



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

A Letter to Catholics in Wisconsin on Faithful Citizenship

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The Second Vatican Council emphasized the unique mission of the lay faithful in transforming the political, social, economic, and cultural realms for the sake of the common good. With the 2010 election season approaching, we wish to affirm this Christian mission in your role as citizens. In writing this letter we have no desire to endorse candidates or political parties. Nor do we seek to impose doctrinal beliefs on fellow citizens. Rather, we provide the following framework of Catholic social teaching to assist you in forming your conscience, in evaluating political candidates and public policies, and in fulfilling your calling to bring the love and truth of Jesus Christ into a world where these are so dearly needed.

All of us—laity, religious, and clergy—are imperfect and in need of reform; so too, our democratic institutions. For this reason, every four years, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issues a statement on faithful citizenship (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, 2007; www.faithfulcitizenship.org). We invite you to read or re-read this statement because a well-formed conscience is essential to the Christian life. Here we briefly highlight the statement's four main themes.

First and foremost, the right to life of every human person—from conception to natural death—is the primary and thus most essential of all human rights. Faith teaches and human reason confirms that human life is not a privilege bestowed on us by others, but rather a right that society must recognize and protect. As Christians, we are called to witness to an authentic “human ecology” which safeguards all human life—no matter how frail or impaired—from being manipulated or destroyed.

Second, the nature of marriage, between a man and a woman, is established by the Creator as the foundation of the family, which in turn becomes the first and vital cell of society. Due to its service to life, including the procreation and necessary formation of new citizens, marriage is a social—not just a sacred—good that government needs to recognize, encourage, and protect. “Marriage... contributes to society because it models the way in which women and men live interdependently and commit, for the whole of life, to seek the good of each other” (USCCB, *Between Man and Woman*, 2003). Marriage promotes the interest of children who need the constant love, attention, and guidance of their mothers and fathers to reach their fullest potential.

Third, our consistent life ethic extends from the vulnerable inside the womb to the vulnerable outside the womb. As Catholics we understand that God has a special love for the poor and all those in danger or distress. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us, "whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40). As Pope John Paul II explains, "It is not merely a matter of 'giving from one's surplus,' but of helping entire peoples which are presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development. For this to happen...requires above all a change of life-styles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies" (*Centesimus annus / The Hundredth Year*, #58).

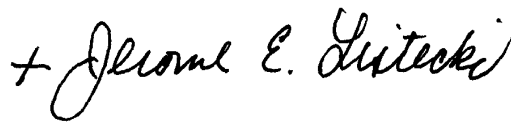
Fourth, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that, "If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation" (*World Day of Peace Message 2010*). Our natural resources are gifts from God and we are all responsible for protecting them. Indeed, environmental ecology is intimately tied to human ecology: when we use our natural resources wisely, all human beings, now and in the future, will have the opportunity to thrive.

Being a faithful citizen is never easy. Yet, if Catholics continue to remain engaged, not just politically but also culturally, there is so much good that we will contribute to our nation and to our world.

"Unity in essentials; liberty in non-essentials; charity in both." This time-honored advice is especially pertinent around election time. While faithful Catholics are united on the essentials of Church doctrine, we sometimes disagree on non-essential matters or in the prudential means of pursuing authentic goods. All of us, however, bear witness to Our Lord Jesus Christ when, in the midst of our vigorous debates, we demonstrate charity and respect for one another.

We thank you for reading this letter and for your contributions as informed, involved, and faithful citizens. We close by asking you to keep us in your prayers, as you always remain in ours.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



The Most Rev. Jerome E. Listecki
Archbishop of Milwaukee



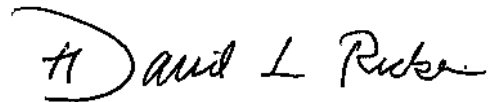
The Most Rev. William P. Callahan
Bishop of La Crosse



The Most Rev. Peter F. Christensen
Bishop of Superior



The Most Rev. Robert C. Morlino
Bishop of Madison



The Most Rev. David L. Ricken
Bishop of Green Bay