



FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP 2020

This series has been prepared by the Wisconsin Catholic Conference as a guide for those who wish to inform their consciences in order to participate more fully in the political process. To learn more about the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship (FCFC)*, visit www.faithfulcitizenship.org and www.wisconsinatholic.org.

Third in a five-part series

Life & Dignity of the Human Person



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Why is protecting the unborn of such great importance?

As Pope Francis explains, “Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenceless and innocent among us. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this. ... [T]his defence of unborn life is closely linked to the defence of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 213)

HUMAN BEINGS ARE ENDS IN THEMSELVES AND NEVER A MEANS OF RESOLVING OTHER PROBLEMS. ONCE THIS CONVICTION DISAPPEARS, SO DO SOLID AND LASTING FOUNDATIONS FOR THE DEFENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS....

(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 213)

What about other human rights?

“The right to life implies and is linked to other human rights – to the basic goods that every human person needs to live and thrive. All the life issues are connected, for erosion of respect for the life of any individual or group in society necessarily diminishes respect for all life. The moral imperative to respond to the needs of our neighbors – basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work – is universally binding on our consciences and may be legitimately fulfilled by a variety of means. Catholics must seek the best ways to respond to these needs.” (*FCFC*, 25)

“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 protect the right to life by seeking effective ways 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. We revere the lives of children in the womb, the lives of persons dying in war and from starvation, and indeed the lives of all human beings as children of God. We stand opposed to these and all activities that contribute to what Pope Francis has called ‘a throwaway culture.’” (*FCFC*, 45)

Poverty & Economic Justice

What is a just economy?

The Church calls on us to use all our spiritual, moral, and intellectual energies to create a new order – “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.” (St. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 35)

“Economic decisions and institutions should be assessed according to whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person. Social and economic policies should foster the creation of jobs for all who can work with decent working conditions and just wages. Barriers to equal pay and employment for women and those facing unjust discrimination must be overcome. Catholic social teaching supports the right of workers to choose whether to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal. It also affirms economic freedom, initiative, and the right to private property.” (*FCFC*, 73)

Why is there a growing gap between the rich and the poor?

As Pope Francis has written, “This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. ... Debt and the accumulation of interest also make it difficult for countries to realize the potential of their own economies and keep citizens from enjoying their real purchasing power. To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 56)

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What can we do about poverty?

Jesus told us that the poor will always be with us. But this does not absolve us from our responsibility to help liberate those living in poverty. “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.” (*FCFC*, 75)

THE DIGNITY OF EACH HUMAN PERSON AND THE PURSUIT OF THE COMMON GOOD ARE CONCERNS WHICH OUGHT TO SHAPE ALL ECONOMIC POLICIES.

(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 203)

What are the effects of consumerism?

As Pope Francis has written, “Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading. ... To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 53-54)