

Subsidiarity



In their statement on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the Catholic bishops of the United States identify the four main principles of the Church’s social teaching and apply them to some concrete issues. This is not to tell the faithful for whom or against whom to vote, but instead to help them form their consciences in accordance with God’s truth as they approach this often-challenging decision. The four main principles are the Dignity of the Human Person, the Common Good, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity. They are all interrelated. This bulletin focuses on **Subsidiarity**, and the other three principles are covered in three other bulletins in this series. —★

The principle of Subsidiarity reminds us that larger institutions in society (such as the state or federal government) should not overwhelm or interfere with smaller or local institutions (such as the family, local schools, or the Church community). Yet larger institutions have essential responsibilities when local institutions cannot adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, or advance the common good.¹ Subsidiarity reflects the essential freedom and innate human dignity of each person while also recognizing the role higher authorities, such as government, can play to ensure that all people are able to thrive.

Respecting this principle promotes the flourishing of each individual person and the realization of the common good. As Pope Francis has explained, the principle of Subsidiarity “allows everyone to assume his or her own role in the healing and destiny of society.”² By participating in public life locally, each person and the voluntary associations of civil society to which they belong can be “leaven,” bringing “enrichment” to neighbors, to communities, and to society as a whole.³

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“Respecting Subsidiarity promotes the flourishing of each individual and the realization of the common good.”



As we assist the faithful to take up the call to be “leaven” in society, we seek policies that allow individuals and communities to flourish.

- As the bishops teach in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, “Family—based on marriage between a man and a woman—is the first and most fundamental unit

of society: a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. It should be defended and strengthened, not redefined, undermined, or further distorted.”⁴

- It is important to uphold parents’ rights and responsibilities to care for their children, including the right to direct their children’s education in accordance with their convictions, with support rather than interference from the state.⁵ These include the rights of parents to send their child to the school of their choice, and to protect their child from “gender ideology” at school.
- Moreover, laws, programs, and initiatives should strengthen the social safety net and improve family stability. For example, parents should receive support through work, training, assistance with childcare, health-care, housing and transportation.⁶ The Earned Income Tax Credit and child tax credits continue to be important vehicles to help low-income families out of poverty.
- The Church’s special concern for the poor requires the pursuit of social and economic policies which foster jobs with decent working conditions and just wages, and which support the rights of workers, including the ability to organize and bargain collectively without reprisal.⁷

As we pursue the principle of Subsidiarity in our public policies, we pray for all families and for those in poverty, and we support their efforts to exercise their rights and responsibilities in society.

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This bulletin insert along with five others was approved by the body of U.S. bishops in November 2023. Find this and more complementary resources at www.faithfulcitizenship.org.

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1 USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, nos. 47-48. See also: *Centesimus Annus (The Hundredth Year)*, no. 48; *Dignitatis Humanae (Declaration on Religious Freedom)*, nos. 4-6, and *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 185.

2 Pope Francis, General Audience, “Catechesis ‘Healing the World’: 8. Subsidiarity and the Virtue of Hope,” Sept. 23, 2020. See also: Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth)*, no. 57.

3 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti (On Fraternity and Social Friendship)*, no. 142.

4 USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 46.

5 Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love)*, no. 84.

6 See Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, nos. 25, 44, on the need for family support through dignified employment, education, health-care and housing.

7 St. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, nos. 7-8, 35. See also: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 301-309.