

The Catholic Church, Politics and Political Issues

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) provides a resource for the Catholic faithful *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (tambien en Español), this teaching document on the political responsibility of Catholics also provides guidance in the exercise of their rights and duties as participants in our democracy.

In particular, we draw your attention to the *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship - Introductory Letter* which reads in part:

Pope Francis has continued to draw attention to important issues such as migration, xenophobia, racism, abortion, global conflict, and care for creation. In the United States and around the world, many challenges demand our attention.

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.

The USCCB has also recently released a series of videos to inspire prayer and action in political life and to help Catholics apply the Church's teaching as handed down by Pope Francis. The videos complement *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, and seek to help the faithful participate in public life, prioritize faith over partisan politics, engage with civility, and respond to pressing issues of our day. Each video ends with a prayer. The videos are titled:

Catholics Participate in Public Life

Catholics Protect Human Life and Dignity

Catholics Promote the Common Good

Catholics Love their Neighbors

Faithful Citizens Work with Christ as He Builds His Kingdom (a compilation of the four videos)

Importantly, as we enter this Presidential election year, below are some reminders regarding political activity and the exercising of our civic rights and duties.

As you are already aware, parishes and other nonprofit, IRS-designated section 501(c)(3) church organizations are prohibited from participating in political campaign activity. Thus, certain political activities that are entirely appropriate for individuals may not be undertaken by church organizations or their representatives.

For quick reference, you are encouraged to review the complete list of Do's and Don'ts Guidelines During Election Season and/or a list of more detailed guidance regarding political activity provided by the USCCB Office of General Counsel. An abbreviated list of "Do's and Don'ts" follows.

DO:

- Address the moral and human dimensions of public issues.

- Share church teaching on human life, human rights, and justice and peace.
- Apply Catholic values to legislation and public issues.
- Conduct a non-partisan voter registration drive on church property.
- Distribute unbiased candidate questionnaires covering issues of human life, justice, and peace that have been reviewed and approved by your diocesan attorney.
- Check with your diocesan attorney if you have any questions about what is appropriate.

DON'T:

- Endorse or oppose candidates for political office.
- Distribute partisan campaign literature under church auspices.
- Arrange for groups to work for a candidate for public office.
- Invite only selected candidates to address your church-sponsored group.
- Conduct voter registration slanted toward one party.
- Distribute a biased candidate survey.

The Environment

“Praise be to you, my Lord.”

“LAUDATO SI’, mi’ Signore”

– “Praise be to you, my Lord.”

These are the words that open Pope Francis’ encyclical on ecology and care for God’s creation. These words, quoting St. Francis of Assisi’s beautiful canticle, remind us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. Pope Francis’ encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* was released in June 2015. Five years later, in 2020, Pope Francis invited all Catholics and people of good will to celebrate its fifth anniversary by protecting families and future generations through action to care for our common home. Here are themes that Pope Francis highlighted in *Laudato Si’* which require our urgent response today.

- **A Moral and Spiritual Challenge.** The ecological crisis, Pope Francis writes, is a summons to profound interior conversion—to renew our relationships with God, one another, and the created world.
- **Care for God’s Creation.** God created the world and entrusted it to us as a gift. Now we have the responsibility to care for and protect it and all people, who are part of creation. Protecting human dignity is strongly linked to care for creation.
- **We are All Connected.** We are connected to the rest of the human family, to the created world, and to those who will come after us in future generations.
- **Impact on the Poor.** People in poverty have contributed least to climate change, yet they are disproportionately impacted by it. As a result of excessive use of natural resource by wealthy nations, those who are poor experience pollution, lack of access to clean water, hunger, and more.
 - **Called to Solidarity.** We are one human family and have a shared responsibility for others and for creation. Wealthy countries have a responsibility to reduce consumption of non-renewal resources and should help poorer nations develop in sustainable ways.
 - **Technological and economic development must serve human beings and enhance human dignity, instead of creating an economy of exclusion, so that all people have access to what is needed for authentic human development.**
- **Supporting Life, Protecting Creation.** Concern for nature is incompatible with failure to protect vulnerable human beings, such as unborn children, people with disabilities, or victims of human trafficking.
- **A Time to Act.** Pope Francis calls for a change in lifestyle and consumption. We can make important changes as individuals, families, and communities, and as civil and political leaders.
- **Hope and Joy.** “Injustice is not invincible” (no. 74) and we act knowing that we seek to live out God’s vision of renewed relationships with God, ourselves, one another, and creation.

How You Can Respond

Each of us are called to take concrete steps – from reducing consumption to working for political change – to better care for creation. Here are some ideas.

1. Become more aware of our connectedness. Care for one another and creation includes understanding that “everything is connected” (no. 91) and that the economy, politics, community involvement, and technology all affect the future of the planet and humankind. How can we become more aware of our connectedness?
2. Changes to lifestyle and consumption habits can make a big difference. For example, get a re-usable water bottle, take shorter showers, walk, bike or take public transportation instead of driving, recycle, compost food waste, and buy energy efficient appliances.
3. Make changes institutionally at your parish, school, or workplace. For example, start recycling and composting, use washable dinnerware in cafeterias, share electronically instead of printing, do an energy audit, and install solar panels.
4. Support local efforts to solve environmental problems. Community groups around the country are working to make city, county, and state-wide changes that can make a big difference. Find out what is going on locally and get involved.
5. Contact your members of Congress to share Pope Francis’ message and urge action to address climate change.

Prayer

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love, teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of you. Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made. Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is. God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. The poor and the earth are crying out. O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty. Praise be to you! Amen.

Excerpted from “A Christian prayer in union with creation,” in *Laudato Si’*, no. 246
For More Information: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops webpage on Environment and Environmental Justice (www.usccb.org/environment)

- Catholic Climate Covenant(www.catholicclimatecovenant.org)
- WeAreSaltAndLight.org

Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration

The Catholic Church in the United States is an immigrant Church with a long history of embracing diverse newcomers and providing assistance and pastoral care to immigrants, migrants, refugees, and people on the move. Our Church has responded to Christ's call for us to "welcome the stranger among us," for in this encounter with the immigrant, the migrant, and the refugee in our midst, we encounter Christ.

A rich body of Church teaching, including Papal encyclicals, Bishops' statements and pastoral letters, has consistently reinforced our moral obligation to treat the stranger as we would treat Christ himself. In the 2001 pastoral statement, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, the Bishops of the United States called upon the Catholic faithful to a conversion of minds and hearts, imploring us to communion and solidarity with diverse newcomers, and entreating us to find new and meaningful ways to welcome our immigrant sisters and brothers into our parishes, schools and communities. In 2003, the Bishops of the United States, together with the Bishops of Mexico, in the pastoral statement, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope" / "Juntos en el Camino de la Esperanza Ya no Somos Extranjeros" acknowledged that the current immigration system is badly in need of reform and offered a comprehensive set of recommendations for changing U.S. laws and policies to bring about a more humane and just immigration system in the United States.

Immigration in the United States is a complex issue. When evaluating immigration policy issues, it is necessary to address the human dignity of immigrants and refugees who are seeking refuge and a better life, and respect and recognize due process and human rights. It is also important to acknowledge states' rights and responsibilities to control their borders. Immigrants and refugees have various reasons for why they want to come to the United States: many flee persecution and exploitation, some hope to reunite with family members already living in the U.S. or to find work that will provide support and a just way of life for their families back home. Our current broken immigration system has led to undocumented people living in this country, working jobs and raising their families in fear of deportation. Go to the USCCB website to learn more about the Church's migration principles and values.

Five principles that help guide the Church's approach to migration

I. Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.

All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.

II. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.

The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right.

III. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.

The Church recognizes the right of sovereign nations to control their territories but rejects such control when it is exerted merely for the purpose of acquiring additional wealth. More powerful economic nations, which have the ability to protect and feed their residents, have a strong obligation to accommodate migration flows.

IV. Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.

Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. This requires, at a minimum, that migrants have a right to claim refugee status without incarceration and to have their claims fully considered by a competent authority.

V. The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected.

Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Often, they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment by enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.