

SUMMARY OF POSITIONS OF THE U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

ECONOMY

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

What

Economic decisions and institutions should be assessed according to whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person.

Building a just economy that works for all encompasses a wide range of issues, including food security and hunger, work and joblessness, homelessness and affordable housing, and tax credits for low-income families, as well as protecting programs that serve poor and vulnerable people throughout the federal budget.

Social and economic policies should foster the creation of jobs for all who can work with decent working conditions and just wages.

Barriers to equal pay and employment for women and those facing unjust discrimination must be overcome.

JUST WAGES

What

The most effective way to build a just economy is to make decent work at decent wages available for all those capable of working.

Why

A just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice. In determining fair pay both the needs and the contributions of each person must be taken into account.

UNIONS

What

Catholic social teaching supports the right of workers to choose whether to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal.

Why

Catholic social teaching affirms economic freedom, initiative, and the right to private property.

UNEMPLOYMENT

What

When the economy fails to generate sufficient jobs, there is a moral obligation to protect the life and dignity of unemployed and underemployed workers and their families.



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HEALTHCARE

What

Support measures to strengthen Medicare and Medicaid.

Health care coverage remains an urgent national priority.

Why

Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. Despite an increase in the number of people insured, millions of Americans still lack health care coverage.

The nation's health care system needs to be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, respect the principle of subsidiarity, and meet the needs of the poor and uninsured, especially born and unborn children, pregnant women, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations.

SAFETY NET

What

Supports policies that protect human life and dignity, strengthen families, encourage and reward work, preserve a safety net for the vulnerable, and build public/private partnerships to overcome poverty.

Federal policies should form a "Circle of Protection" around programs that serve poor and vulnerable people in our communities and avoid placing additional burdens on people and families struggling to live in dignity.

TAX CREDITS

What

Improving the Earned Income Tax Credit and child tax credits, available as refunds to families in greatest need, will help lift low-income families out of poverty.

WELFARE

What

Welfare policy should reduce poverty and dependency, strengthen family life, and help families leave poverty through work, training, and assistance with child care, health care, housing, and transportation.

Given the link between family stability and economic success, welfare policy should address both the economic and cultural factors that contribute to family breakdown. It should also provide a safety net for those who cannot work.

SOCIAL SECURITY

What

Social Security should provide adequate, continuing, and reliable income in an equitable manner for low- and average-wage workers and their families when these workers retire or become disabled, and for the survivors when a wage-earner dies.



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PAYDAY LENDING

What

Support legislation that protects consumers from the excessive and exploitative rates of interest charged by many payday lenders.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

What

At a time of rising homelessness and when many workers' wages are stagnant and living expenses are rising, it is important to ensure housing security.

Oppose unjust housing discrimination and support measures to meet the credit needs of low-income and minority communities.

The lack of safe, affordable housing requires a renewed commitment to increase the supply of quality housing and to preserve, maintain, and improve existing housing through public/private partnerships, especially with religious groups and community organizations.

Why

Decent, safe, and affordable housing is a human right. Catholic teaching supports the right to private property, but recognizes that communities and the government have an obligation to ensure the housing needs of all are met, especially poor and vulnerable people and their families.



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IMMIGRATION

IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

What

Comprehensive reform is urgently necessary to fix a broken immigration system and 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.

Support policies and actions that protect refugees of war and violence, at home and abroad, and all people suffering religious persecution throughout the world, many of whom are our fellow Christians.

Why

The Gospel mandate to "welcome the stranger" requires Catholics to care for and stand with newcomers, authorized and unauthorized, including unaccompanied immigrant children, refugees and asylum-seekers, those unnecessarily detained, and victims of human trafficking.

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.

The detention of immigrants should be used to protect public safety and not for purposes of deterrence or punishment; alternatives to detention, including community-based programs, should be emphasized.

FARM WORKERS

What

Farmers and farm workers who grow, harvest, and process food deserve a just return for their labor, with safe and just working conditions and adequate housing.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

What

Human trafficking is a "crime against humanity" and should be eradicated from the earth. Trafficking victims, most especially children, should receive care and protection, including special consideration for permanent legal status. Additional education and mobilization efforts are needed to address the root causes of human trafficking—poverty, conflict, and the breakdown of judicial process in source countries.

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THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

DEATH PENALTY

What

The USCCB supports efforts to end the use of the death penalty and in the meantime to restrain its use through broader use of DNA evidence, access to effective counsel, and efforts to address unfairness and injustice related to application of the death penalty.

GUN VIOLENCE

What

Promote moral responsibility and effective responses to violent crime, curbing violence in media, support reasonable restrictions on access to assault weapons and handguns, and oppose the use of the death penalty are particularly important in light of a growing "culture of violence."

Support measures that control the sale and use of firearms and make them safer (especially efforts that prevent their unsupervised use by children or anyone other than the owner), and for sensible regulation of handguns.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

What

An ethic of responsibility, rehabilitation, and restoration should be a foundation for the reform of our broken criminal justice system. A humane and remedial rather than a strictly punitive approach to offenders should be developed. Such an approach includes supporting efforts that justly reduce the prison population, help people leaving prison to reintegrate into their communities, combat recidivism, promote just sentencing reform, and strengthen relationships between the police and the communities they serve.

Continue to combat any unjust discrimination, whether based on race, religion, sex, ethnicity, disabling condition, or age, as these are grave injustices and affronts to human dignity. Where the effects of past discrimination persist, society has the obligation to take positive steps to overcome the legacy of injustice, including vigorous action to remove barriers to education, protect voting rights, support good policing in our communities, and ensure equal employment for women and minorities.



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CARE FOR CREATION

ENVIRONMENT

Care for Creation is a moral issue. Protecting the land, water, and air we share is a religious duty of stewardship and reflects our responsibility to born and unborn children, who are most vulnerable to environmental assault. We must answer the question that Pope Francis posed to the world: "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" (Laudato Si', no. 160). There are many concrete steps we can take to assure justice and solidarity between the generations.

Effective initiatives are required for energy conservation and the development of alternate, renewable, and clean-energy resources.

Seriously address global climate change, focusing on the virtue of prudence, pursuit of the common good, and the impact on the poor, particularly on vulnerable workers and the poorest nations.

The United States should lead in contributing to the sustainable development of poorer nations and promoting greater justice in sharing the burden of environmental blight, neglect, and recovery. It is important that we address the rising number of migrants who are uprooted from their homeland as a consequence of environmental degradation and climate change. They are not currently recognized as refugees under any existing international convention and are thus not afforded legal protections that ought to be due to them.

AGRICULTURE

What

The USCCB advocates for the protection of agriculture and nutrition programs that provide for poor, hungry, and vulnerable people, both at home and abroad, support for those who grow our food, fairness to family farmers and ranchers, and that promote good stewardship of the land.

When faced with limited government resources, agriculture subsidies should be directed to small and medium sized farmers and ranchers who truly need assistance to be competitive and successful.

A first priority for agriculture policy should be food security for all. Because no one should face hunger in a land of plenty, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or Food Stamps), the Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and other nutrition programs need to be strong and effective.

Supporting rural communities sustains a way of life that enriches our nation. Careful stewardship of the earth and its natural resources demands policies that support sustainable agriculture as vital elements of agricultural policy.



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ISSUES FROM THE OFFICE OF PRO-LIFE ACTIVITIES

ABORTION AND PREGNANCY

What

Promote a culture of life by supporting laws and programs that encourage childbirth and adoption over abortion and by addressing poverty, providing health care, and offering other assistance to pregnant women, children, and families.

Oppose contraceptive and abortion mandates in public programs and health plans, which endanger rights of conscience and can interfere with parents' right to guide the moral formation of their children.

Why

Respect for human life and dignity is also the foundation for essential efforts to address and overcome the hunger, disease, poverty, and violence that take the lives of so many innocent people.

Abortion, the deliberate killing of a human being before birth, is never morally acceptable and must always be opposed.

EUTHANASIA

Why

The purposeful taking of human life by assisted suicide and euthanasia is not an act of mercy, but an unjustifiable assault on human life.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

What

Wages should allow workers to support their families, and public assistance should be available to help poor families to live in dignity. Such assistance should be provided in a manner that promotes eventual financial autonomy.

Why

Policies on taxes, work, divorce, immigration, and welfare should uphold the God-given meaning and value of marriage and family, help families stay together, and reward responsibility and sacrifice for children.

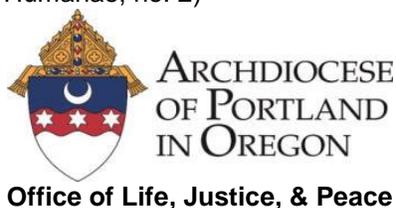
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

What

US policy should promote religious liberty vigorously, both at home and abroad: our first and most cherished freedom is rooted in the very dignity of the human person, a fundamental human right that knows no geographical boundaries.

Why

In all contexts, its basic contours are the same: it is the "immun[ity] from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits." (Dignitatis Humanae, no. 2)



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INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

What

The United States has the responsibility to take the lead in addressing the scandal of poverty and underdevelopment. Our nation should help to humanize globalization, addressing its negative consequences and spreading its benefits, especially among the world's poor.

The United States also has a unique opportunity to use its power in partnership with others to build a more just and peaceful world.

The United States should take a leading role in helping to alleviate global poverty through substantially increased development aid for the poorest countries, more equitable trade policies, and continuing efforts to relieve the crushing burdens of debt and disease.

US policy should promote religious liberty and other basic human rights. In particular, US policy should promote and defend the rights of religious minorities throughout the world, especially in regions where people of faith are threatened by violence simply because of their faith.

The United States should provide political and financial support for beneficial United Nations programs and reforms, for other international bodies, and for international law, so that together these institutions may become more responsible and responsive agents for addressing global problems.

Asylum should be afforded to refugees who hold a well-founded fear of persecution in their homelands. Our country should support protection for persons fleeing persecution through safe haven in other countries, including the United States, especially for unaccompanied children, women, victims of human trafficking, and religious minorities.

Our country should be a leader—in collaboration with the international community—in addressing regional conflicts.

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

What

Leadership on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an especially urgent priority. The United States should actively pursue comprehensive negotiations leading to a just and peaceful resolution that respects the legitimate claims and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians, ensuring security for Israel, a viable state for Palestinians, respect for Lebanon's sovereignty, and peace in the region.

Israel must stop the work on the Separation Wall in the Cremisan Valley.

WHY

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has long supported a two-state solution, secure and recognized Israel living in peace alongside a viable and independent Palestinian state. "The actions taken towards the building of the separation wall there "undermine the cause of peace and impair the possibility of a two state solution."



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WAR AND PEACE

GENOCIDE, TORTURE AND NONCOMBATANTS

What

The use of torture must be rejected as fundamentally incompatible with the dignity of the human person and ultimately counterproductive in the effort to combat terrorism.

Direct and intentional attacks on noncombatants in war and terrorist acts are never morally acceptable.

Why

Genocide, torture, and the direct and intentional targeting of noncombatants in war or terrorist attacks are always wrong.

PEACE

What

Work to avoid war and to promote peace.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

What

The United States has a responsibility to work to reverse the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and to reduce its own reliance on weapons of mass destruction by pursuing progressive nuclear disarmament.

Why

The use of weapons of mass destruction or other means of warfare that do not distinguish between civilians and soldiers is fundamentally immoral.

WAGE PEACE

What

Though we recognize the justifiable use of military force, we encourage the reallocation of resources from armed conflict to the urgent needs of the poor and the root causes of violence.

