The WCC has prepared two series of resources based on the U.S. bishops’
statement, Forming Consciences for
Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political
Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops
of the United States. Catholics are encouraged to utilize these resources as they
navigate the election process and fulfill their civic responsibilities.

The first and longer five-part series includes the following:

1. Letter from the Bishops/Overview of Catholic Social Teaching
2. Forming Consciences
3. Life & Dignity of the Human Person/ Poverty & Economic Justice
4. Religious Liberty/Immigration & Solidarity
5. Marriage & Family/Care for Creation

The shorter three-part series includes:

1. Letter from the Bishops/Overview of Catholic Social Teaching
2. Forming Consciences from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)
3. Select Quotes from the WCC’s five-part series.

Additional resources outside of both series include:

1. Candidate Questions & Wisconsin Voter Information
2. WCC Guidelines for Church Involvement in Electoral Politics

While the series and resources are designed for parish bulletins, they can also be reproduced on a parish website or on posters.

As in years past, the WCC materials are based on the U.S. bishops’ statement, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States (www.faithfulcitizenship.org).

Kim Vercauteren, Executive Director of the WCC, explained that being a faithful citizen involves much more than voting. A faithful citizen translates the social teachings of the Church into concrete economic, political, and social policies.

At the close of their opening letter, the bishops of Wisconsin write:

“Catholic social teaching . . . is crucial to proper discernment. Its proper application can lead to finding effective solutions for many of today’s most pressing problems. This is why it is so vital for the laity to know and live this teaching. Some people may disagree at times with this social teaching, but they acknowledge that it is consistent. As Catholics we support the unborn child and the mother. We support individual rights and the common good. We support the rule of law and mercy.”
Director’s Corner
Kim Vercauteren, Executive Director

Wisconsin’s Department of Corrections (DOC) currently manages 37 prisons and has an annual operating budget of over $1.2 billion. With a state prison population that has increased from 3,400 prisoners in 1978 to more than 23,000, it is clear that Wisconsin must do a better job of ending the cycle of incarceration.

Policymakers on both sides of the aisle are engaged in discussions on how to keep people from being incarcerated, as well as finding better ways of ensuring those exiting our prisons and jails have meaningful work, adequate shelter, and the resources necessary to be a valued member of their community. One proposed reform is allowing those with certain offenses, who have successfully paid their debt to society, to be able to have past crimes expunged from their record, a reform the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) supports. The WCC also supports efforts to improve access to mental health services for those facing incarceration and urges legislators look to at means of expanding these services to individuals under community supervision. This will require our state to invest in ways to attract more mental health professionals to live and work in Wisconsin, which is already facing a provider shortage.

There are also transitional jobs and other workforce training programs that currently operate on a small scale within our corrections systems and have shown initial positive results. However, in order to make an impact, Wisconsin has to be ready to divert more funds into employment and vocational training, as well as help facilitate relationships between employers in need of workers and those former offenders in need of employment.

We in the Church must also do more to help those returning to our communities after incarceration. Recently, Dismas Ministry, a national Catholic prison outreach organization, hosted the National Catholic Ministry Conference. The theme for the event, “Bridges of Hope,” highlights the need for society to build bridges through pastoral care for those who have faced incarceration. As Catholics, we need to build bridges through a robust criminal justice ministry, focused on improving the lives of victims, offenders, and our communities, especially those most directly impacted by crime.

Bishops Lead Day of Reparation

On October 9, 2018, at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help in Champion, Wisconsin, the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, led by Archbishop Jerome E. Listecki and Bishop David L. Ricken and ninety priests from Wisconsin and beyond, attended a day of priestly prayer and reparation to God and to all those who have suffered abuse by clergy within the Church.

An outdoor Mass was held on the Shrine grounds, followed by the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The public was invited to participate in both the Mass and the Sacrament. Don Warden, chief operating officer of the Shrine, estimated about 700 lay people attended for all or part of the day. Afterwards, the bishops hosted a spiritual conference for Catholic clergy in the Chapel given by Reverend Frederick Miller of Newark, New Jersey, who is chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Father Miller’s presentation centered on priesthood, Mary, and reparation.

October 9 was the 159th anniversary of the apparition of the Blessed Mother to a young adult laywoman, Adele Brise. This year is also the 150th anniversary of the Dioceses of La Crosse and Green Bay and the 175th anniversary of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. In commemorating these milestones, the bishops of Wisconsin recognized the need to atone for the wrongs committed by Church leaders who violated their vows and the trust of the faithful, causing irreparable harm to vulnerable persons throughout our Church. The bishops stated that they remain committed to restoring the trust of these families, the faithful, and the people of Wisconsin in the Catholic Church.

“I understand how horrifying it is to reflect upon the failure of Church leaders to address these crimes swiftly and justly,” said Archbishop Jerome Listecki. “However, these public conversations, while heart-wrenching for victim-survivors and their families, are a necessary step in publically reaffirming our commitment to protecting Wisconsin’s most vulnerable individuals.”

Bishop David Ricken noted, “There are many reasons to come together this year with our priests. Front and center, however, is the need to make reparation for the heinous misdeeds of our ordained leaders and pray for healing for the victim-survivors.”
On October 10, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a proposal to change the rules governing the definition of “public charge” in immigration proceedings. Public charge refers to an individual who is financially dependent in whole or in part on the government.

For decades, federal immigration officials used two measures to determine whether an immigrant was likely to become unacceptably dependent on government assistance: the immigrant either was likely to receive over 50 percent of his/her income from public cash assistance, or was likely to be institutionalized for long-term care. In either case, the immigrant could be denied entry into the U.S. or lawful permanent residence (LPR, also known as “green card” status).

The DHS is now proposing to expand the measures used to determine who could become a public charge. In addition to cash assistance and institutionalization, the DHS is adding receipt of food stamps, Section 8 Housing vouchers, rental assistance, public housing, Medicare Part D, and non-emergency Medicaid (with some exceptions).

Along with this longer list of benefits, the DHS is also shortening the time that immigrants may receive public benefits. For example, the current practice is to deny applications if over 50 percent of the immigrants’ income derives from cash assistance. The DHS rule would permit denials if immigrants in 2018 received $1,821 in any 12 consecutive months.

Finally, it introduces factors that may weigh positively or negatively for the applicant. For example, if an immigrant has resources or assets that are equal to or greater than 250 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), this would weigh favorably. But if the immigrant has income less than 125 percent FPL, this would weigh negatively. Large families and elderly parents are also negatives.

The proposed rule would primarily impact those living legally in the U.S. who are trying to obtain lawful permanent residence or who seek to extend their current legal status. However, the DHS rule could also indirectly hurt family members, including U.S. citizen children, who want to have their parents or other family members join them in this country.

The proposal would exempt refugees, asylees, Cuban Haitians, U visa and T visa applicants, Temporary Protected Status applicants, and Special Immigrant Juveniles.

The U.S. bishops have yet to submit their public comments to DHS (expected by the end of November), but have already asserted how the proposed rule will harm families, especially those who are economically disadvantaged and those who seek reunification with their family members. The bishops are also very concerned that many mixed-status families (e.g., U.S. citizen children, but legal immigrant parents or siblings) will forgo vital legal assistance (e.g., nutrition, health, housing) for fear that it would negatively affect LPRs or other status change applicants.

The DHS proposed rule is not final and the DHS is accepting public comments until December 10. After reviewing these, the DHS may amend the rule or simply publish it as is. The final rule has the force of law.

Immigrant families are vital to Wisconsin. Their energy, ambition, and hard work have revitalized many parts of the state. Immigrants deserve the opportunity to pursue a better life through legal channels and establish lawful residence or citizenship.

Catholics and others are encouraged to learn more about this issue and to submit comments either electronically or by mail. To learn more, visit the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Justice for Immigrants website at https://justiceforimmigrants.org/what-we-are-working-on/immigration/public-charge-2.

For up-to-date information, join the WCC’s free e-advocacy network and get the bi-weekly Capitol Update.

Visit www.wisconsincatholic.org to sign up!

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Voter Resources on Candidates and Ballots

Neither the WCC nor the Wisconsin dioceses distribute information on the positions of candidates for public office. Nor does the Catholic Church endorse or oppose candidates for election to public office. (For further information on what political activity is permitted in parishes, see the WCC Guidelines for Church Involvement in Electoral Politics at http://www.wisconsincatholic.org/Guidelines_SHORT_2016.docx.pdf).

However, because it can indeed be difficult to discern who is the best candidate, the WCC has prepared a Candidate Questions card (http://www.wisconsincatholic.org/Candidate_Questions__Voting_Info.pdf) to help voters make informed decisions. The questions serve as a reminder to Catholics of those policy issues that implicate important values and principles of Catholic teaching. Consider submitting these questions to the candidates either in person, electronically, by phone, or in writing. The questions can also be compared to the candidates’ platforms or websites.

The most comprehensive compilation of candidate debates, forums, interviews, and other election-related activities is available at WisconsinEye Campaign 2018 (http://www.wiseye.org/Campaign-2018), a non-profit entity dedicated to covering political and policy events around the state, including full coverage of the Wisconsin Legislature.


Politifact Wisconsin “fact checks” some of the claims made by candidates and compiles all these stories in one location (https://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/elections). Finally, sample ballots are provided by address at MyVote WI (https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us), along with other voter information.