



2020 General Election of the United States
Major Party Platforms
In Comparison with Catholic Teaching
On the Non-Negotiable Moral Issues
And the Negotiable Policy Issues

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE PLATFORMS OF THE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES

NON-NEGOTIABLE MORAL ISSUES

1. Dignity of Human Life from Conception to Natural Death
2. Dignity of Natural Marriage & Family
3. Freedom of Religion, the First Freedom

NEGOTIABLE (POLICY) ISSUES*

- A. War and Peace
- B. Capital Punishment
- C. Health Care
- D. Economic Policy
- E. Immigration
- F. Environmental Policy

* Since the platforms are extensive on each topic, please consult the Party Platform documents themselves for the details of the Party positions.

[Democratic Party Platform](#)

[Republican Party Platform](#)

[American Solidarity Party](#)

[Libertarian Party Platform](#)

[Green Party Platform](#)

NON-NEGOTIABLE MORAL ISSUES

Pope Benedict VI, Address to European Parliamentary Group, 30 March 2006.

As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, the principal focus of her interventions in the public arena is the protection and promotion of the dignity of the person, and she is thereby consciously drawing particular attention to principles which are not negotiable. Among these the following emerge clearly today:

- (a) **protection of life in all its stages**, from the first moment of conception until natural death;
- (b) **recognition and promotion of the natural structure of the family as a union between a man and a woman based on marriage**, and its defense from attempts to make it juridically equivalent to radically different forms of union which in reality harm it and contribute to its destabilization, obscuring its particular character and its irreplaceable social role;
- (c) **the protection of the right of parents to educate their children.**

Each of the **Non-Negotiable** issues identified by the Pope involve *essential goods* which are necessary for the flourishing of human beings and human societies. Their violation involve *intrinsic evils* which can never be justified by good intentions or circumstances.

Pope St. John Paul II affirmed this unchanging teaching of the Church in his Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, against certain modern theories which suggest that there is no such thing as an intrinsic evil, but only something which is generally evil, which, however, can be sometimes justified by reason of good intention or circumstances suggesting good consequences from doing it.

The **Non-Negotiable Issues**, such as basic health care or a just economy, presume these essential goods—human life, the proper functioning of the basic cell of society (marriage and family), as well as religious freedom (and authentic freedom generally). Policies which are *contrary* to any of the essential goods make the common good unachievable in whole or in part, depending upon the policy.

[More Information on Non-Negotiable Issues](#)

[More Information on Negotiable Issues](#)

1. Dignity of Life from Conception to Natural Death

Pope St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* 38. [T]he common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights – for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture – is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with the maximum determination.

Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* 58. Among all the crimes which can be committed against life, procured abortion has characteristics making it particularly serious and deplorable. The Second Vatican Council defines abortion, together with infanticide, as an ‘unspeakable crime’.

EV 59. [O]ne cannot overlook the network of complicity which reaches out to include international institutions, foundations and associations which systematically campaign for the legalization and spread of abortion in the world.

EV 71. The legal toleration of abortion or of euthanasia can in no way claim to be based on respect for the conscience of others, precisely because society has the right and the duty to protect itself against the abuses which can occur in the name of conscience and under the pretext of freedom.

U.S.C.C.B. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 2019 Introductory letter. The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed. At the same time, we cannot dismiss or ignore other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism, the environmental crisis, poverty and the death penalty.

Our efforts to protect the unborn remain as important as ever, for just as the Supreme Court may allow greater latitude for state laws restricting abortion, state legislators have passed statutes not only keeping abortion legal through all nine months of pregnancy but opening the door to infanticide. Additionally, abortion contaminates many other important issues by being inserted into legislation regarding immigration, care for the poor, and health care reform.

The protection and dignity of every human life from conception to natural death. The framework within and against which every other issue must be measured. Without life there is no right to health care, a living wage, immigration, domestic and security and peace, and the myriad of other issues in Catholic social teaching affecting the living.

At Issue:

- the right to take the life of the unborn child, against the law of nature and the law of God, (freedom of choice, reproductive rights, reproductive health, family planning)
- state laws which set restrictions on that “right”
- the abortion pill (chemical abortion), the future of readily available abortion
- tax-payer funding of abortion, prohibited under the Hyde Amendment since 1976
- the Title X rule, family planning organizations which receive federal funding (e.g. Planned Parenthood) cannot refer for abortion
- legal oversight of the abortion industry, such as laws setting medical emergency obligations which bind abortion providers as they do any other surgical centers [abortion is always fatal for the child, and often enough fatal for the mother, as well]
- the Mexico City Policy, which forbids promotion of abortion abroad with federal funding [Reagan, Bush and Trump instituted; Clinton and Obama suspended]
- “ideological colonialism” (coined by Pope Francis), promoting abortion and “reproductive health” diplomatically through American and international abortion promoters, with federal funding, and without regard for the religions and cultures of the countries being “helped”
- scientific research on human embryos, which involves artificial fertilization and ultimately destruction, and government funding of such research
- euthanasia, sometimes referred to as mercy killing, medically assisted suicide or the right-to-die

[More Information on Human Life](#)

Democratic Platform

Democrats are committed to protecting and advancing reproductive health, rights, and justice. We believe unequivocally, like the majority of Americans, that every woman should be able to access high-quality reproductive health care services, including safe and legal abortion. (p.32)

We will repeal the Title X domestic gag rule and restore federal funding for Planned Parenthood, which provides vital preventive and reproductive health care for millions of

people, especially low-income people, and people of color, and LGBTQ+ people, including in underserved areas. (*ibid.*)

Democrats oppose and will fight to overturn federal and state laws that create barriers to reproductive health and rights. (*ibid.*)

We will repeal the Hyde Amendment, and protect and codify the right to reproductive freedom. (*ibid.*)

Democrats oppose restrictions on medication abortion care that are inconsistent with the most recent medical and scientific evidence and that do not protect public health. (*ibid.*)

We recognize that quality, affordable comprehensive health care; medically accurate, LGBTQ+ inclusive, age-appropriate sex education; and the full range of family planning services are all essential to ensuring that people can decide if, when, and how to start a family. (*ibid.*) [abortion is considered here as “family planning”]

We believe that comprehensive health services, including access to reproductive care and abortion services, are vital to the empowerment of women and girls. (*ibid.*)

Instead of walking away, Democrats believe the United States should lead the way and mobilize our partners to work in common cause. We will rejoin and reform the WHO, the United Nations Human Rights Council, and the United Nations Population Fund, because in a global public health crisis and a global democratic recession, American leadership is needed more than ever. (p. 75)

[The United Nations Human Rights Council, and the United Nations Population Fund are among the worst perpetrators of ideological colonization, along with International Planned Parenthood, and large private foundations]

We will support the repeal of the global gag rule (also known as the Mexico City Policy) and measures like the Helms Amendment, which limit safe access to abortion. We will also restore and expand American contributions to the United Nations Population Fund to help guarantee access to health care for women and children around the world and eliminate child, early, and forced marriage. (p. 82)

We will appoint U.S. Supreme Court justices and federal judges who . . . will respect and enforce foundational precedents, including . . . *Roe v. Wade*. (p.39)

Republican Platform

The Constitution's guarantee that no one can "be deprived of life, liberty or property" deliberately echoes the Declaration of Independence's proclamation that "all" are "endowed by their Creator" with the inalienable right to life. Accordingly, we assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment's protections apply to children before birth. (p.13)

We oppose the use of public funds to perform or promote abortion or to fund organizations, like Planned Parenthood, so long as they provide or refer for elective abortions or sell fetal body parts rather than provide healthcare. (p.13)

We support the ability of all organizations to provide, purchase, or enroll in healthcare coverage consistent with their religious, moral, or ethical convictions without discrimination or penalty. (p.37)

We support the right of parents to consent to medical treatment for their minor children and urge enactment of legislation that would require parental consent for their daughter to be transported across state lines for abortion. Providers should not be permitted to unilaterally withhold services because a patient's life is deemed not worth living. (*ibid.*)

American taxpayers should not be forced to fund abortion. As Democrats abandon this four decade-old bipartisan consensus, we call for codification of the Hyde Amendment and its application across the government, including Obamacare. We call for a permanent ban on federal funding and subsidies for abortion and healthcare plans that include abortion coverage. (*ibid.*)

2. Dignity of Natural Marriage & Family

Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* 44. It is thus becoming a social and even economic necessity once more to hold up to future generations the beauty of marriage and the family, and the fact that these institutions correspond to the deepest needs and dignity of the person. In view of this, States are called to *enact policies promoting the centrality and the integrity of the family* founded on marriage between a man and a woman, the primary vital cell of society, and to assume responsibility for its economic and fiscal needs, while respecting its essentially relational character.

Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* 251. In discussing the dignity and mission of the family, the Synod Fathers observed that, ‘as for proposals to place unions between homosexual persons on the same level as marriage, there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family.’ It is unacceptable ‘that local Churches should be subjected to pressure in this matter and that international bodies should make financial aid to poor countries dependent on the introduction of laws to establish marriage between persons of the same sex.’

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* 70. The family founded upon marriage is the basic cell of human society. The role, responsibilities, and needs of families should be central national priorities. Marriage must be defined, recognized, and protected as a lifelong exclusive commitment between a man and a woman, and as the source of the next generation and the protective haven for children. The institution of marriage is undermined by the ideology of “gender” that dismisses sexual difference and the complementarity of the sexes and falsely presents “gender” as nothing more than a social construct or psychological reality, which a person may choose at variance with his or her biological reality (see *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 224). As Pope Francis has taught, “the removal of [sexual] difference creates a problem, not a solution” (*General Audience*, April 15, 2015). “Thus the Church reaffirms . . . her no to ‘gender’ philosophies, because the reciprocity between male and female is an expression of the beauty of nature willed by the Creator” (Pope Benedict XVI *Address to the Pontifical Council Cor Unum*, Jan. 19, 2013). This affirmation in no way compromises the Church’s opposition to unjust discrimination against those who experience “deep-seated homosexual tendencies,” who “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2358).

At Issue:

- natural marriage, the indispensable basic unit biologically and socially of every society throughout human history, composed of a man, a woman and their children
- whether laws should foster the authentic nature of marriage, or approve as its equal other kinds of relationships (as Obergefell v. Hodges did of same sex relationships)
- the definitions of marriage and family in adoption and other laws
- the legal battle, already engaged as a result of the logic of the Obergefell case as to whether polyamorous relationships, in which multiple men and/or women form a group sexual relationship, should be legally recognized
- gender ideology, which Pope Francis has called demonic on multiple occasions, in which the historical natural and philosophical understanding of human nature and sexuality is replaced by a largely psychological sense of sexual identity (the number with biologically confused gender being quite small in comparison)
- “ideological colonialism,” promoting gender ideology diplomatically through American and international organizations, with federal funding

[More Information on Marriage And Family](#)

Democratic Platform

(2016) Democrats applaud last year’s decision by the Supreme Court that recognized LGBT people—like every other American—have the right to marry the person they love. But there is still much work to be done. (p.19)

(2020) Democrats applaud this year’s U.S. Supreme Court decision that made clear that employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity violates the law, but we know we still have work to do to ensure LGBTQ+ people are treated equally under the law and in our society.

We will fight to enact the Equality Act and at last outlaw discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in housing, public accommodations, access to credit, education, jury service, and federal programs. We will work to ensure LGBTQ+ people are not discriminated against when seeking to adopt or foster children, protect LGBTQ+ children from bullying and assault, and guarantee transgender students’ access to facilities based on their gender identity. Democrats will ensure federally funded programs for older adults are inclusive for LGBTQ+ seniors.

We will ensure that all transgender and non-binary people can procure official government identification documents that accurately reflect their gender identity.

We will stop employment discrimination in the federal government, and will restore full implementation of President Obama's executive order prohibiting discrimination by federal contractors on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. (p.42-43)

Republican Platform

We condemn the Supreme Court's ruling in *United States v. Windsor*, which wrongly removed the ability of Congress to determine marriage policy in federal law. We also condemn the Supreme Court's lawless ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. . . . We endorse the First Amendment Defense Act, Republican legislation in the House and Senate which will bar government discrimination against individuals and businesses for acting on the belief that marriage is the union of one man and one woman. (p.11)

We support the right of the people to conduct their businesses in accordance with their religious beliefs and condemn public officials who have proposed boycotts against businesses that support traditional marriage. We pledge to protect those business owners who have been subjected to hate campaigns, threats of violence, and other attempts to deny their civil rights. (p.12)

Foremost among those institutions is the American family. It is the foundation of civil society, and the cornerstone of the family is natural marriage, the union of one man and one woman. . . . We oppose policies and laws that create a financial incentive for or encourage cohabitation. (p.31)

Our laws and our government's regulations should recognize marriage as the union of one man and one woman and actively promote married family life as the basis of a stable and prosperous society. For that reason, as explained elsewhere in this platform, we do not accept the Supreme Court's redefinition of marriage and we urge its reversal, whether through judicial reconsideration or a constitutional amendment returning control over marriage to the states. We oppose government discrimination against businesses or entities which decline to sell items or services to individuals for activities that go against their religious views about such activities. (p.31-32)

We urge marriage penalties to be removed from the tax code and public assistance programs. (p.32)

3. Freedom of Religion

Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* 1-2. [C]onstitutional limits should be set to the powers of government, in order that there may be no encroachment on the rightful freedom of the person and of associations. . . . It regards, in the first place, the free exercise of religion in society. . . . This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. [N.B. Those limits are those of the natural moral law]

Pope Francis, Encyclical *Evangelium Gaudium* 255. . . . A healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such, does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques. This would represent, in effect, a new form of discrimination and authoritarianism. The respect due to the agnostic or non-believing minority should not be arbitrarily imposed in a way that silences the convictions of the believing majority or ignores the wealth of religious traditions.

Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* 84. At the same time I feel it important to reiterate that the overall education of children is a 'most serious duty' and at the same time a 'primary right' of parents. **This is not just a task or a burden, but an essential and inalienable right that parents are called to defend and of which no one may claim to deprive them.** The State offers educational programmes in a subsidiary way, supporting the parents in their indeclinable role; parents themselves enjoy the right to choose freely the kind of education – accessible and of good quality – which they wish to give their children in accordance with their convictions. Schools do not replace parents, but complement them. This is a basic principle: 'all other participants in the process of education are only able to carry out their responsibilities in the name of the parents, with their consent and, to a certain degree, with their authorization.'

U.S.C.C.B., *Forming Consciences* 72. US policy should promote religious liberty vigorously, both at home and abroad: our first and most cherished freedom is rooted in the very dignity of the human person, a fundamental human right that knows no geographical boundaries. In all contexts, its basic contours are the same: it is the "immun[ity] from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his

own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.” (*Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 2). In the United States, religious freedom generally enjoys strong protection in our law and culture, but those protections are now in doubt. For example, the longstanding tax exemption of the Church has been explicitly called into question at the highest levels of government, precisely because of her teachings on marriage. Catholics have a particular duty to make sure that protections like these do not weaken but instead grow in strength. This is not only to secure the just freedom of the Church and the faithful here but also to offer hope and an encouraging witness to those who suffer direct and even violent religious persecution in countries where the protection is far weaker.

80. . . . Employers, including religious groups and family-owned businesses, should be able to provide health care without compromising their moral or religious convictions, and individuals should be able to purchase health care that accords with their faith.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or **prohibiting the free exercise thereof**; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

The free exercise of religion is not just a freedom of conscience, therefore, but the freedom to act in accordance with one’s conscience. This is not a license to do anything, justified by a religious claim, but what is morally lawful, in itself, known as the natural law. This requires, as John Adams put it, “a moral and religious people.” For example, human nature itself rules out human sacrifice justified as the exercise of religious conscience, just as it does abortion justified as a choice. It likewise defends freedom in the raising one’s children, without justifying child abuse.

Today in the name of pluralism, however, a new moral law, proclaimed by progressivism has displaced not just the divine law, which believers accept, but also the natural law. This latter “law”, based on a reasoned appreciation of the common purposes of human nature and life, naturally and spiritually, has accompanied human beings since our beginning, and has been recognized in some form for 2300 years, though often with huge defects in understanding and practice (e.g. slavery, religious, ethnic and racial persecution and discrimination, etc.). Together with divine revelation given to Israel through Moses and to the Church through Jesus Christ, this natural and supernatural view has driven the progress of civilization since that time.

Following philosophers of “rights,” and more recently “identity,” this view of human life and law has quickly been swept away in favor of an individualistic collection of personal “rights,”

founded upon individual choice, rather than a common human nature. However, rather than leaving others free to exercise their own natural and supernatural views, like all ideologies it must assert its supremacy and orthodoxy over anyone and any institution which opposes its view of “rights”. Beyond the rhetoric, the differences in the political positions of the parties and the candidates generally reflect one or the other view of the basis of law and freedom.

At Issue:

- the right not just to worship according to one’s beliefs, but also to exercise one’s religious beliefs in concrete acts without the intrusion of government
- the freedom of parents to educate their children in their religious beliefs and values
- whether public schools will respect the rights of parents in conscience formation, and not usurp it, by
 - 1) indoctrination in progressive ideology on life, human sexuality and marriage, and freedom (i.e. the essential goods of a healthy and free society); nor,
 - 2) dispense contraception, refer for abortion or for transgender therapy
- the right that there be no “religious test” for public office, for a business license, or other participation in the benefits of society, that requires surrendering the conscience to the state and adherence to progressive ideology
- the right, not to affirm any value, or to perform any act, which violates ones conscience (especially in the home, in religious schools, in employment)

[e.g. the Little Sisters of the Poor and EWTN with respect to the Contraceptive Mandate of the Affordable Care Act; Catholic doctors and hospitals with respect to other morally objectionable surgeries, such as sterilization and trans-gender surgery]

- similarly, the ability of charitable organizations to provide their services (e.g. adoption, immigrant care) in keeping with their religious conscience (e.g. abortion referrals, adoption placements etc.)
- the appointment of judges who will respect and defend the essential common good, as established by the natural law, as affirmed in the Constitution authentically understood

[More Information on Religious Freedom](#)

Democratic Platform

We recognize that quality, affordable comprehensive health care; medically accurate, LGBTQ+ inclusive, age-appropriate sex education; and the full range of family planning

services are all essential to ensuring that people can decide if, when, and how to start a family. (p.32)

We are proud to be the party of the Affordable Care Act, which prohibits discrimination in health care on the basis of sex and requires insurers to cover prescription contraceptives at no cost. These efforts have significantly reduced teen and unintended pregnancies by making it easier to decide whether, when, and how to have a child. (*Ibid.*)

Democrats are committed to ending discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, language, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability status. (p.34)

Religious freedom is a core American value and a core value of the Democratic Party. Democrats will protect the rights of each American for the free exercise of his or her own religion. It will be the policy of the Democratic Administration to advocate for religious freedom throughout the world. ... We will reject the Trump Administration's use of broad religious exemptions to allow businesses, medical providers, social service agencies, and others to discriminate. (p.48)

Republican Platform

We value the right of America's religious leaders to preach, and Americans to speak freely, according to their faith. Republicans believe the federal government, specifically the IRS, is constitutionally prohibited from policing or censoring speech based on religious convictions or beliefs, and therefore we urge the repeal of the Johnson Amendment. (p.11)

We pledge to defend the religious beliefs and rights of conscience of all Americans and to safeguard religious institutions against government control. (p.11)

We likewise endorse the efforts of Republican state legislators and governors who have defied intimidation from corporations and the media in defending religious liberty. We support laws to confirm the longstanding American tradition that religious individuals and institutions can educate young people, receive government benefits, and participate in public debates without having to check their religious beliefs at the door. (p.11-12)

To protect religious liberty we will ensure that faith-based institutions, especially those that are vital parts of underserved neighborhoods, do not face discrimination by government. (p.32)

We support the rights of conscience of military chaplains of all faiths to practice their faith free from political interference. (p. 43)

THE PLATFORMS WITH RESPECT TO NEGOTIABLE ISSUES

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Wade Lecture, St. Louis University (1983). A consistent ethic of life does not equate the problem of taking life (e.g., through abortion and in war) with the problem of promoting human dignity (through humane programs of nutrition, health care, and housing). But a consistent ethic identifies both the protection of life and its promotion as moral questions. It argues for a continuum of life which must be sustained in the face of diverse and distinct threats. . . . [It] seeks to present a coherent linkage among a diverse set of issues. It can and should be used to test party platforms, public policies, and political candidates.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Letter to the U.S. Bishops (July 2004)*. ... Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion and euthanasia. For example, if a Catholic were to be at odds with the Holy Father on the application of capital punishment or on the decision to wage war, he would not for that reason be considered unworthy to present himself to receive Holy Communion. While the Church exhorts civil authorities to seek peace, not war, and to exercise discretion and mercy in imposing punishment on criminals, it may still be permissible to take up arms to repel an aggressor or to have recourse to capital punishment. There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion and euthanasia.*

* The point here is not the status of the teaching objecting to capital punishment, since strengthened by Pope Francis, but the distinction between an intrinsic evil (abortion) and actions which are dependent upon multiple considerations.

U.S.C.C.B., *Forming Consciences 33*. Prudential judgment is also needed in applying moral principles to specific policy choices in areas such as armed conflict, housing, health care, immigration, and others. This does not mean that all choices are equally valid, or that our guidance and that of other Church leaders is just another political opinion or policy preference among many others. Rather, we urge Catholics to listen carefully to the Church's teachers when we apply Catholic social teaching to specific proposals and situations. The judgments and recommendations that we make as bishops on such specific issues do not carry the same moral authority as statements of universal moral teachings. Nevertheless, the Church's guidance on these matters is an essential

resource for Catholics as they determine whether their own moral judgments are consistent with the Gospel and with Catholic teaching.

34. Catholics often face difficult choices about how to vote. This is why it is so important to vote according to a well-formed conscience that perceives the proper relationship among moral goods. A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to subhuman living conditions, redefining marriage in ways that violate its essential meaning, or racist behavior, if the voter's intent is to support that position. In such cases, a Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in grave evil. At the same time, a voter should not use a candidate's opposition to an intrinsic evil to justify indifference or inattentiveness to other important moral issues involving human life and dignity.

[More Information on Negotiable Issues](#)

[More Information on Non-Negotiable Issues](#)

A. War and Peace

CCC 2307 The fifth commandment forbids the intentional destruction of human life. Because of the evils and injustices that accompany all war, the Church insistently urges everyone to prayer and to action so that the divine Goodness may free us from the ancient bondage of war. (Cf. Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et spes* 81, 4)

CCC 2308 All citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war. However, "as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed." (*GS* 79, 4)

U.S.C.C.B., *Forming Consciences* 68. Catholics must also work to avoid war and to promote peace. This is of particular importance, as there is a danger in the present time of becoming indifferent to war because of the number of armed conflicts. War is never a reflection of what ought to be but a sign that something more true to human dignity has failed. The Catholic tradition recognizes the legitimacy of just war teaching when defending the innocent in the face of grave evil, but we must never lose sight of the cost of war and its harm to human life. Nations should protect the dignity of the human person and the right to life by finding more effective ways to prevent conflicts, to resolve them

by peaceful means, and to promote reconstruction and reconciliation in the wake of conflicts. Nations have a right and obligation to defend human life and the common good against terrorism, aggression, and similar threats, such as the targeting of persons for persecution because of their religion, including Christians. . . . Indeed, the duty of nations to defend human life and the common good demands effective responses to terror, moral assessment of and restraint in the means used, respect for ethical limits on the use of force, a focus on the roots of terror, and fair distribution of the burdens of responding to terror. The use of torture must be rejected as fundamentally incompatible with the dignity of the human person and ultimately counterproductive in the effort to combat terrorism. The Church has raised fundamental moral concerns about preventive use of military force.

69. Even when military force can be justified as a last resort, it should not be indiscriminate or disproportionate. Direct and intentional attacks on noncombatants in war and terrorist acts are never morally acceptable. The use of weapons of mass destruction or other means of warfare that do not distinguish between civilians and soldiers is fundamentally immoral. The United States has a responsibility to work to reverse the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and to reduce its own reliance on weapons of mass destruction by pursuing progressive nuclear disarmament. It also must end its use of anti-personnel landmines and reduce its predominant role in the global arms trade.

[More Information on War and Peace](#)

B. Capital Punishment and Criminal Justice

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2267 [Pope Francis, Rescriptum, 02.08.2018].

Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good. [Pope Francis, Rescriptum, 02.08.2018]. Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good.

Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of

citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption.

Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that “the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person”, and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.

U.S.C.C.B., *Forming Consciences* 84. Promoting moral responsibility and effective responses to violent crime, curbing violence in media, supporting reasonable restrictions on access to assault weapons and handguns, and opposing the use of the death penalty are particularly important in light of a growing “culture of violence.” An ethic of responsibility, rehabilitation, and restoration should be a foundation for the reform of our broken criminal justice system. A humane and remedial rather than a strictly punitive approach to offenders should be developed. Such an approach includes supporting efforts that justly reduce the prison population, help people leaving prison to reintegrate into their communities, combat recidivism, promote just sentencing reform, and strengthen relationships between the police and the communities they serve.

[More Information on Capital Punishment](#)

C. Economic Policy

Pope St. John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* 35. . . . [I]t is right to speak of a struggle against an economic system, if the latter is understood as a method of upholding the absolute predominance of capital, the possession of the means of production and of the land, in contrast to the free and personal nature of human work. In the struggle against such a system, what is being proposed as an alternative is not the socialist system, which in fact turns out to be State capitalism, but rather *a society of free work, of enterprise and of participation*. Such a society is not directed against the market, but demands that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the State, so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole of society are satisfied. . . . We have seen that it is unacceptable to say that the defeat of so-called *Real Socialism* leaves capitalism as the only model of economic organization.

U.S.C.C.B., *Forming Consciences* 75. Welfare policy should reduce poverty and dependency, strengthen family life, and help families leave poverty through work, training, and assistance with child care, health care, housing, and transportation. Given the link between family stability and economic success, welfare policy should address

both the economic and cultural factors that contribute to family breakdown. It should also provide a safety net for those who cannot work. Improving the Earned Income Tax Credit and child tax credits, available as refunds to families in greatest need, will help lift low-income families out of poverty.

76. Faith-based groups deserve recognition and support, not as a substitute for government, but as responsive, effective partners, especially in the poorest communities and countries. The USCCB actively supports conscience clause and other religious freedom protections, opposes any effort to undermine the ability of faith-based groups to preserve their identity and integrity as partners with government, and is committed to protecting long-standing civil rights and other protections for both religious groups and the people they serve. Government bodies should not require Catholic institutions to compromise their moral or religious convictions to participate in government health or human service programs.

[More Information on Economic Policy](#)

D. Health Care

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2211 The political community has a duty to honor the family, to assist it, and to ensure especially: . . .

- in keeping with the country's institutions, the right to medical care, assistance for the aged, and family benefits;
- the protection of security and health, especially with respect to dangers like drugs, pornography, alcoholism, etc.;

U.S.C.C.B., *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* 80. Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. Despite an increase in the number of people insured, millions of Americans still lack health care coverage. Health care coverage remains an urgent national priority. The nation's health care system needs to be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, respect the principle of subsidiarity, and meet the needs of the poor and uninsured, especially born and unborn children, pregnant women, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations. Employers, including religious groups and family-owned businesses, should be able to provide health care without compromising their moral or religious convictions, and individuals should be able to purchase health care that accords with their faith. The USCCB supports measures to strengthen Medicare and Medicaid.

Our conference also advocates effective, compassionate care that reflects Catholic moral values for those suffering from HIV/AIDS and those coping with addictions.

U.S.C.C.B., *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services (6th Edition)*, Introduction. A just health care system will be concerned both with promoting equity of care—to assure that the right of each person to basic health care is respected—and with promoting the good health of all in the community. The responsible stewardship of health care resources can be accomplished best in dialogue with people from all levels of society, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity and with respect for the moral principles that guide institutions and persons.

. . . Catholic health care services will encounter requests for medical procedures contrary to the moral teachings of the Church. Catholic health care does not offend the rights of individual conscience by refusing to provide or permit medical procedures that are judged morally wrong by the teaching authority of the Church.

67. Catholic health care organizations are not permitted to engage in immediate material cooperation in actions that are intrinsically immoral, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and direct sterilization.

[More Information on Health Care](#)

E. Immigration

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2241 The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him. Political authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants' duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens.

Pope St. John Paul II, Address to the Congress on the Pastoral Care of Migrants (9 October 1998). Immigration is a complex question, which concerns not only individuals

searching for more secure and dignified living conditions, but also the population of the host countries. . . . Christians are asked to assume their responsibilities in the Church and in society with greater clarity and determination. As citizens of an immigrant country who know the demands of their faith, believers must show that Christ’s Gospel is at the service of the welfare and the freedom of all God’s children.

U.S.C.C.B., *Forming Consciences* 81. The Gospel mandate to “welcome the stranger” requires Catholics to care for and stand with newcomers, authorized and unauthorized, including unaccompanied immigrant children, refugees and asylum-seekers, those unnecessarily detained, and victims of human trafficking. Comprehensive reform is urgently necessary to fix a broken immigration system and should include a broad and fair legalization program with a path to citizenship; a work program with worker protections and just wages; family reunification policies; access to legal protections, which include due process procedures; refuge for those fleeing persecution and violence; and policies to address the root causes of migration. The right and responsibility of nations to control their borders and to maintain the rule of law should be recognized but pursued in a just and humane manner. The detention of immigrants should be used to protect public safety and not for purposes of deterrence or punishment; alternatives to detention, including community-based programs, should be emphasized.

As Pope Francis has said, human trafficking is a “crime against humanity” (Address, Dec. 12, 2013, and April 10, 2014) and should be eradicated from the earth. Trafficking victims, most especially children, should receive care and protection, including special consideration for permanent legal status. Additional education and mobilization efforts are needed to address the root causes of human trafficking—poverty, conflict, and the breakdown of judicial process in source countries.

91. (As a policy goal) Achieve comprehensive immigration reform that offers a path to citizenship, treats immigrant workers fairly, prevents the separation of families, maintains the integrity of our borders, respects the rule of law, and addresses the factors that compel people to leave their own countries.

[More Information on Immigration](#)

F. Environment

Pope St. John Paul II, Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* 42. ... the dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to ‘use and misuse,’ or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to ‘eat of the fruit of the tree’ (cf. Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity" .

Pope Francis, *Inaugural Mass (19 March 2013)*. I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be 'protectors' of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.

Pope Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'* 60. [W]e need to acknowledge that different approaches and lines of thought have emerged regarding this situation and its possible solutions. At one extreme, we find those who doggedly uphold the myth of progress and tell us that ecological problems will solve themselves simply with the application of new technology and without any need for ethical considerations or deep change. At the other extreme are those who view men and women and all their interventions as no more than a threat, jeopardizing the global ecosystem, and consequently the presence of human beings on the planet should be reduced and all forms of intervention prohibited. Viable future scenarios will have to be generated between these extremes, since there is no one path to a solution. This makes a variety of proposals possible, all capable of entering into dialogue with a view to developing comprehensive solutions.

U.S.C.C.B., *Forming Consciences* 86. Care for Creation is a moral issue. Protecting the land, water, and air we share is a religious duty of stewardship and reflects our responsibility to born and unborn children, who are most vulnerable to environmental assault. We must answer the question that Pope Francis posed to the world: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 160). There are many concrete steps we can take to assure justice and solidarity between the generations. Effective initiatives are required for energy conservation and the development of alternate, renewable, and clean-energy resources. Our Conference offers a distinctive call to seriously address global climate change, focusing on the virtue of prudence, pursuit of the common good, and the impact on the poor, particularly on vulnerable workers and the poorest nations. The United States should lead in contributing to the sustainable development of poorer nations and

promoting greater justice in sharing the burden of environmental blight, neglect, and recovery.

It is important that we address the rising number of migrants who are uprooted from their homeland as a consequence of environmental degradation and climate change. They are not currently recognized as refugees under any existing international convention and are thus not afforded legal protections that ought to be due to them.

Our nation's efforts to reduce poverty should not be associated with demeaning and sometimes coercive population control programs.

[More Information on the Environment](#)