# ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL

Based on the U.S. Bishops' pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, this summary offers points for reflection on the important role of Catholics in a powerful and complex economy. Unfortunately, the principles of economic justice articulated by the bishops in 1986 remain as relevant and necessary today amid persistent poverty, growing inequality, revolutionary technological changes, and the marginalization of many people and communities. Our faith calls us to evaluate the economy, including our role in it through the lens of human dignity, the common good, the family, creation, and especially the poor and vulnerable.

1

## The economy exists for the human person.

Economic life and economic institutions must serve the dignity and flourishing of every person and the common good. People must never be treated merely as instruments of economic production, consumption, or profit.

2

## Economic life is inherently moral.

Economic decisions are moral decisions because they affect human dignity, relationships, communities, and creation. Markets, businesses, governments, and economic policies must be evaluated according to their contribution to the common good.

3

## The dignity of the poor is a fundamental measure of economic justice.

Economic policies and institutions should give priority to overcoming poverty, exclusion, and structures that perpetuate inequality.

4

## Every person has a right to what is necessary for human flourishing.

Every person has a right to the basic necessities of life and to the social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental conditions necessary for integral human development—including food, water, housing, health care, education, meaningful work, social protection, a safe environment, and economic security.

5

## Work is for the human person.

Work possesses inherent dignity because it is a form of human participation, creativity, service, and contribution to the common good. Every person has a right to decent work, just wages, safe and humane working conditions, adequate benefits, rest, and the freedom to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively.

6

## Economic participation is both a right and a responsibility.

People should have meaningful opportunities to participate in economic life. They also have a responsibility to contribute their work according to their abilities and circumstances. Families, communities, businesses, civil society, and governments share responsibility for creating conditions in which people can flourish and contribute to society.

7

## Economic freedom must serve the common good.

Markets can generate creativity, opportunity, and prosperity, but markets are not morally self-sufficient. Government, businesses, civil society, and communities each have legitimate and complementary roles in ensuring that economic freedom is accompanied by justice, accountability, solidarity, and protection of the vulnerable.

8

## Wealth and economic power carry social responsibilities.

Private property, wealth, investment, entrepreneurship, and economic power have legitimate roles but are not absolute. They carry social obligations. Economic institutions, including corporations and financial institutions, must be accountable to workers, communities, society, and the common good.

9

## The economy must respect creation and future generations.

Economic activity must protect the integrity of creation and recognize the interdependence of human and ecological well-being. A just economy cannot sacrifice the environment, vulnerable communities, or future generations for economic gain.

10

## The global economy must be governed by solidarity and justice.

Trade, investment, finance, taxation, migration, development, technology, debt, and international economic institutions all have global consequences and must be oriented toward the common good of the entire human family.

The foundation of this framework represents the Church's teaching as developed and applied through papal documents and resources of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. They reflect the Church's teaching on the dignity, rights, and duties of the human person; the option for the poor; the common good; subsidiarity and solidarity. Here are some examples of the development of this economic teaching from Pope Saint John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis and now Pope Leo XIV.

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### Pope Saint John Paul II

*Centesimus Annus* (1991)

"The Catholic tradition calls for a 'society of work, enterprise and participation' which 'is not directed against the market, but demands that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the state to assure that the basic needs of the whole society are satisfied'" (no. 35).

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### Pope Benedict XVI

*Caritas in Veritate* (2009)

"The Church's social doctrine has always maintained that *justice must be applied to every phase of economic activity*, because this is always concerned with man and his needs… Thus every economic decision has a moral consequence" (no. 37).

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### Pope Francis

*Laudato Si'* (2015)

"A change in lifestyle could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power" (no. 206).

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### Pope Leo XIV

*Magnifica Humanitas* (2026)

"Justice concerns every phase of economic activity, from resource acquisition to financing, and from production to consumption; every choice has moral consequences" (no. 162).

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United States Conference of Catholic Bishops