



DIOCESE OF  
SACRAMENTO

Office of Catholic Charities & Social Concerns

# FORMING CONSCIENCE FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

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## PURSUING THE COMMON GOOD WITH A MIND LIKE CHRIST

*Rediscovering Our Vocation as Citizens*



## INTRODUCTION

As **Catholics**, we are called to participate in public life in a manner consistent with the mission of our Lord, a mission that he has called us to share. On this mission, we “take up the task of serving the common good with joy and hope, confident that God, who ‘*so loved the world that he gave his only Son,*’ walks with us and strengthens us on the way”. As missionary disciples, we are accompanied by the Holy Spirit who works in each of us and in every human situation, guiding our hearts, thoughts and actions to build a “civilization of love”. A civilization in which “all human beings have the freedom and opportunity to experience the love of God and live out that love by making a free gift of themselves to one another” (*Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship*, pg. 13). Christ’s love for us let’s us see our human dignity in full clarity and compels us to love our neighbors as he has loved us

The upcoming elections, local, state and national, present us with opportunities and challenges to ensure that every person, child, and family can participate in the “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” that our nation was founded upon. As Pope Francis teaches, “An authentic faith . . . always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 183). As Catholics, we are “obligated to participate in shaping the moral character of society” with a “mind like Christ”, guided by His true wisdom, by praying often, letting faith inform our political participation.

This summer we encourage the Faithful to:

- Understand what the Church teaches about issues affecting public policy
- Develop a well-formed conscience to be able to address political and social questions
- Engage in genuine dialogue and openness to others



## CALL TO ACTION

Parishes, ministries and families are encouraged to share and participate this summer and fall in forming our conscience for faithful citizenship and to prepare our minds’ to be like Christ by sharing and utilizing the following resources:

### July - September 2nd (*Included in this Packet*)

- **Liturgy:** Incorporate Prayers of the Faithful and Homily Helps
- **Share Bulletin Inserts** for *Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship* (USCCB)
- **What does it mean to form my conscience?** (USCCB)
- **Watch Videos** explaining *Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship* (USCCB)
- **Sign Up** for the California Advocacy Network (California Catholic Conference of Bishops)
- **Attend and Invite Others** to Webinars on *Faithful Citizenship* hosted by Office of Catholic Charities and Social Concerns of the Diocese of Sacramento

### September - October (*Will be released at a later date*)

- **Learn, Promote and Participate** in Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

### October 27 - November 4 (*Will be released at a later date*)

- **Pray the Novena** for Faithful Citizenship



# LITURGY

**Prayers of the Faithful:** The following intercessions may be used together or individually.

- For the Church, that we may be a witness to Christ's love by practicing charity and promoting justice and peace throughout the world, *we pray the Lord*
- For the people of the United States, that we may be united in building a society in which everyone can have the opportunity to live with dignity and hope, *we pray to the Lord*
- For Catholics throughout our nation, that the values of our faith may guide us to be active participants in civic life, *we pray to the Lord*
- For members of this community, that we may find ways to help build a world of greater respect for human life and human dignity, *we pray to the Lord*
- For those who serve in elected office, that they may lead with courage and wisdom, reflecting the Church's teaching that the moral test of our society is how the weak, the poor, and the vulnerable are faring, *we pray to the Lord*
- *For parishioners who have been elected to public office, that they might use their offices to protect the unborn and promote the dignity of the poor and vulnerable, we pray to the Lord*
- For those who are suffering from poverty and injustice, that our decisions this election year may lead to policies and programs that help them live in dignity, *we pray to the Lord*
- For the earth, that our nation's leaders will be inspired by God's Spirit to protect all of His creation, *we pray to the Lord*
- For workers around the world, especially children who work long hours for little pay, that might all seek ways to promote fairness, justice and dignity in their lives, *we pray to the Lord*

Source: *Liturgy and Prayer Suggestions, Faithful Citizenship*,  Committee of Justice and Peace, USCCB

Office of Catholic Charities & Social Concerns

# LITURGY



**"I am the Bread of Life, whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst." – John 6:35**

**Note:** Homilists are encouraged to use the points below to develop their own homily, sensitive to the needs of their congregation. Homilists are encouraged to address the topic of *faithful citizenship* with great pastoral sensitivity, knowing how divisive local, state and national elections can be in our society and among Catholics.

Homilists are encouraged to speak about *faithful citizenship* from the framework that the "Church's obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith" (*Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 9). Receiving Christ in the Eucharist, propels us to live our faith in our society to uphold and protect the **dignity of each person**, to love in **solidarity**, and pursue the **common good for all**.

- **The Eucharist, Body of Christ, Broken for the world:** The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11), and in the Eucharist we encounter God's presence in personal and profound ways.
  - "A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented" (*God is Love*, no. 14). The Eucharist teaches us about human dignity, calls us to right relationship with God, ourselves and others.
  - As Catholics, we believe Christ offers Himself equally to each one and the Eucharist awakens our awareness of the **Dignity of each person**. This dignity of the human person is the "foundation of a moral vision for society" (*Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 44).
- **The Eucharist moves us and inspires us to respond:** In the Eucharist, the boundlessness of the Father's love "springs up within us a lively response" that causes us to "begin to love" (*Dominicae Cenae*, no. 5).
  - Contemplating Christ's sacrifice for the world in need, we are compelled to follow his example. Drawn "into the very dynamic of self-giving" we are moved to self-giving action in solidarity with the members of our human family who face injustice (*God is Love*, no. 13).
  - **Solidarity** highlights . . . the intrinsic and social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity, and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards a an ever more committed unity (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 192-193).
- **The Eucharist propels us forth to transform the world:** The Eucharist "increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today".
  - Christ in the Eucharist calls us to build "a more human world a world fully in harmony with God's plan" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20). Filled with awe for all we have received in Christ's self-gift, we respond with service and works of charity.
  - **The Common Good** indicates "The sum of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 26). Human Dignity is respected and the Common Good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met (*Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 49).





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# FORMING CONSCIENCE FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

**Bulletin Inserts**

**Resource:** *What does it mean  
to form my conscience?*

# Introductory Note



*Let us look to the example of the Good Samaritan. Jesus' parable summons us to rediscover our vocation as citizens of our respective nations and of the entire world, builders of a new social bond. This summons is ever new, yet it is grounded in a fundamental law of our being: we are called to direct society to the pursuit of the common good and, with this purpose in mind, to persevere in consolidating its political and social order, its fabric of relations, its human goals.*

(Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 66)

As Catholics and Americans, we are blessed to be able to participate in our nation's political and public life. Our freedoms respect the dignity of individuals and their consciences and allow us to come together for the common good. Election seasons, therefore, should contain a sense of gratitude and hope. Our love for this country, our patriotism, properly impels us to vote.

But increasingly, it seems, election seasons are a time of anxiety and spiritual trial. Political rhetoric is increasingly angry, seeking to motivate primarily through division and hatred. Fear can be an effective tool for raising money. The most heated arguments online often get the most clicks. Demonizing the other can win votes.

We propose once more the moral framework of *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* precisely as pastors, inspired by the Good Samaritan, with the hope of binding these wounds and healing these bitter divisions. This document is not based on personalities or partisanship, the latest news cycle, or what's trending on social media. Instead, it reflects the perennial role of the Church in public life in proclaiming timeless principles: the infinite

worth and dignity of every human life, the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity. Not sure what these mean? We invite you to read a copy of *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* and learn more.

Allowing your conscience to be stretched and formed by these reflections can give you peace! They point to Jesus' challenge to show mercy to those in need, just as the Good Samaritan. As Pope Francis writes, "Here, all our distinctions, labels and masks fall away: it is the moment of truth. Will we bend down to touch and heal the wounds of others?" (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 70). Let this be in our hearts when we talk about politics and make political choices.

Some might be tempted to say: yes, of course, we will be the ones who help by promoting good and opposing evil. But when confronted with so much good at risk and so much evil, it is a great challenge to avoid fear and anger. The threat of abortion remains our pre-eminent priority because it directly attacks our most vulnerable and voiceless brothers and sisters and destroys more than a million lives per year in our country alone. Other grave threats to the life and dignity of the human person include euthanasia, gun violence, terrorism, the death penalty, and human trafficking. There is also the redefinition of marriage and gender, threats to religious freedom at home and abroad, lack of justice for the poor, the suffering of migrants and refugees, wars and famines around the world, racism, the need for greater access to healthcare and education, care for our common home, and more. All threaten the dignity of the human person.

So *precisely how* we promote good and oppose evil is an essential part of answering the Lord's call, of being a disciple. As St. Paul reminds us:

*Never let evil talk pass your lips; say only the good things men need to hear, things that will really help them. Do nothing that will sadden the Holy Spirit with whom you were sealed against the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, all passion and anger, harsh words, slander, and malice of every kind. In place of these, be kind to one another, compassionate, and mutually forgiving, just as God has forgiven you in Christ (Eph. 4:29-32).*

Thus, Pope Francis exhorts us to “genuine dialogue and openness to others,” by which we may “be frank and open about our beliefs, while continuing to discuss, to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together” (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 203). This applies to the faithful both as voters and as candidates—we must consider not only candidates’ positions on these issues, but their character and integrity as well.

How can we meet this challenge? Again, St. Paul gives us a way: Put on “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). Take time away from social media and spend time with Holy Scripture and the Blessed Sacrament. Turn off the TV and the podcast, and listen in silence. Volunteer at a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter, a crisis pregnancy center. Serve the poor, the needy, the outcast. Pray often, letting faith inform your political participation.

Participation in political life also requires judgments about concrete circumstances. While the bishops help form the laity in accordance with basic principles, they do not tell the laity to vote for particular candidates. On these often complex matters, it is the laity’s responsibility to form their consciences and grow in the virtue of prudence to approach the many and varied issues of the day with the mind of Christ. Conscience is “a judgment of reason” by which one determines whether an action is right or wrong (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1778). It does not allow us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere “feeling.” Conscience—properly formed according to God’s revelation and the teaching of the Church—is a means by which one listens to God and discerns how to act in accordance with the truth.<sup>1</sup> The truth is something we receive, not something we make. We can only judge using the conscience we have, but our judgments do not make things true.

It is our responsibility to learn more of Catholic teaching and tradition, to participate in Church life, to learn from trustworthy sources about the issues facing our communities, and to do our best

to make wise judgments about candidates and government actions.

We must also seek wisdom, as Holy Scripture instructs:

*Wisdom from above is first of all innocent. It is also peaceable, lenient, docile, rich in sympathy and the kindly deeds that are its fruits, impartial and sincere. The harvest of justice is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace (Jas. 3:17-18).*

The teachings of the Church, moreover, offer a vision of hope, where justice and mercy abound, because God is the infinite source of all goodness and love. With this wisdom and hope, we can find a way to bend down as the Good Samaritan did, through the fear and divisions, to touch and heal the wounds.

May God bless you as you consider and pray over these challenging decisions. May God bless our nation with true wisdom, peace, and mutual forgiveness, that we may decide together, through our democratic processes, to uphold the dignity of life and the common good.

This bulletin insert along with five others was approved by the body of U.S. bishops in November 2023. Find this and more complementary resources at [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org).

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<sup>1</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* (*The Church in the Modern World*), no. 16. See also, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1785.

# The Role of the Church in American Political Life



*The Church is the body of Christ, who reigns as king over all Creation. Everything, including political life, belongs to Jesus Christ, and so participation in political life belongs to the mission of the Church. Our mandate is to 'go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation' (Mk 16:15). . . . Here, 'the creation' refers to every aspect of human life. . . 'Nothing human can be alien to it.'*

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 181, quoting *Aporecida Document*, no. 380

Our national tradition of religious freedom permits and encourages all people of faith to bring the insights of their religious traditions to bear on political matters. As Pope Francis affirmed during his visit to the U.S., "Religious liberty, by its nature, transcends places of worship and the private sphere of individuals and families. . . . Religion itself, the religious dimension, is not a subculture; it is part of the culture of every people and every nation."<sup>1</sup>

"If society is to have a future, it must respect the truth of our human dignity and submit to that truth. . . . A society is noble and decent not least for its support of the pursuit of truth and its adherence to the most

basic of truths" (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 207). The truths that guide public life can be known by natural reason. The sanctity of human life, the equal dignity of all individuals, the obligation to protect the vulnerable, the nature and purposes of sex, marriage, and family—these are not exclusively "religious" truths, but truths that all people of goodwill can come to know without the aid of revelation. Our Catholic faith sheds light on these truths, and so we have a duty to bring that light to our nation.

★ ———  
"The truth is something we receive, not something we make. We can only judge using the conscience we have, but our judgments do not make things true."  
——— ★

## Many Parts, All One Body

The bishops and their pastoral collaborators each have distinct roles in the Church's mission. The bishops have the responsibility to govern the society of the Church, hand

on doctrine and tradition, and administer the sacraments. The laity are called to bring the gospel to bear on the world. While many laity are involved in roles of leadership and service within the Church, it remains primarily the role of the laity to advocate for justice, to serve in public office, and to inform daily life with the gospel. “The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society is proper to the lay faithful” (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 29).

Participation in political life requires judgments about concrete circumstances. While bishops together with their coworkers help form the laity in accordance with basic principles, they do not tell the laity to vote for particular candidates. On these often complex matters, it is the laity’s responsibility to form their consciences and grow in the virtue of prudence to approach the many and varied issues of the day with the mind of Christ.

## Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

Conscience is “a judgment of reason” by which one determines whether an action is right or wrong (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1778). It does not allow us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere “feeling.” Conscience—properly formed according to God’s revelation and the teaching of the Church—is a means by which one listens to God and discerns how to act in accordance with the truth.<sup>2</sup> The truth is something we receive, not something we make. We can only judge using the conscience we have, but our judgments do not make things true.

It is our responsibility to learn more of Catholic teaching and tradition, to participate in Church life, to learn from trustworthy sources about the issues facing our communities, and to do our best to make wise judgments about candidates and government actions. These decisions should take into account a candidate’s commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue. Thus equipped, and further impelled by our sense of patriotism, we exercise our right and duty to vote and otherwise to participate actively in public life.<sup>3</sup> By forming our consciences for faithful citizenship, we can better pursue the common good and thus obey the command of our Lord to love our neighbors.

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1 Pope Francis, Meeting for Religious Liberty with Hispanic Community and Other Immigrants, September 26, 2015.

2 *Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World)*, no. 16. See also, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1785.

3 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2239-40.



# Dignity of the Human Person



In their statement on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the Catholic bishops of the United States identify the four main principles of the Church's social teaching and apply them to some concrete issues. This is not to tell the faithful for whom or against whom to vote, but instead to help them form their consciences in accordance with God's truth as they approach this often-challenging decision. The four main principles are the Dignity of the Human Person, the Common Good, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity. They are all interrelated. This bulletin focuses on the **Dignity of the Human Person**, and the other three principles are covered in three other bulletins in this series. —★

Because each human person is created in the image and likeness of God, each one of us possesses innate and inviolable human dignity. This dignity is present in each person from the moment of their conception and throughout their lives. As Pope Francis has emphasized, human dignity is central to building a society in which we are "brothers and sisters all."<sup>1</sup>

★ —  
"The dignity of the human person is the foundation for a moral vision of society."  
—★

*Every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally; this fundamental right cannot be denied by any country. People have this right even if they are unproductive, or were born with or developed limitations. This does not detract from their great dignity as human persons, a dignity based not on circumstances but on the intrinsic worth of their being. Unless this basic principle is upheld, there will be no future either for fraternity or for the survival of humanity.<sup>2</sup>*

Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 107

The dignity of the human person is the foundation for a moral vision of society. As we seek to imitate the Good Samaritan and become neighbor to all, we must work to protect the dignity of all, especially those who are most vulnerable.

As we engage in the public square with a well-formed conscience:

- We work to protect the most vulnerable—children in the womb who are in danger of abortion—while also standing in radical solidarity with mothers.<sup>3</sup> Building on their bond of flesh and kinship, and on the network of family, neighbor, and community relationships in which they are situated, the Church actively assists mothers and their children to have a brighter future.

- We continue to protect the dignity of our sister or brother who is elderly, disabled, or ill by strongly rejecting euthanasia and assisted suicide. These practices are symptoms of a “throw-away culture,” in which children of God of inestimable worth are cast aside as worthless.<sup>4</sup>
- Likewise, we must recognize the inherent dignity of the migrant and refugee. In our country now, that means 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.
- We support the dignity of the person, created male or female; therefore, we oppose a gender ideology that fails to recognize the difference and reciprocity between man and woman.<sup>5</sup>
- Racism attacks the dignity of the human person by denying that we are all equally made in the image of God, so we must overcome racism in our hearts as well as in our systems and institutions.<sup>6</sup>
- We continue to seek reform of the criminal justice system and to end the use of the death penalty. We support common sense measures to reduce gun violence.<sup>7</sup>
- Finally, we seek to prevent and remedy any aspects of an “economy of exclusion,”<sup>8</sup> which “does not hesitate to exploit, discard, and even kill human beings,”<sup>9</sup> and to work instead toward an “economy of communion” rooted in ethical concern.<sup>10</sup>

“Social friendship and universal fraternity”  
Pope Francis writes, “necessarily call for an acknowledgement of *the worth of every human person*, always and everywhere.”<sup>11</sup> Through our political participation, our accompaniment of those in need, and the witness of our daily lives, may we support the worth of every person, created in God’s image.

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1 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship), no. 8.

2 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 107. See also: Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), no. 45.

3 USCCB, “Letter and Policy Recommendations Supporting Women and Children,” October 26, 2022.

4 St. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), nos. 8, 15, 18, 23, 94. See also: Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* nos. 18-21.

5 Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love), no. 56.

6 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*, 3-8.

7 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, nos. 263-270. See also: *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 84.

8 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel), no. 53.

9 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 22.

10 Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, nos. 45-47.

11 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 106.

# The Common Good



In their statement on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the Catholic bishops of the United States identify the four main principles of the Church's social teaching and apply them to some concrete issues. This is not to tell the faithful for whom or against whom to vote, but instead to help them form their consciences in accordance with God's truth as they approach this often-challenging decision. The four main principles are the Dignity of the Human Person, the Common Good, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity. They are all interrelated. This bulletin focuses on the **Common Good**, and the other three principles are covered in three other bulletins in this series. —★

The Common Good is "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily."<sup>1</sup> 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 life, a right to religious freedom, and a right to have access to those things required for human decency.

Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to ourselves, to our families, to the larger society, and to the earth.<sup>2</sup>

★ In short, we should seek "to build that kind of society where it is easier for people to be good."<sup>3</sup>

In the midst of a "throwaway world" in which some members of the human family "can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence," Pope Francis urges us to build a "culture of encounter" in which those most in need receive our greatest concern and attention. We must "place at the center of all political, social and economic activity the human person, who enjoys the highest dignity, and respect for the common good."<sup>4</sup>

★ —  
"In short, we should seek 'to build that kind of society where it is easier for people to be good.'"  
—★

As we seek to imitate the Good Samaritan, who was neighbor to all, we pursue the Common Good in order that every individual and all people can flourish.<sup>5</sup>

- Marriage and the family are the central institutions of social life – the primary



school of virtue, where we first experience common rather than merely individual goods – and so these institutions should be supported and strengthened.

- Likewise, as one human family dwelling in our common home, we must hear “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” and respond to climate change with actions to better protect creation for our brothers and sisters now and in generations to come.<sup>6</sup>
- Accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father, and as our common home includes accepting our bodies as God’s gift, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation.<sup>7</sup>
- We recognize and protect the right to religious liberty, our first and most cherished freedom. The protection of conscience and religious liberty is an indispensable element of the common good – a fundamental human right that knows no geographical boundaries.<sup>8</sup>
- While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve special concern, which the Church describes as the *preferential option for the poor*.<sup>9</sup> Laws and policies must prioritize those who struggle to make ends meet and must preserve the social safety net and promote decent jobs, affordable housing, and childcare.

Pope Benedict XVI writes in *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth*): “To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity.” We must be attentive to the

common good “juridically, civilly, politically and culturally” in the life of society. “The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors,” he writes, “the more effectively we love them.”<sup>10</sup>

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1 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1906, citing *Gaudium et Spes* (*The Church in the Modern World*), no. 26.

2 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, nos. 49, 51.

3 Peter Maurin, as quoted by Dorothy Day. See *All the Way to Heaven: The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day* (New York: Random House, 2010), 457.

4 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*), nos. 18 and 232.

5 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*), no. 66.

6 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (*On Care for Our Common Home*), no. 49. See also: Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth*), nos. 48-52, and Pope Francis, *Laudate Deum*, nos. 58 and 60.

7 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (*On Care for Our Common Home*), no. 155.

8 St. Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae* (*Declaration on Religious Freedom*), no. 6; Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1907, citing *Gaudium et Spes* (*The Church in the Modern World*), no. 26.

9 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 53.

10 Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 7.

# Solidarity



In their statement on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the Catholic bishops of the United States identify the four main principles of the Church's social teaching and apply them to some concrete issues. This is not to tell the faithful for whom or against whom to vote, but instead to help them form their consciences in accordance with God's truth as they approach this often-challenging decision. The four main principles are the Dignity of the Human Person, the Common Good, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity. They are all interrelated. This bulletin focuses on **Solidarity**, and the other three principles are covered in three other bulletins in this series. —★

Solidarity is "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to . . . the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."<sup>1</sup> We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. The person is social in nature; we develop and flourish within a community. As baptized members of the community of the Church, we are part of one body in Christ and we are also part of one global human family.<sup>2</sup>

In *Fratelli Tutti* (*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*) Pope Francis places solidarity at the center of what it means to cultivate social friendship as one family:

*Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land, and housing, the denial of social and labor rights.*<sup>3</sup>

Thus, solidarity affects not only the goals we pursue in public life, but also the way we pursue them—ever mindful that we are all brothers and sisters, all children of God.

★ —  
"Solidarity requires that in our prayer and in our political engagement, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need receive preferential concern."  
—★

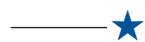
Solidarity requires that in our prayer and in our political engagement, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need receive preferential concern.

In imitation of the Good Samaritan, we seek to be neighbor to all.<sup>4</sup> We are called to practice “radical solidarity” by accompanying pregnant women to choose life and by offering support to new mothers and their children.<sup>5</sup> As neighbors to all, we also advocate for families affected by poverty, unemployment, or illness, individuals struggling with mental illness or addiction, the elderly and those with disabilities, and all whose livelihoods and homes are endangered by climate change.<sup>6</sup>

In countries ravaged by war, such as Ukraine, West Africa, and the Middle East, we must “touch the wounded flesh of the victims” and support efforts for relief and peace,<sup>7</sup> while also working collaboratively to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons.<sup>8</sup>



“In imitation of the Good Samaritan, we seek to be neighbor to all.”



We seek policies that “welcome, protect, promote, and integrate” migrants and refugees who arrive at our borders, and which aid development in countries of origin.<sup>9</sup>

Racism is an obstacle to solidarity, and we strive to root it out not only by examining our hearts individually, but also by looking critically at our policies and institutions.<sup>10</sup>

In a culture that overemphasizes the accumulation of wealth, we must not forget our “obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development.”<sup>11</sup>

As we seek to foster solidarity in hearts and policies, let us pray with Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*:

*Lord, Father of our human family . . . Move us to create healthier societies and a more dignified world, a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war. Amen.*<sup>12</sup>

This bulletin insert along with five others was approved by the body of U.S. bishops in November 2023.

Find this and more complementary resources at [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org).

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1 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 193, quoting St. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (*On Social Concerns*), no. 38. (See Mt 10:40-42, 20:25; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:25-27.)

2 Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (*God is Love*), no. 25b. See also: USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, nos. 52-54.

3 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*), no. 116, quoting *Address to Participants in the Meeting of Popular Movements* (October 28, 2014).

4 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 80.

5 USCCB Chairmen, “Letter and Policy Recommendations Supporting Women and Children,” October 26, 2022.

6 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* (*On Care for Our Common Home*), nos. 25, 48-49. See also: Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth*), nos. 48-52, and Pope Francis, *Laudate Deum*, no. 31.

7 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 261.

8 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 262. See also: St. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, nos. 23-24.

9 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, nos. 129 and 132. See also: Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 62.

10 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love, a Pastoral Letter Against Racism*, 2018. See also: *Fratelli Tutti*, nos. 20, 41, and 97.

11 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 118.

12 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 287.

# Subsidiarity



In their statement on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the Catholic bishops of the United States identify the four main principles of the Church's social teaching and apply them to some concrete issues. This is not to tell the faithful for whom or against whom to vote, but instead to help them form their consciences in accordance with God's truth as they approach this often-challenging decision. The four main principles are the Dignity of the Human Person, the Common Good, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity. They are all interrelated. This bulletin focuses on **Subsidiarity**, and the other three principles are covered in three other bulletins in this series. —★

The principle of Subsidiarity reminds us that larger institutions in society (such as the state or federal government) should not overwhelm or interfere with smaller or local institutions (such as the family, local schools, or the Church community). Yet larger institutions have essential responsibilities when local institutions cannot adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, or advance the common good.<sup>1</sup> Subsidiarity reflects the essential freedom and innate human dignity of each person while also recognizing the role higher authorities, such as government, can play to ensure that all people are able to thrive.

Respecting this principle promotes the flourishing of each individual person and the realization of the common good. As Pope Francis has explained, the principle of Subsidiarity “allows everyone to assume his or her own role in the healing and destiny of society.”<sup>2</sup> By participating in public life locally, each person and the voluntary associations of civil society to which they belong can be “leaven,” bringing “enrichment” to neighbors, to communities, and to society as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

★ —  
“Respecting Subsidiarity promotes the flourishing of each individual and the realization of the common good.”  
—★

As we assist the faithful to take up the call to be “leaven” in society, we seek policies that allow individuals and communities to flourish.

- As the bishops teach in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, “Family—based on marriage between a man and a woman—is the first and most fundamental unit

of society: a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. It should be defended and strengthened, not redefined, undermined, or further distorted.”<sup>4</sup>

- It is important to uphold parents’ rights and responsibilities to care for their children, including the right to direct their children’s education in accordance with their convictions, with support rather than interference from the state.<sup>5</sup> These include the rights of parents to send their child to the school of their choice, and to protect their child from “gender ideology” at school.
- Moreover, laws, programs, and initiatives should strengthen the social safety net and improve family stability. For example, parents should receive support through work, training, assistance with childcare, health-care, housing and transportation.<sup>6</sup> The Earned Income Tax Credit and child tax credits continue to be important vehicles to help low-income families out of poverty.
- The Church’s special concern for the poor requires the pursuit of social and economic policies which foster jobs with decent working conditions and just wages, and which support the rights of workers, including the ability to organize and bargain collectively without reprisal.<sup>7</sup>

As we pursue the principle of Subsidiarity in our public policies, we pray for all families and for those in poverty, and we support their efforts to exercise their rights and responsibilities in society.

★ —————  
“As we assist the faithful to take up the call to be “leaven” in society, we seek policies that allow individuals and communities to flourish.”  
————— ★

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1 USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, nos. 47-48. See also: *Centesimus Annus (The Hundredth Year)*, no. 48; *Dignitatis Humanae (Declaration on Religious Freedom)*, nos. 4-6, and *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 185.

2 Pope Francis, General Audience, “Catechesis ‘Healing the World’: 8. Subsidiarity and the Virtue of Hope,” Sept. 23, 2020. See also: Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth)*, no. 57.

3 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti (On Fraternity and Social Friendship)*, no. 142.

4 USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 46.

5 Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love)*, no. 84.

6 See Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, nos. 25, 44, on the need for family support through dignified employment, education, health-care and housing.

7 St. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, nos. 7-8, 35. See also: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 301-309.





## What does it mean to form my conscience?

Catholics have a long tradition of engagement in the public square. Sometimes that engagement requires making difficult moral decisions that impact our own lives and those of others. Our conscience can help guide the decisions we make. The Second Vatican Council guides us: “Always summoning [one] to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience can when necessary speak to [one’s] heart more specifically: **do this, shun that**” (*Gaudium et Spes* 16). However, our **conscience doesn’t just** come to us when we are born. We must work throughout our lives to form it through prayer, learning, and conversation.

How do I form my conscience?

It takes time to form our consciences so that we can make well-reasoned judgments about particular, real-life situations. The Church teaches that it is important to work continually on conscience formation so we can be prepared to make decisions whenever the opportunity arises. Some specific ideas to form your conscience are:

- 1) Begin by being open to the truth and what is right.
- 2) Study Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church.
- 3) Examine the facts and background information about various choices and be discerning in where we gather information.
- 4) Prayerfully reflect to discern the will of God (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 18).

Additionally, it is important to consider how our community of faith can help us form good consciences through some of these steps:

- 1) Seek the prudent advice and good example of trusted leaders and others to support and enlighten our conscience.
- 2) Learn about the authoritative teaching of the Church.
- 3) Pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to help us develop our conscience.
- 4) Regularly partake in an examination of conscience **to hear God’s voice in** your life.<sup>1</sup>

Doing the work of forming our consciences can seem daunting. Fortunately, we have many church teachings that can help us in this important task. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* is an important resource for U.S. Catholics and helps us prayerfully reflect on how we can apply Church teaching in **our civic life**. “Conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere “feeling” about what we should or should not do. Rather, conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us **to do what is good while shunning what is evil.**”<sup>2</sup>

Here are some questions for further reflection:

1. When has my conscience guided me to **“do good and avoid evil”**?
2. What are some key resources I can use to form my conscience?
3. **Forming conscience is a “lifelong task.”** What do I do to *regularly* form my conscience? What more should I do?

<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana–United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000, no 1777

<sup>2</sup> USCCB. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. Washington, DC: 2015, no. 17





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**WATCH USCCB VIDEOS:**  
***FORMING CONSCIENCE FOR  
FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP***

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## VIDEOS:

### *Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship*



**Look Up** in an online search engine: **"You Tube USCCB Faithful Citizenship"**

**Direct Link:** <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL18AF7577177E12D9&si=it6DAi0tsfmFbLn8>



**Visit** <https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-and-peace/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship>



#### **Video 1: Catholics Participate in Public Life**

As Catholics, how are we called to engage? How can we live out our faith in and out of the voting booth? How we can imitate Christ's love and compassion by modeling civility?

Link: <https://youtu.be/YpiJvheFjAA?si=6gkoAEKIAWSzoSWf>



#### **Video 2: Catholics Protect Human Life and Dignity**

Learn why Catholics protect human life and dignity of all, how we do this by voting, serving and advocating in our communities.

Link: <https://youtu.be/zdnvUngN84U?si=MKrEP4p5hjuBpdx5>



#### **Video 3: Catholics Promote the Common Good**

As Catholics, we promote the Common Good so that every person can, not only live, but also thrive. Our faith inspired action can transform our communities.

Link: [https://youtu.be/MwOyJKROZFk?si=dF3LUIXLG\\_Nvexwp](https://youtu.be/MwOyJKROZFk?si=dF3LUIXLG_Nvexwp)



#### **Video 4: Catholics Love Their Neighbors**

As Catholics, we are called to protect the family, founded on marriage and to help women and children fleeing poverty and violence.

Link: <https://youtu.be/xOk50RPoiIQ?si=XYIF3iSn4DwUBqel>



#### **Video 5: Faithful Citizens Work with Christ as He Builds His Kingdom**

As Catholics, we are called to participate in public life, serving those in need, and advocating. The Church's obligation in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith.

Link: [https://youtu.be/Iy\\_AaQbJSiE?si=k7si8bYIgZNT\\_UGg](https://youtu.be/Iy_AaQbJSiE?si=k7si8bYIgZNT_UGg)







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# *FORMING CONSCIENCE FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP:*

1. Sign up for California Advocacy Network
2. Attend Virtual Webinar:

*Faithful Citizenship: How do pursue the common  
good with a mind like Christ?*

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## California Advocacy Network

The California Catholic Conference invites you to join with thousands who are standing up for life and dignity. Together, our voices will be heard.

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- Bi-weekly e-newsletter, Public Policy Insights - to stay up to date on the key public policy issues happening in California
- periodic Action Alerts which make it easy for you to voice your opinion on crucial issues
- Use the network any time to easily send e-mails to your elected representatives

**Sign Up, by visiting:** <https://cacatholic.org/alerts/>

**“We need to participate for the common good.  
Sometimes we hear: a good Catholic is not interested  
in politics. This is not true: good Catholics immerse  
themselves in politics by offering the best of  
themselves so that the leader can govern.”**

**- Pope Francis**

# HOW DO WE PURSUE THE COMMON GOOD WITH A MIND LIKE CHRIST?

As Catholics, we are “obligated to participate in shaping the moral character of society” with a “mind like Christ”. To do so, we must form our conscience, be prudent and understand the principles that are the heart of Catholic Social Teaching:

- **dignity of the human person**
- **the common good**
- **subsidiarity**
- **solidarity**

**Join this event to learn how to form your conscience** through the moral framework of ***Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship***.

Together, we can decide, through our democratic process, to uphold dignity of life and the common good.



**FORMING  
CONSCIENCES  
FOR FAITHFUL  
CITIZENSHIP**



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## UPCOMING VIRTUAL EVENTS

**SATURDAY,  
AUGUST 3, 2024  
10 AM  
\*English**

**TUESDAY,  
AUGUST 13, 2024  
7 PM  
\*English**

**THURSDAY,  
AUGUST 15, 2024  
7 PM  
\*Spanish**

**To Register:**

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