



Platform for the Common Good

INSPIRED BY FAITH AND BUILDING ON OUR NATION'S FOUNDING IDEALS

Enlivened by the Gospel message of hope and the wisdom of Catholic Social Teaching, we, as people of faith, have come together with deep urgency to help make our nation “a more perfect union.”

Our Catholic tradition raises the best of what it means to be human and challenges us to live up to these ideals. With the U.S. Catholic Bishops, we acknowledge that “we are a nation founded on ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,’ but the right to life itself is not fully protected.” (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 2007, p. 1) Victimized are the unborn, those experiencing war and violence, those suffering from economic poverty in our own nation, and those fleeing violence and poverty in other nations. Like the U.S. Bishops, we believe “these challenges are at the heart of public life and at the center of the pursuit of the common good.” (ibid.)

We know in faith the inherent dignity of each person and the sacredness of life. We know in faith that all of us have a right to participate in decisions that affect us. We know in faith that we are one, not just with people in our country, but with the entire global community. And we know in faith that we are called to care for all God’s Creation.

Inspired by faith, we also recognize an urgent need not only to reclaim, but to build on our nation’s early ideals. Our founders had a powerful vision for this nation. We have struggled for more than two hundred years to build on this vision—and to renew and perfect the early ideals by making them real not just for a privileged few, but for all who reside within our boundaries. Furthermore, in today’s world we know we cannot be content with just a limited national focus. We are linked globally and must engage that reality as well.

In this time of perilous change, we have an urgent need to build on the best of our founding vision and claim our role as “We the people of the United States.” To accomplish this, we must set aside our individual wants and partisan views. We need to strive together to realize the common good and to also share a special concern for people who are poor and most vulnerable. In this interconnected world, injustice or suffering anywhere diminishes all of us. So we seek a world where human needs are addressed and where differences are settled in dialogue, not violence. We seek a world where security is defined by solidarity, and where peace is achieved through justice. And we know this can be fully realized only when we exercise concern both for the world today and for generations to come.

PLATFORM SPECIFICS – WE THE PEOPLE

When they gathered in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787, our nation’s founders sought **to establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity.** This quest was articulated in the Preamble to the Constitution.

Today, **We the People** must do all we can to create a **more perfect Union** focused on the common good. Acknowledging that the quest for the common good is both a civic obligation and requirement of our faith, some 2,000 of us recently gathered in more than 175 groups across the U.S. to begin writing this Platform for the Common Good. We discussed our nation’s current reality, based on our diverse lived experiences, and quickly realized that we must address multiple social ills that are inextricably linked. For example, we could not separate problems in our immigration system from unfair trade policies and discrimination—or the massive funding of war from an underfunding of education, health and other human needs programs.

In the end, we understood that we share a common obligation to address our interrelated challenges through sustained individual, community, business and government engagement.

In the words of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution,

We the People of the United States are called to:

ESTABLISH JUSTICE

Justice requires ongoing work to create economic, political and social systems that respect life, honor the dignity and equality of all persons, and allow every person the opportunity to flourish. Furthermore, we need to continually monitor those systems and correct them whenever they fail to address these goals. Recognizing that we are members of an interconnected world, we are accountable for the consequences of our political and economic decisions both within our nation and throughout our global community. Discrimination which denies full human dignity to any person hurts the whole human family. Our actions and decisions should reflect our values of compassion and fairness, especially when they address economic disparity and discrimination.

“Every economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person.”

Economic Justice for All, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 13

WHAT WE SEE: Too many today have lost a sense of a consistent ethic of life, which is harmed in many ways, including by poverty, abortion and capital punishment. Internationally, our economic system has disproportionately benefitted large corporations and their shareholders while millions of U.S. workers and laborers, family farmers in the global south, and others often struggle in poverty.

In the shrinking middle class, many U.S. families find it increasingly difficult to meet their needs. This challenge is even greater in households headed by women and in communities of color. We witness wages that do not reflect the cost of living and a widening gap between rich and poor. Unrestrained capitalism has created systemic inequality both within the U.S. and between industrialized nations and the “developing” world. The resulting economic desperation is one of the causes of mass displacement and increased migration.

The U.S. immigration system has not adjusted to meet 21st century realities. This leads to exploitation and mistreatment of migrant workers and immigrants who are undocumented. Fear and bigotry are often the driving forces behind laws and practices that have separated families, deprived people of basic human rights, militarized the border, and negatively impacted local economies.

Throughout our nation, intolerance and other forms of discrimination have fostered disparities and injustice.

TO ESTABLISH JUSTICE we are challenged to protect life and to address disparities between “haves” and “have-nots” in this country and around the world. We are called to support policies that promote economic equity, ensure human rights, and eliminate all forms of exploitation and discrimination. We must address the root causes of migration and reform our flawed immigration system. And we need to change

laws and mentalities that support institutional racism, sexism and classism, and discrimination based on disability, age or other factors.

Government Action Needed:

To Protect Life

- Promote policies that prevent and reduce abortions by supporting women and families. Ensure robust alternatives to abortion, including adoption
- Abolish the death penalty.

To Address Economic Disparity

- Enhance the influence of low-income and middle-income people on policymaking to ensure that the interests of all are served, not just those with money
- Treat federal budgets as moral documents, insisting that they be just and serve the common good
- Better regulate corporations and financial institutions; institute financial reform and transparency
- Enhance workers' rights to join unions without fear of harassment and to negotiate first contracts within a reasonable time period
- Sign and ratify international conventions that promote economic justice and human rights
- Work to lessen income disparities and to reform tax policies that favor the wealthy and corporate interests.

On Immigration

- Examine and correct the negative impacts of trade agreements on low-income communities, especially in other nations as they lead to migration
- Support policies that assist countries of the global south to enliven their economies

- Create new processes and laws for a reasonable path to citizenship
- Ensure immigrants' rights to fair wages and safe work environments, and the rights to organize and join unions
- Promote immigration policies that maintain family unity
- Focus on basic security for all those impacted—immigrants and local communities
- Protect the basic human rights of all immigrants detained by local and federal authorities.

To Address Discrimination

- Acknowledge that discrimination, including racism and sexism, continues to impact public systems and encourage public employees and others to engage in anti-discrimination training
- End discrimination in all institutional forms.

Individual/Community Action Needed:

- Support and promote programs that promote a fair distribution of resources and serve vulnerable populations
- Support and promote programs and activities that address prejudice and discrimination
- Write letters to the editor and op-eds to encourage anti-racism education and better relationships within our communities
- Strive to keep the media honest and denounce scapegoating and fear-mongering
- Attend local precinct meetings and other gatherings to express concerns to public servants.
- Purchase fair trade products.

ENSURE DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY

Domestic tranquility grows in a society in which all can participate and access what they need to live with dignity. Healthy communities ensure that all members live in safety as they fairly share the benefits and costs of social and economic systems that serve their communities.

“Human dignity can be realized and protected only in community.”

Economic Justice for All, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 14

WHAT WE SEE: Violence permeates many neighborhoods within the U.S., especially those where poverty rates are high. Current rates of murder, crime, drug-use, gang membership and incarceration are intolerable. Harsh law enforcement and a lack of rehabilitation services result in recidivism that further undermines families and communities. Racism and classism are endemic in the U.S. criminal justice system.

Ineffective or non-existent public transportation, exclusionary zoning, and lack of safe green spaces isolate individuals and neighborhoods, limit job opportunities, and harm families.

TO ENSURE DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY we need infrastructures and programs to build up local communities and businesses and to provide access to education, jobs, needed services and green space. Local businesses are important in developing strong

communities that support families. Government, business and community partnerships must provide needed opportunities for children and families to flourish in an environment free from violence and criminal activity. We need to reform our criminal justice systems and focus more attention on rehabilitation programs and transitional support services for re-entry into communities.

Government Action Needed:

- Fund after-school programs, jobs for youth, and continuing education (GED, ESL) for adults
- Create community zoning that encourages mixed-use and mixed-income development along with green spaces
- Promote incentives for local business development that includes grocery stores and other services in all communities
- Ensure that convenient, safe public transportation is available in all communities
- Change the criminal justice system so it will

decrease recidivism and end discriminatory law enforcement

- Promote re-integration programs for ex-offenders that offer effective support with drug and alcohol rehabilitation, job training, employment, housing and healthcare.

Individual/Community Action Needed:

- Work to build a consistent culture of life and nonviolence
- Know our neighbors and participate in local government
- Become a mentor and/or work with youth, both in school and after school
- Volunteer at community-initiated programs/activities, e.g. litter pickup or neighborhood watch
- Organize and raise awareness of community problems, and create solutions
- Support and promote better criminal laws and changes in our prison system.

PROVIDE FOR THE COMMON DEFENSE

Common defense, in the global context of the 21st century, cannot rely on military might alone. National security is only possible in the context of global, human and ecological security. Conflict prevention and resolution are fostered by relationships of trust that advance human rights and the common good.

“If development is the new name for peace, war and preparations for war are the major enemy of the healthy development of peoples. If we take the common good of all humanity as our norm, instead of individual greed, peace would be possible.”

On Social Concern, Pope John Paul II, #10

WHAT WE SEE: Current U.S. government priorities, as measured by our national budget, favor the military components of defense to the grave neglect of other required elements of security. This is not the best way to provide security for our nation and for our world, as events of the past few years have shown. A foreign policy of U.S. domination, arms-building, and preemptive war does more to *offend* other nations and people than it does to *defend* our own.

The militaristic mindset of our nation needs to change. It contributes to a culture of violence in our world that reaches into our neighborhoods. The war in Iraq is an especially troubling example of U.S. reliance on military force alone to solve international problems and the ineffectiveness of this course. The cost of the war is tremendous in terms of lives lost; people grievously wounded; physical and ecological destruction; ongoing mental health problems of those involved; the plight of refugees and other victims of

war; and the damage done to U.S. moral credibility and standing in the world.

The dollar cost of the war increases our national debt and squanders resources needed for healthcare, education, infrastructure, job creation and poverty elimination. Yet our nation continues to prepare for other wars, stockpiling conventional and nuclear weapons while ignoring non-proliferation treaties and insisting that other nations disarm; spending billions on military equipment that is inappropriate for today’s conflicts; manufacturing and selling arms to the rest of the world; and neglecting the diplomatic and development components that are necessary for national and human security. This runs contrary to our commitment to protect life and human dignity.

TO PROVIDE FOR THE COMMON DEFENSE we need to develop an ethical U.S. foreign policy that emphasizes conflict resolution through diplomacy instead of military force—and that promotes stability

abroad through fair trade laws, debt cancellation and increased responsible international development aid. Our nation must engage with other nations to develop creative solutions to common problems such as migration, human trafficking, drug trafficking, crime, weapons proliferation, global poverty, and climate change.

Our country needs to do more to foster constructive relations with and improved understanding of other cultures. Supporting the United Nations is critical as is participating in and abiding by international treaties.

Government Action Needed:

- Reject a foreign policy of domination in favor of cooperative multilateral efforts to prevent conflict and promote diplomacy, development and human rights
- Reduce the military weapons budget and invest in basic human needs
- Renounce preemptive war and first-strike policies
- Take decisive steps to eliminate nuclear weapons
- Acknowledge that torture is immoral and counter to U.S. values

- Establish a cabinet-level institution responsible for education in conflict resolution, reconciliation and peacekeeping
- Support the United Nations and other multilateral organizations
- Restore the constitutional balance of power between the executive and legislative branches on the responsibility for using military force
- End the U.S. occupation of Iraq, remove U.S. combat troops, and accept responsibility for assisting Iraqi refugees and rebuilding civil society
- Improve care and provide adequate services for returning U.S. troops, veterans and their families.

Individual/Community Action Needed:

- Promote a culture of life and nonviolence by participation in peacebuilding actions
- Seek opportunities to learn about different cultures to lessen prejudice, misunderstanding and divisions among people
- Commit to ongoing education on U.S. foreign policy (aid allocation, trade positions and military spending)
- Tell elected officials to support actions that will lead to real peace.

PROMOTE THE GENERAL WELFARE

To ***promote the general welfare*** requires ensuring that the right to life and to fulfillment of essential human needs essential for life, including food, quality healthcare, safe housing, and quality education, are available to everyone. Today, more than ever, we are deeply interconnected. Thus, deprivation or suffering in one part of the world ultimately affects us all. Individuals, communities and government all have a positive role to play in ensuring that people can survive and live with dignity.

“The needs of [people who are] poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion; the production to meet social needs over production for military purposes.”

Economic Justice for All, U.S. Catholic Bishops, #94

WHAT WE SEE: Massive investment in war and militarism has diverted money required to meet human needs. Many good jobs have moved overseas. Tax cuts for the wealthy and corporate interests also decrease needed resources. Groups and individuals face ongoing discrimination. And social programs fail when they encourage dependency rather than providing pathways out of poverty.

Education is an essential and powerful tool to intervene in generational poverty, but it fails large numbers of students, especially those from low-income families and students of color. Many schools

fail to engage students, and graduation rates are low. College is prohibitively expensive for many, limiting options for educational achievement.

Our nation continues to spend more on healthcare than other countries, but millions of people receive inadequate or no care. People in low-income communities and communities of color have a much lower quality of care.

Even “affordable” housing is unaffordable for many families, and wait lists for programs such as Section 8 take years. Meanwhile, mortgage foreclosures resulting in part from inadequate regulation of the

mortgage industry have hurt countless families and increased homelessness. And the continuing inability to restore communities devastated by Hurricane Katrina is evidence of the government inability to adequately address housing emergencies.

TO PROMOTE THE GENERAL WELFARE we must promote and protect life and all of the systems and supports that are required for life and human dignity. This includes embracing the goals of both the U.S. and the global campaigns to eliminate poverty and to increase access to quality education, living wage jobs, safe housing, nutritious food, and comprehensive, quality healthcare. We must create the essential conditions for a consistent culture of life that respects and promotes life at all stages.

Government Action Needed:

On Poverty

- Support human life and dignity by approving and funding programs that promote the dignity of all life (e.g., quality housing, child care, healthcare and nutrition assistance)
- Provide more efficient access to and better coordination among human needs services
- Institute a living wage that allows wage earners to provide food, shelter, medical care, education and recreation for themselves and their dependents
- Bring environmental, labor, corporate and trade concerns into proper balance.

On Employment

- Create green and public works jobs to reduce unemployment
- End tax loopholes and other incentives that make it easier for businesses to leave the U.S.
- Provide incentives for businesses to create new jobs in U.S. communities that need them
- Ensure that employees have the right to form labor unions and to bargain collectively for just working conditions, a living wage, healthcare, and retirement and other benefits
- Ensure that employers make provisions for family members with caretaking responsibilities
- Address employment needs of groups with high unemployment (e.g., people with disabilities).

On Health and Nutrition

- Study successful healthcare systems in states and other countries and incorporate best practices
- Move away from for-profit healthcare
- Institute affordable, universal quality healthcare,

which includes prenatal and infant care, dental care, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, vision care, and prescription drug coverage

- Ensure that all pregnant women have access to full healthcare
- Fully fund anti-hunger programs like food stamps and infant nutrition programs
- Shift to preventive care and medical home model that provides access to primary care doctors
- Provide adequate funding for medical and health education
- Improve healthcare access for underserved communities such as low-income rural areas
- Better regulate pharmaceutical companies and work for affordable prescription prices.

On Education

- Increase education funding and distribute resources equitably, with special attention to schools in low-income neighborhoods
- Pay teachers fair and adequate wages and institute programs to encourage teacher retention
- Provide more arts, music and other cultural enrichment courses
- Ensure that special education students have the resources and trained teachers they need
- Ensure that education includes life skills and vocational training to prepare students for jobs
- Provide free universal preschool/Head Start
- Fund educational mandates.

On Housing

- Increase funding for safe, affordable housing, especially for people who are homeless, and ensure inclusionary housing
- Convert vacant properties/units into affordable and/or transitional housing
- Fund and promote rent-to-own programs.

Individual/ Community Action Needed:

- Make individual and communal choices that protect the dignity of all life
- Attend city council and town hall meetings
- Engage in the corporal works of mercy and contribute money to meeting others' needs
- Be responsible consumers by supporting companies that promote fair trade and boycotting companies with poor labor standards
- Work toward improving our own health
- As parents, be involved in our children's education
- Hold regional school boards accountable.

SECURE THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY TO OURSELVES AND OUR POSTERITY

Securing the blessings of liberty for ourselves and future generations requires that we shape our economic and regulatory systems so they are balanced and sustainable. We cannot have healthy human organisms on a sick planet because all life relies on interdependent, healthy ecosystems. We must move beyond older economic and social models that rely on environmental exploitation, excessive corporate power and discrimination and embrace new, emerging economic systems and environmental technologies that are sustainable and secure.

“Using [natural resources] as if they were inexhaustible, with absolute dominion, seriously endangers their availability not only for the present generation but above all for generations to come.”

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, Pope John Paul II, 34

WHAT WE SEE: Resource depletion alters the environment to a point of limiting regeneration. As resources diminish, future generations’ ability to live with dignity diminishes. Environmental degradation and unsustainable resource use affects us all, especially people who live in impoverished communities. Pollution, global warming and privatization of resources like water threaten the harmony of our ecological, economic, and social systems. Unsustainable consumption of fossil fuel increases desertification, drought and flooding. Shifts in weather patterns exact a tremendous human cost as they threaten the fragile water and agricultural systems that sustain subsistence farmers in much of the world.

Both domestically and globally, nations allow multinational corporations unreasonable control over economic and environmental resources. Their privileged seat at the policy bargaining table and single-minded devotion to profit have fostered unsustainable and exploitative economic systems. And people in the U.S. and other industrialized nations consume a disproportionate percentage of the world’s resources while engaging in wasteful practices.

Meanwhile, our nation continues to ignore the need to rebuild our deteriorating infrastructure (e.g., bridges) and to reduce our national debt. Both will have a devastating effect on future generations.

To secure the Blessings of Liberty for ourselves and our posterity we must organize our economic systems, development and production to provide for long term sustainability. Ecological responsibility requires that we manage and distribute material resources across all humanity and into future generations.

We envision a social and economic order that is sustainable and ecologically responsible; places

human dignity above profits; harnesses renewable and clean sources of energy; balances corporate interests with the global common good; addresses the need to strengthen our infrastructure; eliminates debt that will harm future generations; recognizes and seeks to address discriminatory practices; promotes fair trade policies; and neither exploits persons and communities, nor abuses our stewardship of the earth.

Government Action Needed:

- Bring environmental, labor, corporate and trade concerns into proper balance
- Support multilateral efforts to address ecological concerns
- Help the “developing” world secure basic human needs including access to clean water and an equitable access to the marketplace
- Assist resource-poor countries in adapting to the effects of climate change through increased development assistance
- Promote renewable energy technologies and other green technologies
- Pass legislation to conserve resources and address global warming
- Eliminate business practices that abuse people or the environment
- Address our national debt so it does not extend to future generations
- Repair and rebuild our aging infrastructure.

Individual/Community Action Needed:

- Educate ourselves on the connection between ecological issues and our life choices—and make better choices
- Alter our consumption practices to be in line with our calls to stewardship, sustainability and respect for human life and dignity
- Actively engage our representatives and policymakers on unsustainable consumption and the oppressive structures of inequality.

SUMMARY AND CALL TO ACTION

“In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue,
and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”
Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, U.S Catholic Bishops, 2007, p. 4

For over 200 years, people of faith have sought to extend our nation’s founding vision to all people. Our goal: to form “a more perfect union” that serves the common good.

We the People must continue to work together—as government, business, communities and individuals—to create a nation and world rooted in justice. We must speak, act, insist, demand and ensure that the common good is at the heart of all decisions and actions. These times call for renewed engagement across our differences. Political engagement is not just our right, but our responsibility.

We commit to engaging this Platform for the Common Good. We will use it as an educational tool in the pre-election process, as a yardstick for measuring candidates and making our choices on November 4, 2008, and most importantly, as an accountability measure after the election. It is this continued engagement that will lead to true change. By working for the principles contained in this Platform for the Common Good, we will become the country that we say we are, authentically affirming what our founders wrote with pride: ***We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.***

— *The Delegates and Steering Committee
of the Convention for the Common Good,
and all who shared in this process*

**For more information:
www.catholicsinalliance.org or www.networklobby.org**