

## **Brothers and Sisters All: A Faithful Platform for the Future of Our Country**

### ***Introduction***

*"Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all."*

*—Pope Francis (Fratelli Tutti)*

As we live out this call to solidarity and communion in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the people of the United States face a myriad of choices between competing visions for our nation's future. As Catholics, we are called by our faith to engage in this 2020 election and to shape the values and policies that will guide the future of this nation.

Pope Francis reminds us that "a good Catholic meddles in politics, offering the best of themselves, so that those who govern can govern well." The Catholic vision for the common good is a radical invitation to what Pope Francis calls a "revolution of tenderness."

The central claim of Christianity has always been that the rejected, crucified, and then resurrected Jesus is Lord of a new creation. In fact, with God's love incarnate in Jesus, a new community is established where hierarchies are subverted, concentrated power is decentralized, and all are welcome.

In this new place of mercy the last are first, the poor are blessed, and enemies are loved. Black lives matter here. LGBTQ lives matter here; and so too do the lives of refugees, the imprisoned, the unborn, and anyone else who suffers dehumanization, exclusion, and injustice.

In this new community, all of creation has intrinsic worth and must be treated accordingly.

Of course, no candidate and no party completely adheres to this vision of the common good. Ours is a pluralistic society in which many do not share our faith or its social vision. It is our hope, however, that the essential truth of the Gospel, the beauty of Pope Francis's vision, and the social mission of the Catholic Church will appeal to U.S. people.

The following reflections apply the teachings of our Church to the problems of our day with a heart of mercy for all of our sisters and brothers.

### ***Our Political Foundation: The Sacred Gift of Life and Creation***

The inviolable dignity of each and every human person, especially those who are vulnerable, and care for our planet home are the foundational political concerns for Catholics. That dignity becomes meaningless unless human life is valued both in our laws and in our culture. Indeed, we believe, as the Declaration of Independence states, that the very purpose of government is to promote "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Today, human dignity and all life are degraded by racism, violence, abortion, war, the death penalty, euthanasia, human trafficking, gun violence, torture, environmental damage, social exclusion, and poverty.

*We believe that these issues are all integrally connected and that their root causes must be addressed.*

## Racial Justice

The killing of George Floyd in May 2020 brought tens of thousands of Americans to the streets in lament and anger at the personal and structural racism that persists in our nation, its policies, laws and criminal justice system. As Pope Francis recently noted in *Fratelli tutti*, “Racism is a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding, and lurks in waiting” (97). For example, racial inequities that have existed for generations have been amplified by the COVID-19 public health crisis, as people of color, particularly Black Americans, are more likely than a White American to become infected with the virus; more likely to die if they become ill; more likely to be in jobs considered essential that may require frequent contact with customers or other members of the public; and more likely to lose their jobs as the economy collapses. Undocumented people of color, and those in mixed-status families, are unable to receive federal stimulus funds, pushing them further into precarity as the pandemic continues.

We must address the racism revealed in repeated acts of violence, both directly physical and structural, perpetrated against people of color across our country. Public policies must be designed in ways to overcome disproportionate impacts and reduce structural racism. Applying a “racial equity lens” can help us to achieve equal outcomes for people of color. When this lens is applied to policies and programs, progress should be made toward eliminating racial inequities.

Such a lens would:

- Center the needs and leadership of communities of color first. People from communities of color should be included as full partners in the policy design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Name and consider each community of color individually, recognizing each community has its own history, experiences, and challenges.
- Analyze the specific policy outcomes for each racial and ethnic group. To reverse racial inequities, policy recommendations consider the historical trauma each community has experienced and experienced differently.
- Set up policies and programs that are responsive in a way that is proportionate to these disparate impacts.
- Include a robust implementation and monitoring plan. While policy design is important, it is equally important to evaluate that the targeted support is provided in a thoughtful, racially equitable way.

Policies like the landmark Civil Rights Act, passed fifty-six years ago, were one step toward addressing equality, but we cannot stop there. We must dismantle the racism that shows up in our tax codes, school zoning and funding processes, housing codes, the criminal justice system, the allocation of federal resources and in many, many other aspects of local, state, and national systems.

We are encouraged and inspired by the leadership of Black Lives Matter, the Poor Peoples’ Campaign and others to seek reconciliation for our communities and our nation and to work for change.

**Of particular interest and concern to us at this time are the candidate’s:**

- **Understanding of systemic racism in the United States and its impact on Black, indigenous, and people of color;**
- **Position on voter identification laws and other restrictions that suppress voting among people of color;**
- **Position on COVID-19 relief for those disproportionately impacted by racial inequities in healthcare, and lack of enforcement of workplace safety regulations;**
- **Position on ending for-profit prisons and detention centers;**
- **Position on funding for community safety efforts that address anti-Blackness in policing and support non-carceral, prevention-oriented strategies.**

## The Climate Crisis

The first words of the Bible tell us that God is the creator of heaven and earth. God’s first home for us was a garden, and God’s first vocation for us was to be gardeners that protect and sustain creation.

In his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis spoke about our global failure to live up to this mission: ... “we can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point, due to the rapid pace of change and degradation; these are evident in large-scale natural disasters as well as social and even financial crises, for the world’s problems cannot be analyzed or explained in isolation.” [61]

But this isn’t Francis’s issue alone. In fact, it was Pope Benedict—not Francis—who was first dubbed the “green pope” by the media for his environmental activism. “If you want to cultivate peace,” Benedict famously said, “protect creation.”

The Catholic Church speaks on issues of faith and science not as an academic exercise, but because these issues affect human flourishing and the well-being of the natural world. We are called by God to defend the dignity of every woman, man, child, and the earth, our common home, threatened by a global economy that kills through environmental exploitation, rampant consumerism, and structural inequalities, by personal and societal lifestyles, by national and local public policies and practices, by global financial decisions and transnational business activities.

Living simply, protecting creation, reducing our carbon emissions and, in other ways, addressing climate change are responses to God’s ancient request that we care for all that God has given us: clean air, fresh water, and fruits of the harvest. Water is a particularly vital concern as violent conflicts have been, and will continue to be, linked to issues around water.

**Of particular interest and concern to us at this time are the candidate’s:**

- **proposed policies in response to climate change, loss of species diversity, and other critical ecological issues;**
- **strategy for creating alternative energy sources, moving away from fossil fuels, and providing a just transition to green jobs;**
- **understanding of the intersectionality of climate change and race;**
- **pledge to adhere to the commitments of the Paris Climate Accords and to meeting the US obligations to provide full funding for the Green Climate Fund;**
- **awareness of the disproportionate impact of climate change on impoverished communities in the U.S. and around the world.**

## A Just Economy

The most immediate economic issue facing the world today is the economic chaos brought on by the novel coronavirus pandemic which has only served to increase the scandalous levels of income inequality and poverty. In the U.S., the impact of COVID-19 is exacerbated by unjust minimum wages, unequal pay for women and people of color, lack of federal paid family leave laws, systematic attacks on labor rights, and high rates of unemployment and incarceration among youth and in communities of color. In many impoverished countries, the pandemic is devastating economies already dealing with overwhelming external debt, overreliance on extractive projects, domestic and international corruption and unjust trade agreements.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented challenge for the U.S. economy which must be met by a sustained, ambitious government response lasting months, perhaps years. The effort will require new and expansive measures to support workers, state and local governments and small

businesses, and that effort should focus especially on those workers and communities of color who are bearing the brunt of the crisis. While the recovery program likely will cost trillions of dollars, people-centered policies and investments could bring the economy back more quickly and more equitably.

However, we note that this economic burden has not fallen equally on all segments of society. In 1980, the wealthiest one percent garnered ten percent of the national income. Today that same top one percent receives about twenty percent of the national income and the outsized influence of money in politics has significantly distorted our political system. Thus, while millions suffer, Congress and the administration entertain the idea of dismantling the Affordable Care Act, cutting Medicare, defunding successful federal “social safety net” programs, or raising the retirement age, but refuse to close tax loopholes that benefit the wealthiest Americans and the largest, most profitable corporations.

**Of particular interest and concern to us at this time are the candidate’s**

- **plans for managing the coronavirus and the health, social and economic consequences of the pandemic;**
- **proposals for closing the increasing wealth gap;**
- **plans for a national paid family leave program;**
- **plans to ensure that all U.S. residents have access to quality, affordable healthcare.**

### **Peacemaking and Nonviolence**

The world continues to struggle with violent conflict in our own communities as well as with large-scale violent conflict in Afghanistan, Yemen, Nigeria, Libya, Palestine, and Israel, among other nations. Yet, notable, effective, and sustainable peacemaking practices offer a great deal of hope.

Research has shown that nonviolent resistance movements are twice as effective as violent resistance and at least ten times more likely to lead to durable democracy. Other effective nonviolent practices that can reduce violence include restorative justice approaches to accountability and responsibility, trauma-healing programs, unarmed civilian protection, and inter-religious dialogue. Ensuring a gender perspective and women’s participation, protection, and rights is critical to violence prevention and disarmament, protection in displacement settings, peacekeeping, policymaking, and reconstruction.

In contrast, war and preparations for war continue to fuel further violence, acts of terrorism, and counter-terrorism in a cycle of violence. With war, people living in poverty suffer the most in terms of death, displacement, and disease. Pope Francis has been clear, “No more War.” He explains in his recent encyclical: “There are two extreme situations that may come to be seen as solutions...without realizing that they are false answers that do not resolve the problems they are meant to solve and ultimately do no more than introduce new elements of destruction in the fabric of....society. These are war and the death penalty.” (225)

Catholics are called to humanize even our enemies; not to excuse injustice or violence, but to see the good in every person as a child of God with sacred dignity, value, and genuine human needs. Thus, we support a robust commitment to creative, multi-level, and sustained diplomacy at all stages of conflict. We support increasing investment not only in poverty-focused development aid, but also in innovative, effective, nonviolent peacemaking programs, both domestically and abroad. We seek an end to gun violence and to the death penalty. We call for the U.S. to end our nuclear weapons program, invest much less in military programs, and instead become a global leader in training people in the skills and strategies of active nonviolence to resist injustice and transform conflicts.

**Of particular interest and concern to us at this time are the candidate's:**

*Global*

- **plan for a new foreign policy framework with a focus and commitment to diplomacy, nonviolent resistance, and peacebuilding to prevent and defuse violence;**
- **willingness to reduce U.S. military spending to invest in social programs, public health, and effective nonviolent responses to serious global threats;**
- **willingness to scale-up funding for unarmed civilian protection programs, such as the existing funding for UCP in South Sudan.**

*Domestic*

- **strategy to significantly reduce gun violence;**
- **strategy to invest in violence prevention and nonviolent conflict skills within our communities;**
- **strategy to end the death penalty.**

**Justice for Migrants and Refugees**

Pope Francis's first pastoral trip outside of Rome was to the Italian island of Lampedusa where hundreds died while seeking safety. There, Pope Francis called out the globalization of indifference, which characterizes societies that lack compassion for immigrants and refugees. Today, we face the worst refugee crisis since WWII with millions fleeing violence and war, even as our nation dismantles its refugee program and turns back asylum seekers.

For over a century the U.S. Catholic bishops have embraced the Gospel mandate to provide support and hospitality for vulnerable and marginalized populations on the move. Along with the Catholic faithful they continue to advocate with policymakers to ensure dignity, justice, and protection for vulnerable people on the move; to communicate the Church's social teaching on migration, and help others of goodwill to better understand and appreciate the call to serve Christ in the stranger; to educate on the moral and Scriptural imperative to provide safety, hospitality, and welcome to newcomers and to support vulnerable migrants in need of care.

The current situation is immoral and shameful. The 10-20 year wait time for legal immigration and the arbitrary deportation of members of our communities tears families apart. Those seeking refuge at our border, including unaccompanied children, are turned away in violation of domestic and international law. For-profit prisons continue to profit from detaining immigrants, families, and children. Recipients of DACA and TPS live under threats that their status will be revoked. Further, we continue to fail to address the root causes, including U.S. foreign and trade policy, which contribute to the violence, poverty, and environmental destruction that drive forced migration.

**Of particular interest and concern to us at this time are the candidate's:**

- **position on a pathway to citizenship for the approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants and those with temporary protection, including DACA and TPS;**
- **plans to rebuild the refugee resettlement program and asylum systems;**
- **plans to address the inhumanity of current detention and deportation policies, the militarization of our borders and to reform the Department of Homeland Security;**
- **plans to ensure fairness in the immigration system, without regard for race, religion, wealth, or national origin;**
- **understanding of the root causes of migration, including violence and war, climate change, and poverty.**

## Freedom of Religion and Conscience

In the words of Pope Francis: “From our faith experience and from the wisdom accumulated over centuries, but also from lessons learned from our many weaknesses and failures, we, the believers of the different religions, know that our witness to God benefits our societies. The effort to seek God with a sincere heart, provided it is never sullied by ideological or self-serving aims, helps us recognize one another as travelling companions, truly brothers and sisters.”

In a time when hate and fear of religious difference has dominated much of the national rhetoric, we remain committed to preserving the freedom of religion, which is an anchor of our first amendment to the Constitution. As Americans we are called to respect people of all faiths, including Muslims.

There is no room in our society for anti-immigrant laws that seek to exclude people based on their religious beliefs. Our democracy is strongest when we support diversity of thought and belief; when the dignity of each individual is respected and everyone can contribute to the common good.

Jesus tells us our faith must manifest itself in works, so we insist that no distinction be drawn between our houses of worship and our public ministries to the poor and sick. This ensures that our work to serve the excluded can be practiced within our faith tradition. That being said, no Catholic institution—or any institution—should use a false notion of religious liberty to discriminate against anyone they employ or serve, particularly the LGBTQ community.

Sadly, the issue of religious liberty has often been perverted and used as a partisan wedge. The United States’ foundational commitment to religious liberty has, for more than two hundred years, helped unite Americans, not divide them. We oppose efforts to restrict religious liberty for all people, of any religion, but we also oppose efforts to demean it by turning it into a partisan weapon.

**Of particular interest and concern to us at this time are the candidate’s:**

- **attitude toward our Muslim neighbors and refugees from the Middle East and commitment to immediately end the Muslim Ban;**
- **commitment to work with Congress to pass hate crimes legislation and restore funding to address domestic extremism;**
- **approach to the freedom of conscience of individuals and religious institutions;**
- **willingness to condemn anti-Semitic attacks on Jewish communities and places of worship.**