



# WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

## 2023 PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS

*The Wisconsin Catholic Conference is the public policy voice of Wisconsin's Catholic bishops. The 2023 Public Policy Positions reflects the seven themes of Catholic social teaching and their corresponding priorities as set forth by the U.S. bishops in their statement, **Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility** at [faithfulcitizenship.org](https://faithfulcitizenship.org). We urge Wisconsin's citizens and lawmakers to implement these policies to protect life and promote the common good.*

### THEMES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Since the time of the Apostles, the Catholic Church has sought to relate the Gospel to the conditions of each age. Jesus's call to be good and faithful servants who serve the hungry and thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the ill and incarcerated (Matthew 25)—all these and more are the basis for Catholic social teaching. From the late nineteenth century to the present day, these teachings have been condensed into the following seven themes.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Family, Community, and Participation

Rights and Responsibilities

Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

Solidarity and Subsidiarity

Care for God's Creation

#### LIFE & DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, each person's life and dignity must be respected from conception to natural death. People are more important than things, and the measure of every good society is whether it protects and respects the life and dignity of the human person, especially the most vulnerable.

**Protect every human life.** All human life is sacred. Wisconsin must effectively affirm, protect, and defend each and every human life at every stage of development, including the unborn. Wisconsin must also oppose all attempts to legalize euthanasia, assisted suicide, and abortion.

**Protect religious freedom and conscience.** The right to religious freedom and conscience is grounded in the very dignity of the human person. No one should be forced to act in a manner contrary to his or her own conscience or beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. Wisconsin must guard this civil right by protecting the religious and conscience rights of individuals, employers, and employees, allowing private organizations to live out their religious beliefs, and allowing for reasonable collaboration between public and religious entities.

**Affirm the dignity of human life in medical and scientific research.** Science and medicine must heal and not harm. Wisconsin must reject research and development that requires the destruction or cloning of a human embryo, as well as the use of abortion-derived stem cells.

**Support pregnant and parenting women.** Pregnant and parenting women face unique burdens. In addition to ensuring adequate financial and medical support, Wisconsin must provide women facing a crisis pregnancy with wraparound services that can enable them to parent or place their child for adoption. Wisconsin must also provide high quality childcare and decent housing to women in need, and make it possible for them to continue their education.

**Uphold the innate equality, dignity, and complementarity of male and female.** Men and women are biologically different from the moment of conception and possess equal dignity. Wisconsin must uphold these two scientific and moral realities and defend those who seek to live them out. At the same time, all who experience gender dysphoria must be treated with compassion, sensitivity, and respect.

**Stop domestic abuse and human trafficking.** No human being should be abused or enslaved. Wisconsin must give all persons experiencing domestic abuse and human trafficking ready access to services that can assist them in escaping their situation and rebuilding their lives.

**Support elders and persons with disabilities and chronic or terminal illnesses.** Respect for all human life means assisting those with limitations. Wisconsin must ensure these individuals receive necessary support and services, including transportation and quality care. Wisconsin must also assist caregivers and value their contributions to the well-being of their families and communities.

**Reject the death penalty.** The death penalty is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the human person. Wisconsin has acknowledged this when it abolished the death penalty in 1854 and must maintain this ban.

## FAMILY, COMMUNITY & PARTICIPATION

The human person is not only sacred, but social. The God-given institutions of marriage—the lifelong commitment between a man and a woman—and family are central and serve as the foundations for social life. Marriage and family should be supported and strengthened, not undermined. Every person has a right to participate in social, economic, and political life, and a corresponding duty to work for the advancement of the common good and the well-being of all, especially those who are poor and vulnerable.

**Keep children safe.** Every child deserves safety and care. Wisconsin must continue to advance the protection of children from all forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The Catholic Church’s *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* helps to advance this mission. Wisconsin must also make every effort to eliminate child poverty.

**Encourage and strengthen marriage.** Lifelong marriage between one man and one woman is essential to the continuation of humanity, to the total development of the human person, and to the dignity, stability, peace, and prosperity of the family and society. Wisconsin must promote marriage and evaluate all public policies for their impact on marriage and families.

**Respect and promote family relationships.** Families are essential to human flourishing. Wisconsin must advance taxation, employment, and welfare policies that foster family unity and reward personal responsibility. Whenever possible, parents must be given the option to care for their young children at home or place them in quality childcare programs. Parents must also be allowed sufficient flexibility and leave from work to attend to their family’s needs, especially in times of illness and loss.

**Promote adoption and foster care.** Adoption and foster care not only give children a family, but also represent a community’s support for some of the most vulnerable children. Wisconsin must support adoption awareness campaigns, adoption counseling for birthmothers, adoptive parents, and children, and tax credits for adoptive parents. Parents adopting or fostering children with special needs must receive the additional support to help their families thrive.

**Support choice in education.** Parents are the primary educators of their children. As such, they have the right to send their children to the school of their choice, whether public, private, religious, or homeschool. Wisconsin must provide resources to families in need so that they can choose the educational path best suited to their child’s success. The state’s four parental choice programs deserve continued support. Wisconsin must also alter its tuition tax deduction to a tax credit that better serves families in need.

**Strengthen support for education.** Education is the surest path to full participation in the social, economic, and political life of our nation. Wisconsin must sustain its public commitment to strong elementary and secondary schools. In particular, it must make greater efforts to ensure that all our children continue to advance in their education and achieve their highest academic potential.

**Require parental consent for medical treatments.** Parents bear primary responsibility for ensuring the health, well-being, and education of their children. Wisconsin must prohibit abortion, artificial contraception, gender transition, and medical treatment for children without parental consent.

**Promote responsible sexuality.** Sex education is primarily the responsibility of parents, not schools. Wisconsin must develop sex education with local parental involvement and must teach children why and how to avoid sexual activity. Sex education should not promote artificial contraception or the separation of gender from innate biological sex.

**Assist veterans and their families.** Veterans deserve ongoing support for their service. Wisconsin must ensure that veterans and their families receive proper assistance and care as they return to civilian life.

**Support family farms.** Family farms form the backbone of Wisconsin’s rural economy. Wisconsin must help existing family farmers maintain their operations and encourage the creation of new family farms.

## RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Every person has a fundamental right to life—the right that makes all other rights possible. Each person also has a right to the conditions for living a decent life—food, housing, work, education, culture, transportation, basic health care, the freedom of communication and expression, and the protection of religious freedom. We have a responsibility to secure and respect these rights not only for ourselves, but also for others.

**Support equitable taxation and sound fiscal policies.** Our political institutions are responsible for securing the social conditions that enable each of us to share our gifts and reap the benefits of life in community. Taxes are essential if government is to fulfill this responsibility and citizens have a moral obligation to pay them. Wisconsin must distribute the tax burden equitably, based on a person's ability to pay. Wisconsin must also avoid excessive debt that burdens future generations.

**Support healthy lifestyles.** Alcohol and drug abuse, smoking, and unhealthy diets take a huge toll, not only on individuals, but also on society. Wisconsin must promote healthy and responsible choices and provide greater health support for those struggling with addiction and other destructive behaviors.

**Practice restorative justice.** Criminal justice not only defends and restores the public order, but it also serves to rehabilitate the offender. Wisconsin's criminal justice system must ensure that victims of crime, including the community at large, have opportunities to be healed and restored. Policies, even those that enforce strict punishment, must serve the end of rehabilitation. Corrections policies must also make special efforts to reintegrate those previously incarcerated into society.

**Support law enforcement personnel and all who help preserve public safety.** Law enforcement personnel have a responsibility to be guardians and peacemakers who serve their communities with self-control, mercy, and true respect. Wisconsin must provide law enforcement with adequate resources to recruit, screen, and train the finest candidates and to carry out their duties safely and humanely. Wisconsin must also ensure that policing is transparent and accountable to the community.

**Promote racial justice and reconciliation.** Any theory or form of racism and racial discrimination is morally unacceptable. Lasting reconciliation requires addressing the root causes of racism. Wisconsin must ensure justice for all, end disproportionate incarceration, and improve access to quality education, employment, and housing.

## PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR & VULNERABLE

Scripture teaches that God has a special concern for the poor and vulnerable. The Church calls on all of us to embrace this preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, to embody it in our lives, and to work to have it shape public policies and priorities. A fundamental measure of our society is how we care for and stand with the poor and vulnerable.

**Make affordable health care available to all.** Health care is a basic human right. Wisconsin must provide its uninsured and underinsured residents with access to affordable and quality health care, including mental health care.

**Eliminate hunger.** Food is a basic human right. For children it is especially vital, as malnutrition impairs cognitive and physical growth. Wisconsin must ensure that all residents have access to healthy and affordable food.

**Increase funding for safe and affordable housing.** Shelter is a basic human right. Wisconsin must ensure that all its residents have access to decent and affordable housing.

**Prohibit predatory lending practices.** Predatory lending frequently capitalizes on the financial distress of people seeking to fill basic human needs. Wisconsin must cap interest rates and do more to encourage alternatives to predatory lending.

**Reform the juvenile justice system.** Children are not adults. Wisconsin is one of only three states that treats 17-year-olds as adults and places them in adult jails and prisons if convicted. Confining youth in adult institutions results in more physical and sexual abuse, higher recidivism, and more serious subsequent offenses. Wisconsin must return 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system where they can receive developmentally appropriate treatment.

**Strengthen public transportation.** Transportation is essential for full participation in civic life. Wisconsin must ensure that its transportation infrastructure meets the needs of all its residents, rural and urban.

## DIGNITY OF WORK & THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's act of creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers, employers, and others must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and choose to join a union, to economic initiative, and to ownership and private property. These rights must be exercised in ways that advance the common good.

**Provide living wages.** Living wages are essential to human flourishing. All employed persons supporting themselves and their families must be able to afford the basic essentials of food, clothing, shelter, and health care. Wisconsin must index its minimum wage and state Earned Income Tax Credit to reflect changes in the cost of living.

**Protect workers' rights.** Workers have the right to what is justly due them for their labor. They have a right to choose whether to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal. 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. Wisconsin must ensure that public and private employers provide decent working conditions and reasonably accommodate a pregnant employee so that she can retain her job and not endanger her health and life or that of her unborn child.

**Foster employment opportunities and remove barriers to work.** All persons have the right to earn a living, to participate in the economy, and to contribute to the common good. Wisconsin must make every effort to assist persons with physical and mental impairments to find and retain employment. Wisconsin must also assist those who experience unjust discrimination or other employment barriers.

## SOLIDARITY & SUBSIDIARITY

Solidarity recognizes that we are one human family, regardless of our distance and differences. It is a determination to commit ourselves and our society to the common good. If we want peace in our world, we must work for justice. Subsidiarity holds that to protect basic justice, issues should be handled on the most local level possible. Thus, government should intervene only when individuals and groups are unable to handle an issue. Government should not replace or destroy citizen initiatives, but rather provide help (*subsidium*) when necessary.

**Uphold human rights of immigrants and refugees.** Migration is a human right. Federal immigration reform must be comprehensive and include a temporary worker program, a viable path to legalization, due process, and family unification. Laws aimed at enforcement must distinguish between dangerous criminals and non-violent persons whose only offense is lack of proper status. Federal and Wisconsin laws must also protect immigrants and refugees from all exploitation and support their basic human rights. Wisconsin must especially assist refugees who have been harmed by armed conflict that involved the United States.

**Participate justly in the global economy.** Participation in the global economy must respect the dignity of all people. Wisconsin must ensure that trade agreements and investment policies respect the human rights of workers and their families, and foster sound stewardship of the earth's natural resources.

## CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

The world that God created has been entrusted to us. Our use of it must be directed by God's plan for creation, not simply for our own benefit. Our stewardship of the Earth is a form of participation in God's act of creating and sustaining the world. In our use of creation, we must be guided by a concern for generations to come and show our respect for the Creator by our care for His creation.

**Promote sustainable farming.** Agriculture is not just another economic activity; it is vital to human existence. What is grown and how it is grown affects everyone's health and the future of humanity. Wisconsin must promote sustainable farming that provides fair prices so that farmers can make a decent living, raise animals ethically, and maintain sound management practices. For the sake of food security and healthy diets, Wisconsin should also promote the production and consumption of local foods.

**Support clean land, air, and water.** The earth is our common home. Environmental toxins, such as lead, PCBs, and endocrine-disrupting chemicals, are especially a problem for children, born and unborn. Wisconsin must make additional efforts to reduce toxins from our ground and water supply, as well as reduce carbon emissions. Mining activity should reflect sound stewardship of natural resources and the environment.

**Encourage conservation and sustainable energy.** The earth has a limited supply of natural resources to sustain life. Wisconsin must promote the conservation of our natural resources and the development of alternative sources of energy.

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*The development of public policy is an ongoing process. The Wisconsin Catholic Conference will monitor and address new issues as they develop. The seven themes outlined in this document provide the guidance, focus, and foundation upon which the WCC engages all issues.*

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