



FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP 2012

This series has been prepared by the Wisconsin Catholic Conference as a guide for those who wish to inform their consciences in order to participate more fully in the political process. To learn more about the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (FCFC), visit www.faithfulcitizenship.org and www.wisconsinatholic.org.

Second in a four-part series

LIFE & DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Why does the Church teach that all human life is sacred and must be protected?

It is because each human person is created in God's image that, without exception, every human life is sacred. And because of this worth, every human life must be protected and respected from conception until natural death, from being aborted or euthanized.

In protecting human life, Catholics must first "begin with a commitment never to intentionally kill, or collude in the killing, of any innocent human life, no matter how broken, unformed, disabled or desperate that life may seem." (U.S. Catholic Conference, *Living the Gospel of Life*, 21)

"We need the perseverance to continue the struggle for the protection of human life, no matter what the setbacks, trusting in God and in the ultimate fruitfulness of the task He has called us to. We need the prudence to know when and how to act in the public arena – and also to recognize and dismiss that fear of acting which postures as prudence itself. And finally we need the great foundation of every apostolic life: faith, hope and charity. Faith not in moral or political abstractions, but in the personal presence of God; hope not in our own ingenuity, but in His goodness and mercy; and love for others, including those who oppose us, rooted in the love God showers down on us." (U.S. Catholic Conference, *Living the Gospel of Life*, 27)

THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON
IS THE FOUNDATION OF A MORAL
VISION FOR SOCIETY. DIRECT
ATTACKS ON INNOCENT PERSONS
ARE NEVER MORALLY ACCEPTABLE.

What about other human rights?

"The right to life implies and is linked to other human rights – to the basic goods that every human person needs to live and thrive. All the life issues are connected, for erosion of respect for the life of any individual or group in society necessarily diminishes respect for all life. The moral imperative to respond to the needs of our neighbors – basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work – is universally binding on our consciences and may be legitimately fulfilled by a variety of means. Catholics must seek the best ways to respond to these needs." (FCFC 25)



What about the death penalty?

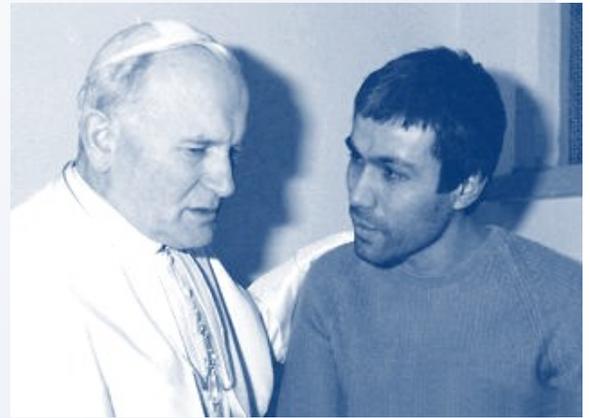
"If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons, public authority should limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2267)



PEACE & NON-VIOLENCE

What is meant by "Love your enemies"?

"This Gospel passage is rightly considered the magna carta of Christian non-violence. It does not consist in succumbing to evil ... but in responding to evil with good ... and thereby breaking the chain of injustice. One then understands that for Christians, non-violence is not merely tactical behaviour but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God's love and power that he is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Love of one's enemy constitutes the nucleus of the 'Christian revolution,' a revolution not based on strategies of economic, political or media power: the revolution of love, a love that does not rely ultimately on human resources but is a gift of God..." (Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 18 February 2007)



Where is peace absent?

"Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them are infamies indeed."

(*Gaudium et spes (The Church in the Modern World)* 27, as cited in John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae (The Gospel of Life)* 3)

CATHOLIC TEACHING ABOUT THE DIGNITY OF LIFE CALLS US TO OPPOSE TORTURE, UNJUST WAR, AND THE USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY; TO PREVENT GENOCIDE AND ATTACKS AGAINST NONCOMBATANTS; TO OPPOSE RACISM; AND TO OVERCOME POVERTY AND SUFFERING.

But how should a nation respond if attacked?

"Nations are called to protect the right to life by seeking effective ways to combat evil and terror without resorting to armed conflicts except as a last resort, always seeking first to resolve disputes by peaceful means." (FCFC 45)

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What is the best approach to promoting peace and non-violence?

"We have a responsibility to discern carefully which public policies are morally sound. Catholics may choose different ways to respond to compelling social problems, but we cannot differ on our moral obligation to help build a more just and peaceful world through morally acceptable means, so that the weak and vulnerable are protected and human rights and dignity are defended." (FCFC 20)