



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.

Fourth in a five-part series

Religious Liberty

Why is religious liberty vital?

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, the right to religious freedom and freedom of conscience is “based on the very nature of the human person, whose dignity enables him freely to assent to the divine truth...” (no. 2106) This freedom must never be coerced, for to do so is to injure human beings in their relationship with God.

As Pope Francis has explained, “Our various religious traditions serve society primarily by the message they proclaim. They call individuals and communities to worship God, the source of all life, liberty and happiness. ... Our rich religious traditions seek to offer meaning and direction, ‘they have an enduring power to open new horizons, to stimulate thought, to expand the mind and heart’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 256). They call to conversion, reconciliation, concern for the future of society, self-sacrifice in the service of the common good, and compassion for those in need. At the heart of their spiritual mission is the proclamation of the truth and dignity of the human person and all human rights.” (Speech at Independence Mall in Philadelphia, September 26, 2015)



Franco Origlia/Getty Images

What is the state of religious liberty in the U.S.?

“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.” (*FCFC*, 72)

What about the rights of nonbelievers?

As Pope Francis has written, “As believers, we also feel close to those who do not consider themselves part of any religious tradition, yet sincerely seek the truth, goodness and beauty which we believe have their highest expression and source in God. We consider them as precious allies in the commitment to defending human dignity, in building peaceful coexistence between peoples and in protecting creation.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 257).

FROM ENDING THE SLAVE TRADE, TO
SECURING CIVIL RIGHTS, FROM
ERECTING HOSPITALS AND SCHOOLS,
TO HELPING THE UNBORN, THE
HOMELESS, AND THE HUNGRY —
PEOPLE OF FAITH HAVE LED THE WAY.

Immigration & Solidarity

Why is the Church committed to immigration reform?

As the Wisconsin bishops wrote in their 2012 pastoral letter, *Traveling Together in Hope*:

“As Catholics, we uphold the sanctity and dignity of every human life, from conception to natural death. We affirm that every human being is created in God’s image through His boundless love. Just as we work to protect the innocent unborn, 40 million of whom have already lost their lives, so we cannot turn our backs on the 12 million immigrants in our midst who long to live freely and fully.”

What about people who are in our country illegally?

Wisconsin’s bishops acknowledge that the rule of law is essential to maintaining a stable society. However, they explain that Americans “have to acknowledge that some of our foreign and domestic policies and practices have contributed to the illegal entry of immigrants. Our nation’s incessant demand for inexpensive goods and services is one of the driving forces behind the export of American jobs and the hiring of immigrant workers. Our nation is a magnet for immigrants because there is work here and because of the international disparity in wages. Our aging population needs younger workers.” (*Traveling Together in Hope*)

What immigration reform does the Church support?

“Comprehensive reform . . . 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.” (*FCFC*, 81)



George Martell/The Pilot Media Group (cropped/shaded)

What more can be done to help those fleeing poverty, violence, and persecution?

As Pope Francis explains, “The Church stands at the side of all who work to defend each person’s right to live with dignity, first and foremost by exercising the right not to emigrate and to contribute to the development of one’s country of origin. This process should include, from the outset, the need to assist the countries which migrants and refugees leave. This will demonstrate that solidarity, cooperation, international interdependence and the equitable distribution of the earth’s goods are essential for more decisive efforts, especially in areas where migration movements begin, to eliminate those imbalances which lead people, individually or collectively, to abandon their own natural and cultural environment.” (Pope Francis, *Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2016)

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