

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."¹

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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.²

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.³ 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.⁴
- 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.⁵
- 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.⁶
- 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.⁷
- Finally, we seek to prevent and remedy any aspects of an “economy of exclusion,”⁸ which “does not hesitate to exploit, discard, and even kill human beings,”⁹ and to work instead toward an “economy of communion” rooted in ethical concern.¹⁰

“Social friendship and universal fraternity” Pope Francis writes, “necessarily call for an acknowledgement of *the worth of every human person, always and everywhere.*”¹¹ 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.

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.

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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.