our true home, as we seek to foster true peace here on earth.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Jeffrey S. Grob
Archbishop of Milwaukee

Most Reverend David L. Ricken
Bishop of Green Bay

Most Reverend Gerard W. Battersby
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.