



Outlines for Clergy Formation on Faithful Citizenship

This guide is to assist dioceses in supporting priests and deacons as they seek to form and engage Catholics on the topic of faithful citizenship. It contains sample outlines for clergy formation sessions, including a three to five hour formation day and a one-hour session. Thematic content included in the outlines echoes reflections by several bishops in [this video for clergy](#)—available to complement and reinforce content covered during formation sessions.

In a separate document, preaching aids are also available as a resource for clergy as they take up the task of accompanying the faithful in ongoing formation on these important topics.

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Outlines for Formation Sessions on Faithful Citizenship

Sample outlines are available for clergy formation to occur during a *formation day* (including three sessions whose combined length totals 3-5 hours), or alternatively, a *one-hour* option that would be appropriate for use at a vicariate or deanery meeting.

Every group will have its own unique needs. While all U.S. Catholics share a call to faithful citizenship, its precise contours differ based on the local context. Thus, users may consider personalizing the provided outlines, tailoring them to their specific situations.

Thematic content included in the outlines echoes reflections by several bishops in [this video for clergy](#), which can complement and reinforce content covered during formation sessions. In addition, “Faith Before Politics” general resources, which may also be of interest to session facilitators and to clergy, are listed at the end of this resource.



Option 1: Formation Day (3-5 hours)

This first outline envisions a formation day that is three to five hours in length. The formation day outline staggers presentation and discussion. Outlines for three separate sessions during the day include suggested thematic content to assist the presenter, followed by discussion questions to help attendees engage with the content, one another and the presenter. An ideal setup has attendees seated at round tables, which are most conducive to facilitating discussion. Depending on the size of the group, the presenter might consider floating from table to table during group discussions; such an approach allows ideas to flow without any individual having to risk speaking in front of the large group. Of course, local circumstances will dictate what is feasible. If circumstances demand a shorter formation day, the presentations or discussion periods could be reduced to keep the formation day to three hours in length. For those preferring an evening session, Mass or Vespers could occur before dinner, with sessions occurring thereafter.

Here is a sample schedule for a five-hour formation day which begins at 10 a.m. and concludes at 3 p.m.

10:00 a.m.	Opening Prayer, Welcome, and Introductions
10:15 a.m.	Session #1: Faithful Citizenship as a Way of Life
11:00 a.m.	Group Discussion
11:15 a.m.	Break
11:30 a.m.	Session #2: Catholic Social Teaching in the U.S. Context
12:15 p.m.	Group Discussion
12:30 p.m.	Daytime Prayer followed by Lunch
1:30 p.m.	Session #3: Preaching Faithful Citizenship
2:15 p.m.	Group Discussion
2:30 p.m.	Large Group Discussion and Q&A
3:00 p.m.	Concluding Prayer

Event organizers should work beforehand to determine the schedule, room layout, and format of discussions. An additional consideration is whether one speaker should deliver all three sessions, or whether different speakers should give each session.

Session 1: Faithful Citizenship as a Way of Life

The session should begin with prayer, followed by a warm welcome and introduction of presenter(s). During this first session, the presenter can include reflection on current events of state or local importance in order to ensure that participants recognize the connections between the thematic content and local realities.

The presenter may wish to begin by noting that during our time together, we will reflect on the U.S. Catholic bishops' vision for how to live our faith as we approach matters of public concern. Our first session will survey the current landscape, then we will consider the principles of Catholic Social Teaching as they have evolved over the last 135 years and remain relevant today, before finally turning our attention to specific strategies for incorporating these topics regularly in preaching.



Why Do the U.S. Bishops Address Questions of Public Life?

- Some people, citing the separation of Church and State, will argue that political issues have no place within the sacred confines of divine worship. Understandably, they may wish to avoid divisive topics or uncomfortable conversations, and they may view the Holy Mass as a welcome pause from the noise of the 24-hour news cycle and endless political messaging.
- As understandable as this opinion may be, it fails to recognize that teaching the moral truths that should shape our lives, including our public lives, is central to the mission given to the Church by Jesus Christ. The ability to witness to our faith and our beliefs is often referred to as our “first freedom.” Doing so is a foundational right and an essential expression of our human dignity.
- **Morality transcends the individual.** Since the days of Cain and Abel (Gn 4:1–16), sin has consequences that afflict families, communities, and the broader society.¹ In the Great Commission, Christ instructed his apostles, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19–20a). Because Christ’s teaching concerns solidarity with the poor and vulnerable (Mt 5:3, 25:31–46; Lk 16:19–31) and promoting justice and mercy (Mt 5:6, 18:15–35; Lk 18:1–8), the successors of the apostles—the College of Bishops—bear the responsibility of teaching these topics, “whether it is convenient or inconvenient” (2 Tm 4:2).²
- **Indeed, canon law speaks clearly on this matter:** “It belongs to the Church always and everywhere to announce moral principles, even about the social order, and to render judgment concerning any human affairs insofar as the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls requires it.”³ Canon law expressly speaks of the role held by conferences of bishops; in our national context, the U.S. bishops speak on matters of national concern when they intersect with sound moral teaching and fundamental human rights. Groups of bishops in ecclesiastical provinces or a given state (as in a state’s Catholic conference) exercise a similar role when addressing matters of state policy. In doing so, they speak as “authentic teachers” of the faithful, who are to adhere to their teaching with “religious submission of mind” (*obsequio animi religioso*).⁴
- This teaching assists Catholics in their fundamental moral responsibility to form their consciences with the aid of sound teaching.⁵ All the faithful, in turn, have the duty to live in accord with their consciences including in public life.
- It is also worth noting that there is no legal obstacle to the Church proclaiming its teaching in the public square. In fact, the opening words of the First Amendment—“Congress shall make no law...”—indicate that this first freedom limits *congressional* action. After the Civil War, Congress adopted and the states ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, which in relevant part extended these limits to *state* action, and the Supreme Court in a series of cases has held that state and local governments, like the federal government, may neither establish a religion nor prohibit religious free

¹ See Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), nos. 13, 25.

² See *Code of Canon Law*, can. 375 §1, 386 §1, 747 §1.

³ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 747 §2.

⁴ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 753.

⁵ See Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 16; Pope St. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), nos. 57–64; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1776–85.



exercise. The crucial point is that the First Amendment restricts *government* action; the federal constitution imposes no limit on the Church other than that no religion can become the official religion. Indeed, this first freedom preserves the Church's ability to weigh in on matters of conscience without the brooding presence of the government's heavy hand. It also preserves the rights of religious minorities—which Catholics historically have been—to freely adhere to, practice, and live in accord with the dictates of conscience.

What Cultural Challenges Does the Church Currently Face?

- As any reading of the lives of the saints will confirm, the faithful in every age face cultural headwinds as they seek to live the Gospel. Three specific challenges merit comment:
- **Secularism and Relativism:** Two ideologies have become increasingly common in the West over the past century. Secularism—a worldview that confines religious practice to private spaces (homes, churches, religious schools, etc.)—has diminished the influence of the Church in many parts of our nation. A related phenomenon, relativism—a viewpoint that claims that all truth claims relate only to the perspective of the person making the claim (i.e., it is *relative* only to that person)⁶—denies the very existence of objective moral truth. Indeed, St. John Paul II spoke prophetically on this topic over 30 years ago: “This is *the risk of an alliance between democracy and ethical relativism*, which would remove any sure moral reference point from political and social life, and on a deeper level make the acknowledgement of truth impossible.”⁷ Catholics today have the duty of standing for truth as they follow Christ, whose truth liberates (Jn 8:32), and whom himself is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6).
- **Polarization and the Media Ecosystem:** The last four decades have seen a seemingly endless rise in political polarization, whereby society divides into two sides with increasing enmity between them. The last decade in particular has seen an alarming rise in domestic political violence: the June 2017 shooting of a U.S. Representative at a sports practice, the January 2021 riot on Capitol Hill, the July 2024 attempted assassination of a then-candidate for president, and the 2025 murders of state legislators and political activists suffice to illustrate the bloody cost of a political polarization that fomented to hatred.⁸ The current profit-driven mass-media and social-media ecosystem has also played a role: news is increasingly marketed to narrow ideological niches, leading to fewer agreed-upon facts in public debates and more conspiracy theories.⁹
- **“Boutique Ecclesiology”:** The rise of the Internet (and now artificial intelligence), with its ability to cultivate specialized viewership and promote so-called “influencers” has undermined the unity and witness of the Church and her ability to authentically share Catholic doctrine.¹⁰ Too often, church groups are perceived as a front for one or another political agenda and seem to offer Catholics the opportunity to “shop around” for a bespoke church experience customized to an individual’s preexisting opinion. The problem with this “boutique ecclesiology”—which exists outside the Catholic Church as well—is that it leaves little room for conversion: a church that only preaches a popular message is one that fails to live out Christ’s first public words in the Gospel: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15).

⁶ See Pope St. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), nos. 1, 48; Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), no. 26; Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), no. 185.

⁷ Pope St. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), no. 101. Emphasis original.

⁸ See Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), nos. 190–91.

⁹ See Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), no. 206.

¹⁰ See Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), no. 46.

Instead, people remain trapped in a hermeneutic circle, where they accept as true only what confirms the preexisting opinion to the exclusion of any call for repentance.

- These three items hardly exhaust the challenges that the Catholics face today but do merit emphasis.

What Cultural Opportunities Can the Church Seize?

- Even in the face of these challenges, we can take comfort in several opportunities available in preaching on faithful citizenship today:
- **Communications and Technology:** While modern communications at times present challenges to evangelization, the same tools can play a role in the solution. Especially since the coronavirus pandemic, many dioceses, parishes, and other ecclesiastical entities have modernized their communications strategy. Recent updates to the Vatican’s website have made searching the Church’s authoritative teaching documents free of charge and more accessible than ever before. Those who wish to learn the Catholic Church’s teaching and apply it in their lives can do so more easily than ever before. Effective communication strategies will continue to play an important role in preaching faithful citizenship.
- **Liturgy and Catholic Heritage:** The Church’s perennial tradition offers great richness. The Sacred Liturgy immerses all who approach it into the dynamism of Trinitarian love, as through the Holy Spirit the single offering of the Son to the Father is made present on the altar.¹¹ The communion of saints offers both their example and intercession.¹² The devotional life of the Church and the faithful witness of many everyday followers of Christ offer a secure anchor amid the stormy seas of constant change. Pope Francis observed, “True wisdom demands an encounter with reality.”¹³ The Sacred Liturgy, the patrimony of Sacred Tradition, and a bimillennial heritage offer such an encounter.¹⁴
- **Increased Interest:** The secular media has observed a rise in the number of converts to Catholicism.¹⁵ While an exploration of the causes of this increase lies outside the scope of our present discussion, this increased interest in Catholicism gives reason for optimism. In many respects, today’s U.S. Church resembles the churches that St. Paul founded on his missionary journeys nearly two millennia ago. Like the Apostle, we must offer supplemental teaching in the face of fragmented initial experiences of faith—St. Paul too had to teach the Thessalonian Christians about living a moral life and communal charity (see 1 Thes 4:1–12). Even so, the goodness, truth, and beauty of the Gospel speak on its own; we have the role of bringing it to the public sphere.¹⁶

The Three Main Themes Posed by the U.S. Bishops for Faithful Citizenship

¹¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1365–72.

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 954–59.

¹³ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), no. 47.

¹⁴ See Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* (1965), no. 8.

¹⁵ See, for example, Elizabeth Dias, “Roman Catholic Churches See a Surge of New Converts.” 26 March 2026. <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/26/us/catholics-converts.html>.

¹⁶ See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), nos. 176–216.



- The U.S. bishops propose three main themes for preaching faithful citizenship. All three flow organically from Scripture and Tradition; they are not “single-issue” agendas but instead synthetically form part of an integral Catholic way of life:
- **The Church’s Role to Transform Society.** Jesus told a brief parable about yeast: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened” (Mt 13:33). Just as a little yeast causes an entire batch of dough to rise and become a fluffy loaf of bread, so the Gospel—and those who respond to it in the life of the Church—allow the values of the kingdom to touch every aspect of society. The laity especially have the role of serving as this leaven in the various secular occupations that they undertake.¹⁷ The clergy seek to support the laity as they fulfill this essential role.
- **“Who Is My Neighbor?”** This question, first posed by the scholar of the law in the leadup to the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29), allowed our Lord to illustrate his answer—it includes even a despised and unwelcome Samaritan. By his Incarnation and Passion, the Lord entered into solidarity with all humanity, so making himself a neighbor to all and inviting all to become a neighbor also.¹⁸ As he said shortly before his Passion, “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (Jn 12:32).
- **Faith before Politics.** At times, the endless political news cycle can drown out the core convictions of our Catholic faith. Like many Americans, some Catholics choose to expose themselves to a steady stream of information from partisan sources, and this often results in the embrace of partisan viewpoints, such that the faithful embrace political ideologies aligned with a political party rather than allowing their perspectives to be formed by the whole of Church teaching, which does not align itself with any political party or ideology. In embracing partisan viewpoints, the faithful may also come to perceive those with different political opinions as enemies. These tendencies have given rise to a politics in search of a moral justification instead of a sound integral conviction of faith seeking to wisely exercise political discretion. In the midst of such a challenge, a question that we must ask ourselves is how best to accompany Catholics to authentically live the call to faithful citizenship—which embraces the fullness of the Church’s teachings and is a way of living the Gospel in attending to specific duties in the public square, which sit alongside a wide array of other duties.

¹⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (1965), no. 2.

¹⁸ See Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 27.



Session 2: Catholic Social Teaching in the U.S. Context

With our initial survey of the U.S. cultural context now complete, we turn our attention toward the criteria of analysis offered by the social teaching of the Church.

Catholic Social Teaching Today: Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026)

- The Church has long recognized her responsibility to affirm the truths of morality, even in the public sphere.
- This heritage of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has received recent attention due to Pope Leo XIV's 2026 encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*. In it, he provides a helpful summary of CST's key tenets. While a comprehensive overview of a vast body of teaching lies outside the scope of this presentation, the following main ideas will help guide further reading and reflection:
- **History of Catholic Social Teaching:**¹⁹
 - Pope Leo XIV first recalls the seminal contribution of his namesake and predecessor Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the first major papal document to address macroeconomics and the rights and duties of governments, laborers, and those who control capital.
 - Forty years later, amid the Great Depression, in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pope Pius XI drew greater attention to Leo XIII's encyclical, augmenting it with further reflections on structural forces at work in economic life, and on subsidiarity. His reflections were especially significant given the dark clouds of totalitarianism that were forming in 1931 and would soon draw the world into a major cataclysm.
 - Pope Pius XII continued this tradition of engaging with social questions of his day, especially by means of his Christmas radio messages, as the Second World War ended and Cold War began.
 - Pope St. John XXIII expanded the scope of Catholic Social Teaching by addressing not only Catholics but all people of good will. In the context of the nuclear arms race, he pleaded for peace in *Pacem in Terris* (1963). The Second Vatican Council further addressed this topic in *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) as it taught, "...the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person which for its part and by its very nature stands completely in need of social life."²⁰ The Council also affirmed the existence, nature, and content of basic human rights.²¹
 - In his 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Pope St. Paul VI continued this emphasis on human dignity amid the rapid but unequal spread of affluence around the world, recognizing that a dignified life for all would be the only sure foundation for lasting peace.
 - St. John Paul II authored three main social encyclicals: *Laborem Exercens* (1981) to mark the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) to mark the 20th

¹⁹ Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), nos. 28–45.

²⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 25.

²¹ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 26.



anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, and *Centesimus Annus* (1991) to mark the centenary of Leo XIII's seminal encyclical while applying the Church's social teaching to the emerging realities of life after the Cold War. Beyond these main three social encyclicals, his treatment of fundamental moral theology in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) and his discussion of assaults against human life in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (1995) also merit mention.

- Pope Benedict XVI addressed a new generation in his 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, which applied the principles of integral human development to the rise in globalization and the then-recent economic shocks from the 2008 global financial crisis.
- Although not the first pope to teach about the moral duty to care for the environment,²² Pope Francis greatly raised the profile of environmental ethics in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Amid the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, he cast an expansive vision of worldwide fraternity in *Fratelli Tutti*.
- While this historical overview cannot do justice to many themes treated in these various documents, they illustrate how the Church has served as a *lumen gentium*, a light for the nations, over 135 years of history. As Catholics in the United States survey our current landscape and seek to live faithful citizenship, we join in this established heritage of observing the “signs of the times” and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.²³
- **The Three Foundations:**²⁴ Pope Leo XIV proceeds to describe three main foundations of Catholic Social Teaching that have emerged over the last 135 years:
 - ***The Human Person as an Image of the Triune God:*** This foundation rests Catholic Social Teaching on the nature of the Most Blessed Trinity and the meaning of creation (Gn 1:26–27), recognizing that human beings are called to participate in God's divine life. As humans, we are interconnected with both rights and responsibilities toward each other.²⁵
 - ***Equal Dignity of All Human Beings:*** Expressing his concern about the rise of ideologies that link human dignity with one's ability to contribute to society, Pope Leo XIV affirms that all human beings share an equal dignity grounded in God's love for all people. The Holy Father thus restates the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which recognized in 1965 that societies were not recognizing such a dignity.²⁶ Indeed, this basic failure has caused many of the grave assaults against the human person over the past century.
 - ***Supreme Value of Human Rights:*** Popes have consistently praised the expanded recognition of fundamental human rights in the aftermath of World War II, and Pope Leo XIV adds his voice in so doing. In doing so, he identifies two current threats to the protection of human rights: (1) a *formalism* that reduces rights to a paper guarantee while technological progress tramples them without any effective recourse, and (2) a *lack of foundations* whereby society ceases looking for the anthropological root of the general

²² Pope St. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991), no. 37; Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), 51.

²³ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 4.

²⁴ Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), nos. 46–58.

²⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), nos. 23–29.

²⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 29.



applicability of human rights. Here, the Holy Father expresses a concern already anticipated more than 30 years ago by Pope St. John Paul II.²⁷

- **The Five Principles:**²⁸ Finally, Pope Leo XIV summarizes five basic principles of the Social Teaching of the Church:

- ***The Common Good:*** Flowing from the three foundations above, all human beings have a responsibility to act in a manner that serves the whole of society, to become a neighbor to all. The Second Vatican Council defined the common good as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.”²⁹ The Holy Father builds on this definition: “We can say that social action reaches its fullness when it is directed toward this shared good, just as a person’s moral action finds its fulfillment in the choice of the true good.”³⁰
- ***The Universal Destination of Goods:*** God created the world and entrusted it to the care of humanity (Gn 1:27–28, 2:15). The bounty of natural resources thus belongs to the human family as a whole. Since *Rerum Novarum*, the Church has simultaneously defended the natural right to private property.³¹ Even so, this right of private ownership is subordinate to the duty to ensure that all can live in dignity: the right to private property is not absolute. This principle has received greater attention in light of more recent papal teaching on environmental ethics, recognizing that all people regardless of ability have a natural right to healthy environment.³² The Holy Father observes that the principle of the universal destination of goods also applies to intellectual property: no one may profit at the expense of another’s rights.
- ***Subsidiarity:*** A check on totalitarianism, the principle of subsidiarity holds that issues should be addressed at as local a level as possible. Natural justice forbids a government from intruding on the dignity of the family, as Pope Leo XIII already observed in 1891 in words that have proven prophetic: “The contention, then, that the civil government should at its option intrude into and exercise intimate control over the family and the household is a great and pernicious error.”³³ This same principle protects small community organizations from government overreach; indeed, it fosters organic social bonds and responsibility. Subsidiarity also requires that higher-level institutions aid and coordinate efforts for the common good and that the political community must work to create conditions in which families and local communities can thrive.
- ***Solidarity:*** This fourth principle puts into practice our Lord’s vast definition of *neighbor* given in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29–37). The Holy Father notes that, in the digital age, we are aware of our close connections with people around the world more than ever before. Consistent with the teaching of his recent predecessors, he also notes that our neighbors with whom we should enter into solidarity also include future generations, who will inherit the world that our current generation leaves them.

²⁷ See Pope St. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1995), nos. 96–97.

²⁸ Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), nos. 59–85.

²⁹ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 26.

³⁰ Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), no. 60.

³¹ Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), nos. 8–11.

³² See Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (2015), nos. 30, 93–95.

³³ Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891) no. 14.



- **Social Justice:** This final term—while often incorrectly perceived as “woke”—flows organically from the Church’s perennial teaching on the cardinal virtues.³⁴ The Holy Father observes that “social justice is a concrete way of following Jesus and remaining faithful to the Gospel.”³⁵ This principle demands that we look beyond one-on-one relationships (commutative justice in Thomistic teaching) to the structural elements that lead to injustice in society (a lack of distributive justice, to use Thomistic language). As the Book of Genesis portrays sin in the primeval world (Gn 3–6), it does not merely consist of discrete evil actions but rather cascades into a sinful morass; the same applies to society today. As Pope St. John Paul II stated, “structures of sin” afflict the world,³⁶ and the principle of social justice demands that they be unveiled and addressed in the light of truth. Pope Leo XIV adds that new technologies have erected new structures of sin: the scourges of online pornography, addictive gambling applications, and rampant violations of privacy come immediately to mind.
- The social teaching of the Church is summarized helpfully in the 2004 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* by what was then called the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Readers of that document will want to keep in mind the various updates to that body of doctrine that have occurred in more recent documents, especially Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009); Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* (2015), *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), and *Laudate Deum* (2024); and Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026).³⁷ It is worth noting that while the various documents of the Church organize the principles of social teaching in various ways (for example, the U.S. Catholic bishops tend to refer to “seven themes” of Catholic Social Teaching, but also utilize the *Compendium*’s four principles as an overall framework), the lens for analyzing modern-day challenges and concerns remains consistent throughout.

Applying Catholic Social Teaching to Faithful Citizenship

- This survey of Catholic Social Teaching may seem overwhelming, as it spans 135 years and encompasses a wide array of public concerns. Happily, it is not a codex of rules to be applied mechanically; instead, the Church’s social teachings offer a well-developed set of criteria to discern the ever-changing “signs of the times.”³⁸
- Indeed, Pope Leo XIV describes the Church’s social teaching as “an examination of conscience” for the Church, which asks whether we live these principles in our shared ecclesial life.³⁹
- Accordingly, the principle of subsidiarity generally means that the papal Magisterium will not directly address the political questions of individual nations.⁴⁰ As Catholics in the United States, we share the collective responsibility to assess the issues of public concern and discern a path forward, under the leadership of our bishops.
- At the same time, the foundations and principles of Catholic Social Teaching require that we Catholics habitually assess our society and consistently make choices to promote human dignity and

³⁴ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. [1807](#), [1928](#).

³⁵ Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), no. 77.

³⁶ Pope St. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), nos. 36–37.

³⁷ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004).

³⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 4.

³⁹ Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas*, (2026), no. 86.

⁴⁰ Especially grave cases call for exceptions, perhaps the most famous of which is Pius XI’s denunciation of Nazi theory in his *Mit Brennender Sorge* (1937).



serve our neighbor, as broadly as the Lord defines that term. This assessment requires several components:

- identifying critical issues and structures of sin present in our nation today,
 - informing oneself of the relevant facts affecting each issue,
 - forming one's conscience with the guidance of the Church's teaching (understanding that there may be degrees of nuance for various issues that require detailed moral analysis), and
 - deciding how to respond given the concrete possibilities in the near and long term.
- In conducting this assessment, we do well to avoid the error of moral equivalency (treating all issues as having the same moral weight) and we should also avoid the temptation to focus on only a single issue to the exclusion of others, or to gather information through a partisan lens. The same principles of synodality—journeying with Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14:6)—teach us to listen patiently to viewpoints that we may initially find uncomfortable, trusting in our shared desire to hear the voice of God speaking the truth.
- Crucially, faithful citizenship is a way of life, not merely something exercised when marking a ballot. Although it addresses specific moral issues—abortion, racial equality, economic inequities, criminal justice, euthanasia, family life, immigration, participation in the political process, war and peace, and many more—faithful citizenship fundamentally is a way of seeing the world in the light of the Gospel and allowing Gospel truth to point the way to prudential judgements and concrete decisions.



Session 3: Preaching Faithful Citizenship

Having explored faithful citizenship in our current U.S. context and the value of Catholic Social Teaching in discerning it, we now turn to concrete strategies for preaching about faithful citizenship, especially in homilies at Mass.

The Liturgical Context of the Homily

- The Second Vatican Council called for the homily to be an integral part of the Sacred Liturgy. Specifically, it taught that “By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text, during the course of the liturgical year; the homily, therefore, is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself.”⁴¹
- Because the Christian life cannot be separated from public responsibilities including voting, advocacy for the poor and vulnerable, and the moral choices we make every day,⁴² topics related to faithful citizenship have a proper place in the Sunday homily as well as in other opportunities for preaching.
- Homilists do well to resist two contrary temptations:
- **Avoidance:** Some homilists may want to avoid sensitive topics, perhaps out of an understandable desire not to offend members of the congregation during the Holy Mass. This temptation runs into our Lord’s contrary example in the Nazareth synagogue (Lk 4:14–30), when Jesus proclaims the words of the prophet Isaiah (Is 61:1–2, Lk 4:18–19) and then says to the assembly, “Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” When the community balks, the Lord continues to engage with them, even though his message was difficult to hear. Jesus’ citing of the ministry of Elijah and Elisha toward foreigners challenged their sense of specialness, causing some in the community to become angry (Lk 4:26–30). Our Lord’s preaching on the Bread of Life in the Capernaum synagogue follows a similar pattern (Jn 6:22–71).
- **Aggrandizement:** The Gospel touches every aspect of the Christian life, public and private; in that respect, it is like yeast that leavens a whole batch of dough (Mt 13:33, Lk 13:21). The Lord entered a world filled with injustices, and he addressed them especially in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3–10, Lk 6:20–26) but also obliquely on occasion (Lk 13:31–32). While his public ministry did not make the political issues of the day its sole or even principal focus, his love and compassion for the poor, sick, and suffering was a continuous thread throughout his ministry.⁴³ In the face of messianic expectations, the Lord emptied himself as a suffering servant: “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). Similarly, St. Paul criticizes the age in which he lived and ministered (Rom 12:2), while still urging submission to imperial authorities (Rom 13:1–7). The Church’s mission has an eternal perspective. The Sunday homily cannot become a local live version of a Sunday morning news program filled with political

⁴¹ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), no. 52.

⁴² See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), no. 183.

⁴³ See Pope Francis, *Dilexit Nos* (2024), nos. 43–47.



commentary. Nor should it be void of connection to the challenges faced by society and the people of God.⁴⁴

- Faithful citizenship, therefore, forms an integral part of how to live as a Catholic in the United States today.⁴⁵ It should, therefore, receive treatment as part of the “guiding principles of the Christian life” as relevant to the readings and other liturgical texts of the day.⁴⁶ Indeed, this preaching will have greater effect when woven organically into pastoral practice rather than only receiving attention during election season. Our civic responsibilities occupy a place within the many responsibilities that flow from the various webs of relationships that we have in our families, workplaces, and local communities.
- The following ten strategies offer some guidance for how to preach faithful citizenship as an integral part of the Catholic Christian life. Some of these strategies focus generally on preparing to preach whereas others more specifically focus on the themes of faithful citizenship. Taken together, they support effective preaching that remains true to the Word of God while highlighting its practical relevance today.

Top Ten List of Strategies for Preaching Faithful Citizenship

- **The Incarnation is everything.** After the mystery of the Blessed Trinity—“the central mystery of Christian faith and life”⁴⁷—the mystery of the Word-made-Flesh, true God and true man, occupies a preeminent place as it lies at the foundation of all preaching and catechesis.⁴⁸ The Church’s constant faith in the full humanity and full divinity of Christ also lies at the foundation of how she interprets the written Word of God in Sacred Scripture.⁴⁹ Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:32), the congregation’s hearts should burn as they encounter the crucified and risen Lord in the proclamation and preaching of the Word of God. Effective preaching, therefore, allows the congregation to perceive the Lord’s divine gaze on those whom he encountered in a real time and place. Concrete language serves this goal well, as do frequent references to the Nicene Creed’s words about our Lord’s true divinity and humanity and the sacramental reality of the Divine Word’s true presence in the Eucharistic banquet.⁵⁰ As Pope Francis wrote, “This [liturgical] context demands that preaching should guide the assembly, and the preacher, to a life-changing communion with Christ in the Eucharist.”⁵¹
- **Therefore, the Lord was subject to political forces too.** As the Evangelist makes clear (Lk 1:5, 2:1–2, 3:1–2), the Lord entered a world dominated by both the religious leadership of the high priest and the imperial might of the Roman emperor and his client kings. Both forces have long histories, incubated in the aftermath of the Maccabean revolt between 167 and 164 BC, when the high priests began to assume a greater political role in Jerusalem. These Hasmonian high priests in turn made an alliance with Rome as a hedge against further aggression from the Seleucid Greek rulers, whose aggressive posture toward the Jews provoked the revolt (1 Mc 8:1–30, 12:1–18, 15:15–21). This Rome-Jerusalem alliance backfired in 63 BC, when the bickering between two claimants to the

⁴⁴ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Homiletic Directory*, nos. 12–14.

⁴⁵ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), nos. 528–31.

⁴⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), no. 52; *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 65.

⁴⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 234.

⁴⁸ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 425–26; Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), nos. 137–38.

⁴⁹ See Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), nos. 33–37; Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* (1965), nos. 11–13; Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010), nos. 11–19.

⁵⁰ See Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010), no. 52.

⁵¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 138.



office of high priest appeared before the Roman military leader Pompey, who seized control of Judea, denying the high priest much of his political authority.⁵² The Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven, as Matthew's Gospel usually calls it) stands in contrast to the values of the Roman Empire: whereas Rome obtained power by military force, the Lord's kingdom "does not belong to this world" (Jn 18:36). Just as our society lives amid political forces, so also did the society in which our Lord lived. Effective homilists invite the congregation to explore the similarities between our Lord's world and our own, looking for opportunities to promote the values of the true Kingdom.

- **And those political forces lie in the background of every biblical book.** The Gospels are not unique in referencing the social challenges of the era. Most if not all biblical books refer to the political climate of the era when it was written. For example, while recounting the origins of the world and the people of Israel, the Book of Genesis seldom misses an opportunity to poke fun at the foreign powers of the era in which it was likely written (see Gn 10:8–20, 11:1–9, 19:30–38). Elsewhere, the Jewish enmity for the Samaritans receives ample treatment in the story of the Assyrian Exile (2 Kgs 17:24–41). The lengthy saga of Israel's desire for a king becomes a quarrel over a need for central leadership (Jgs 17:6, 21:25; 1 Sm 8:1–5) versus the dangers of unchecked power (1 Sm 8:11–18, 1 Kgs 12:18–20), quite possibly history's earliest recorded debate between the merits of larger versus smaller government. Several psalms refer to the relationships between various rulers of various nations (e.g., Pss 72, 98). The prophets often critique social injustice (e.g., Is 1:10–17, Am 2:6–7). Taken as a whole, the Bible portrays many of the same social realities that that we face today. Homilists will want to explore this sociohistorical context and invite the faithful to take heart amid the same forces at work today and to fulfill their responsibilities "to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly" with the Lord (Mi 6:8).
- **Look at the characters.** Characters drive stories. People remember Romeo and Juliet, Ebenezer Scrooge, Huckleberry Finn, Scarlett O'Hara, Jay Gatsby, Luke Skywalker, Marty McFly, and Shrek more than they remember the details of their respective plotlines. The same is true with Sacred Scripture. As human beings, we naturally relate to characters whom we admire or whose lives resonate with our own; hence, role models serve a particular importance especially when children are growing up or adults are beginning a career. Beyond their role as intercessors, the saints serve as support for us today.⁵³ Character-focused preaching draws attention to the various traits and actions of the people presented in the biblical text: such an approach bears particular fruit with characters who have both admirable and tragic traits, as such is the reality of the human condition. Even when preaching a nonnarrative text, homilists do well to infer the situation of the psalmist, letter-writer, sage, or prophet: What situations does this person face, and what choices do they make? Should we make a similar or a different choice?
- **Also look at the pace of action.** As many a mother tells her children, "It's not what you say. It's how you say it." This principle applies also to Sacred Scripture. Effective preaching begins with attentive reading; after all, homilists need to hear the Word of God before preaching it. One important skill for attentive reading is to notice when an inspired author summarizes action (i.e., relates the events of a lengthy period quickly) or slows down the action (i.e., gives a lengthy account of a brief event). When the latter occurs, the inspired author is making a conscious choice to dwell on a scene for a reason. For example, all four Gospels narrate the call of Simon Peter (Mt 4:18–22, Mk 1:16–20, Lk 5:1–11, and Jn 1:35–42), but St. Luke's is not only the longest by far but also

⁵² For more on this history, see F.F. Bruce, "Palestine, Administration of: Roman Administration," in *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:96–99.

⁵³ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [no. 957](#).



discusses fewer characters: he leaves Andrew unmentioned and alludes to the sons of Zebedee in passing. He thus chooses to focus on our Lord's one-on-one encounter with the fisherman. A similar example appears with the Feeding of the Five Thousand: St. John devotes the most attention to this miracle, which leads to the famous Bread of Life Discourse (Jn 6:1–71). By contrast, St. Luke—although his Gospel is longest by the number of Greek words—has the shortest version of this account (Lk 9:10–17), as though to say, “Yes, this event happened, and it matters, but what I really want to tell you is what happened as Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem,” which lasts approximately ten times as long as Mark and five times as long as Matthew (Lk 9:51–19:27 vs. Mk 10 and Mt 19–20). Attention to how the inspired author tells the story can reveal layers of meaning often left undetected, opening the door to fresh preaching that intrigues congregations.

- **Resist the temptation to harmonize or iron out tensions.** The Lectionary presents certain stories that occur in multiple Gospels. For example, the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year A offers the Beatitudes from Matthew's Gospel (Mt 5:1–12a), whereas the Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year C presents Luke's version (Lk 6:17, 20–26). The two versions differ substantially: in setting (a mountain in Matthew vs. a plain in Luke), in content (eight in Matthew vs. four in Luke, with several differences in meaning), and in the presence (in Luke) or absence (in Matthew) of woes. The Holy Spirit inspired both Evangelists; we do well to treat both versions as masterpieces in their own right: annexing the words “in spirit” from Matthew to Luke's “Blessed are the poor” risks emptying the latter's first woe of meaning. A similar situation arises on the First Sunday of Lent, when the temptation account is read: Mark devotes more words to the angels who minister to Jesus than to the temptations he faced (Mk 1:12–15), an opportunity to speak about heavenly help against evil. Matthew (Mt 4:1–11) and Luke (Lk 4:1–13) vary in the order of the temptations, with the latter climaxing in Jerusalem, which bears particular significance in his story. Rather than trying to reconstruct a hypothetical “original version,” homilists do well to reverence the texts appointed for a given Liturgy and preach them in all their power.
- **Look for processes.** Often, the situation that confronts characters requires some pondering before responding. Inspired authors thus will indicate the various movements that make up a process, one that establishes a pattern for our own response to the Word of God. One example appears in Luke 5:1–11, the call of Simon Peter, read as the Gospel on the Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year C). When he appears on scene, Jesus *approaches, instructs, deepens*, and then allows Simon Peter to *ponder, obey, and harvest*. This sixfold process resonates well with how the Lord approaches us in our call to discipleship and calls for a positive response. A similar phenomenon appears in Psalm 22, used on Palm Sunday every year and on the Fifth Sunday of Easter in Year B: the psalmist begins by feeling abandoned by God (vv. 2–6), mocked by peers (vv. 7–12), and otherwise forlorn (vv. 13–19); but then he calls upon the Lord (vv. 20–22) and survives to proclaim the Lord's praise in the assembly (vv. 23–27) and throughout the earth (vv. 28–32)—all a model of how the Lord can redeem even the most tragic of situations, appropriate given the traditional association of this psalm with the Lord's Passion. Homilists do well to detect processes that exemplify how to respond to grace.
- **Think on the book level rather than the scene level.** The Pontifical Biblical Commission has affirmed, “It is the text in its final stage, rather than in its earlier editions, which is the expression of the word of God.”⁵⁴ This final stage consists of the biblical books as they were accepted as wholes into the canon; the division into chapters and verses occurred centuries later. The postconciliar

⁵⁴ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993), I.A.4. Pope Benedict XVI later cited this section of the document in *Verbum Domini* (2010), no. 32; see footnote 97.



Lectionary offers a wealth of opportunities for the faithful to enjoy “richer fare ... at the table of God’s word.”⁵⁵ The three-year Sunday cycle offers opportunities for congregations to value the unique emphases of Matthew, Mark, and Luke; focused opportunities appear with John during the Easter season and during the 17th–21st Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year B, when John 6 is read. Experience suggests that the People of God feel honored when given a chance to connect what they hear in consecutive Sundays, especially when the larger significance of a theme unique to one Gospel connects to shared life experience. For example, all the Sundays from the 13th through 31st Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year C present an account from Jesus’ lengthy journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51–19:27), affording an opportunity to reflect on how the Lord’s journey to the cross leads him to extend mercy to the marginalized, call the comfortable out of complacency, and give an example of faithfulness to the mission. As another example, the 18th through 24th Sundays of Ordinary Time in Year A read Gospel accounts from the fourth major block of Matthew’s Gospel,⁵⁶ during which the Lord reveals to his disciples his vision for the Church he is founding, an ideal time for reflection on how we all live as members of this Church. Attention to the book level allows the full drama of Sacred Scripture to captivate readers.

- **Find the overlap between our world and that of the text.** Several of the above strategies have focused on reading Scripture well, noticing details that provide enrichment. An important complement arises as homilists also pay careful attention to the realities facing our world today. The words of the Second Vatican Council remain instructive: “the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other.”⁵⁷ Homilists who exegete both their assembly and the biblical texts well have the opportunity to show clearly what our world and the world in the biblical text have in common and invite their congregations to respond as the Lord desires.
- **Lead into the Church’s sacramental life.** Liturgical preaching prepares the faithful for the Liturgy of the Eucharist and for Holy Communion. Homilists do well to wed careful preaching to a careful and caring *ars celebrandi* that leads the faithful into a vibrant participation in the sacred mysteries.⁵⁸ As the faithful become more aware of the fruits of the Blessed Eucharist, they draw closer to Christ, become more committed to the poor and vulnerable, enter into a deeper solidarity with the Church around the world, and aspire to seek unity where divisions rupture the bonds of charity.⁵⁹ All preaching on faithful citizenship should remind the faithful of our common bond in the one Lord whose one sacrifice is made present on the altar.

Concluding Reflection on Luke 9:51-19:27

- The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29–37) stands as a shining example of our Lord’s broad definition of neighbor. The Lord tells this parable in response to a scholar of the law who wants to inherit eternal life. He thinks he is doing well, as he correctly cites the *Shema* (Dt 6:4–5) and the command to love one’s neighbor (Lv 19:18). But he quibbles over that term *neighbor*. Our Lord paints a portrait of a Samaritan—loathed for theological and historical reasons but also unwelcome

⁵⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), no. 51.

⁵⁶ Many scholars agree that the body of Matthew’s Gospel has a five-part structure. See Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 23.

⁵⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 4.

⁵⁸ See Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007), no. 38.

⁵⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1391–98.



on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, a road that entirely sat within Judea and never even approached Samaria—who makes himself a neighbor to the robber’s victim.

- Significantly, the Lord encounters this scholar of the law as he journeys to Jerusalem. By the time he tells this parable, he has already predicted his Passion (Lk 9:22) and spoken in the Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah about the “exodus” he is to accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk 9:30-31). Indeed, he too will soon traverse that very same road between Jericho and Jerusalem (see Lk 19:1, 28) and will suffer a far worse fate than the robber’s victim. Who will attend to the suffering Christ? The Lord invites that scholar of the law: “Go and do likewise.” We receive the same invitation.



Discussion Questions

Questions after Session #1

1. How comfortable do you feel about addressing questions of public concern, especially in preaching? Are there some moral issues about which you feel more at ease than others?
2. What challenges and opportunities do you perceive in addressing these issues of public concern in your local community?
3. Of the three themes proposed by the U.S. bishops, which one most resonates with you? Which one most challenges you?

Questions after Session #2

1. As you consider the Church's legacy of Catholic Social Teaching, how prominently does it figure into your daily life and ministry?
2. Which areas of the Church's Social Teaching most resonate with you? Which challenge you the most?
3. Which issues beyond those listed in the outline merit inclusion in our shared assessment of how to live faithful citizenship today? What local issues especially affect your community?

Questions after Session #3

1. How can treatment of issues of public concern connect with the Sacred Liturgy in a way that preserves its transcendence?
2. How does your approach to reading and praying with the Bible influence your preaching? What strategies strike you as most promising?
3. As you pray with the familiar Parable of the Good Samaritan, which detail touches you most? How does it influence your pastoral practice?



Option 2: A One-Hour Formation Session

Leaders of this condensed one-hour session will want to read and consider the ideas presented more fully in the longer outlines (see Option 1: Formation Day). This outline attempts to offer the main salient points in a manageable format. The presenter may also wish to select 2-3 discussion questions from the previous page to assist participants in processing and reflecting on the information presented. In addition, consider sharing with participants the link to [this video for clergy](#) to complement and reinforce content covered during the brief session. The video draws from interviews with several bishops and expands on several of the themes below.

Faithful Citizenship as a Way of Life

- Contrary to some perspectives, the U.S. Constitution limits government intrusion into Church affairs. While it does prohibit any church from becoming the established religion, it otherwise does not limit the Church from addressing matters of public concern.
- Indeed, the Church has a duty to teach on matters that intersect with politics, as the Great Commission required the Apostles to hand on everything the Lord taught them. Because some of that teaching—especially the Beatitudes and some of the parables—addressed matters of justice and society, the successors to the Apostles, the College of Bishops, must also weigh in on questions of public morality.
- The U.S. Church faces several challenges today.
 - **Secularism and Relativism**, which minimize the role of the Church in public life or undermine the very notion of truth at all.
 - **Polarization and the Media Ecosystem**, which exacerbates disagreements into mutual distrust and even hatred.
 - **“Boutique Ecclesiology,”** whereby individuals begin with a set of values and look for a bespoke religious experience that affirms those predetermined conclusions.
- At the same time, opportunities exist.
 - **Communications and Technology** allow easy access to the teachings of the Church in attractive ways, usually at low or no cost.
 - **Liturgy and the Catholic Heritage** offer a bimillennial tradition, an anchor in the stormy waters of constant change.
 - **Increased Interest**, indicated in recent data that has seen an uptick in converts to Catholicism.
- In the face of these realities, the U.S. Bishops have decided on three core themes for faithful citizenship.



- **The Church's Role to Transform Society**, the Church's response to Lord's call to be "leaven" in the world (see Mt 13:33).
- **"Who Is My Neighbor?"** Taken from the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29–37), we are called to adopt the Lord's broad definition of neighbor.
- **Faith before Politics**, a perspective whereby our faith leads us to the public square, instead of preexisting political agendas trying to find a religious rationale.

Catholic Social Teaching in the U.S. Context

- Pope Leo XIV's recent encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026) offers a healthy reflection on the Social Teaching of the Church, beginning with its history.
- The first significant papal treatment of social questions appears in Pope Leo XIII's landmark 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.
- Forty years later (1931), Pope Pius XI commemorated this encyclical and elaborated further on its teaching amid the Great Depression and rise of totalitarian regimes in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*.
- Pius XII continued this tradition, especially through his Christmas addresses, as he led the Church through the tragic years of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War.
- Pope St. John XXIII ushered in a new era of teaching as he addressed not only Catholics, but all people of goodwill, a posture to the world that would be expanded further at the Second Vatican Council, especially in *Gaudium et Spes* (1965).
- Pope St. Paul VI made his greatest contribution in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967), in which he defended human dignity and promoted integral human development.
- St. John Paul II's long reign saw him issue several encyclicals that contributed to Catholic Social Teaching, as the Cold War era ended and the Internet age began. Notable encyclicals of this era include *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), *Centesimus Annus* (1991), *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), and *Evangelium Vitae* (1995).
- A generation later, Pope Benedict XVI responded to the global financial crisis and increased globalization in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009).
- Pope Francis made significant contributions in his ecology encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) and the apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum* (2024), as well as in his apostolic exhortation on evangelization *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) and pandemic-era encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020).
- This overview of history illustrates how the Church has accompanied the world through 135 years of changing economic, social, and political conditions. Therefore, our ongoing evaluation and response to public affairs sits well within established church tradition.
- Pope Leo XIV also reminds the Church of three foundations of the social teaching of the Church.



- The Human Person: Image of the Triune God
 - Equal Dignity of All Human Beings
 - Supreme Value of Human Rights
- He also recalls five principles of Catholic Social Teaching.
 - The Common Good
 - The Universal Destination of Goods
 - Subsidiarity
 - Solidarity
 - Social Justice
- The Holy Father proposes that the principles of Catholic Social Teaching become an examination of conscience for Church action.
- These foundations and principles offer criteria for discernment as we assess the social questions that face our nation today. This necessary assessment requires attentive listening on our shared journey with the Lord, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14:6).
- Faithful citizenship is a way of living an integral Catholic life, not a topic relevant only when marking a ballot.

Preaching Faithful Citizenship

- As we consider how to preach faithful citizenship, we begin with the homily's unique role in the Sacred Liturgy. As an integral part of the liturgical action, it should deepen the assembly's liturgical participation.
- Homiletic treatment of matters of public concern should be careful neither to distract from the Liturgy's transcendent nature nor avoid such topics as though they were unworthy of the Sacred Liturgy.
- Here are ten concrete strategies for preaching faithful citizenship. Some focus specifically on public issues; others are strategies for reading Sacred Scripture in a manner likely to notice relevant details. All seek to foster preaching on faithful citizenship organically based on the biblical readings and not artificially.
 - The Incarnation is everything.
 - Therefore, the Lord was subject to political forces too.
 - And those political forces lie in the background of every biblical book.
 - Look at the characters.
 - Also look at the pace of action.
 - Resist the temptation to harmonize or iron out tensions.
 - Look for processes.



- Think on the book level rather than the scene level.
 - Find the overlap between our world and that of the text.
 - Lead into the Church's sacramental life.
- We conclude with a brief reflection on the Parable of the Good Samaritan:
- The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29–37) stands as a shining example of our Lord's broad definition of neighbor. The Lord tells this parable in response to a scholar of the law who wants to inherit eternal life. He thinks he is doing well, as he correctly cites the *Shema* (Dt 6:4–5) and the command to love one's neighbor (Lv 19:18). But he quibbles over that term *neighbor*. Our Lord paints a portrait of a Samaritan—loathed for theological and historical reasons but also unwelcome on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, a road that entirely sat within Judea and never approached Samaria—who makes himself a neighbor to the robber's victim.
- Significantly, the Lord encounters this scholar of the law as he journeys to Jerusalem. By the time he tells this parable, he has already predicted his Passion (Lk 9:22) and spoken in the Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah about the “exodus” he is to accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk 9:31). Indeed, he too will soon traverse that very same road between Jericho and Jerusalem (see Lk 19:1, 28) and will suffer a far worse fate than the robber's victim. Who will attend to the suffering Christ? The Lord invites that scholar of the law: “Go and do likewise.” We receive the same invitation.

Faith Before Politics Resources from USCCB

“The Church actively participates in the processes by which society grows and is organized, and she offers her own contribution to the creation of a more just and fraternal society.”

- Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas*, no. 19

Resources

Visit usccb.org/FaithBeforePolitics for resources available to the general public. Many are in both English and Spanish. Please note that numerous resources are being refreshed during 2026. Examples of resources available:

- Novena for Faithful Citizenship
- Resources for Civil Dialogue
- Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship statement
- YouTube video playlist
- Do's and Don'ts Guidelines During Election Season
- Bulletin Inserts
- Conscience Formation Handout
- 3 Ways to Support Peaceful Elections

USCCB Policy and Outreach Offices in alphabetical order

Visit the individual page of each office to learn more about the work of each office on public policy addressed in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*.

- [Catholic Education](#)
- [Communications](#)
- [Domestic Justice and Human Development](#)
- [International Justice and Peace](#)
- [Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth](#)
- [Pro-Life Activities](#)
- [Racial Justice and Reconciliation](#)
- [Religious Liberty](#)
- [Migration](#)



United States
Conference of
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The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is an assembly of the hierarchy of bishops who jointly exercise pastoral functions on behalf of the Christian faithful of the United States and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
