

We Are One in Christ:
A Pastoral Letter
To the Clergy, Religious and Faithful People of Central and Southern Indiana
On Fundamentals of Christian Anthropology

By

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As we enter more fully into a new year and look back on the issues that continue to plague our nation, including our local communities throughout central and southern Indiana, I take this occasion to express concern for the wellbeing of both the person and the human family from the perspective of Christian anthropology and Catholic social doctrine (the way Christians view human dignity and the end or purpose of human society.)

During the November 2017 meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, a number of social issues required our consideration and, in many cases, a public response. These issues, which often result in the lessening of the dignity of the human person, included:

- Violations against the sanctity of human life (e.g., abortion, physician-assisted suicide)
- Plight of immigrants, migrants and refugees (e.g., policies for admittance, safeguarding family unity, treatment of undocumented people—especially children and youth, border security and the increasing threat and reality of deportation)
- Racism, including both the increasing number of overt, violent expressions and the subtle all-pervasive influences of racism on American culture (as well as an appreciation for the universal tapestry of languages, cultures and peoples in the Church and the human family as a whole. The importance of bridging the racial divide through mutual respect, responsibility and cooperation)
- Various forms of drug abuse, especially including the opioid crisis;
- Increasing incidences and severity of gun violence in homes and churches and other public places
- Threats against religious liberty in the United States and abroad, including the rights of health care workers and employers to conscientious objection to certain socially

approved and even mandated practices and procedures that are immoral or morally problematic.

As the bishops discussed these and other issues, it became clear that our response to all of them is deeply rooted in the Church's understanding of the origin, nature and destiny of the human person as revealed in Jesus Christ (Christian anthropology). Where we come from, who we are and where we are headed as individuals and as diverse communities of people, determines our rights and responsibilities in human society.

Principles of Christian anthropology

I take this opportunity to share some fundamental principles of Christian anthropology and Catholic social teaching that should be taken into consideration when responding to critical social issues.

Human dignity

Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of man. The person represents the ultimate end of society, which is ordered to him: What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt (John Paul II, Sollicitudo rei socialis (On Social Concerns), #47) (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1929).

The first key principle of Catholic social teaching is respect for the dignity of each and every human person—regardless of race, sex, nationality, economic or social status, educational background, political affiliation or sexual orientation—as created in the image and likeness of God. All are equal in dignity. No one is “better” than anyone else. All deserve respect. All share basic human rights. No one is exempt from the responsibility to support and assist fellow human beings—whether they are from the same family/community or they are strangers who are foreign to us in some way. Every human person, as created in the image of God, is a member of God's family. For Christians, this also means that we are sisters and brothers of Christ and each other.

All sins against the dignity of persons, including the taking of a human life, sexual abuse and sexual harassment, rape, racism, sexism, nativism and homophobia, are violations of this fundamental principle. We can (and sometimes must) disapprove of the behavior of others, but we may never belittle, disrespect or abuse others simply because of our differences, no matter how serious.

Christians are not naïve about the power of evil or the corrupting influence of human sinfulness. In every social situation, there exists the presence of evil both in the form of individual sinful

actions and in the corrupt social structures that have been allowed to develop and become institutionalized in society. What is needed to overcome evil in all its forms is the love of Christ—pure, unselfish, compassionate, merciful and transformational. Love overcomes sin and death. It has the power to transform the hearts and actions of individuals and societies, to break down barriers and build bridges, and to set aside laws and customs that reflect the hatred, prejudice and fear of generations of sinful people. Love ultimately conquers all evil, but, as reflected in the passion and death of Jesus Christ, true love requires surrender to God’s will and the corresponding sacrifice of all human desires and interests that do not correspond to the divine law.

Christians are called to build bridges not walls (Pope Francis). Whether in politics, race relations, economic crises or disputes among families or local communities, we are challenged to be peacemakers, to find common ground and to engage in respectful dialogue.

Whatever we do to the least of these brothers and sisters we do to Christ

The duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40) (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1932).

We *are one* in Christ. This is not a metaphor. It is a fundamental truth of Christian anthropology. Whatever we do to the “least” of our sisters and brothers—especially the poor, the vulnerable, the sick, the immigrant, the elderly—we do to Jesus Christ. This fundamental belief, which we accept as a fact, dramatically influences the way we are called to live our lives. We do not merely exist for ourselves and our own kind. In Christ, we exist for the sake of all regardless of race, sex, nationality, economic or social status, educational background, political affiliation, sexual orientation or any other distinction. While we may agree or disagree with others or support their customs or actions, we do have to keep in mind that whatever we do (or fail to do) to these brothers and sisters, we do (or fail to do) to Christ, who is our brother and our Lord.

As St. Paul teaches in Galatians (3:28), “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female.” We are all one in Christ Jesus. When we refuse to welcome strangers, we refuse our Lord. When we harbor racist, sexist or homophobic attitudes, we disrespect Jesus Christ. When we fail to protect children from all forms of abuse, or safeguard our communities against gun violence, we fail in our most sacred duties as members of God’s family. As Pope Francis has repeatedly warned, the sin of indifference weighs heavily on our consciences as missionary disciples because whatever we do (or fail to do) to these brothers and sisters, we do (or fail to do) to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Plight of immigrants, migrants and refugees

The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin.

Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2241).

Here in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis we are participating in the two year-long *Share the Journey* campaign initiated by Pope Francis in collaboration with *Caritas Internationalis* (the Church's international relief organization), Catholic Charities USA and Catholic Relief Services. The goal of this campaign is to raise awareness of the plight of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers who are forced to flee their homes due to economic, political or religious strife.

Share the Journey seeks to remind us all that the millions of people worldwide who are fleeing war, persecution and poverty are our sisters and brothers. These are real men, women and children, not abstractions or statistics. They have names and faces and personal histories. God knows each one of them by name. He loves them and considers them to be his precious children. What's more, God has challenged us to welcome them as guests, not reject them as aliens, and he has told us in no uncertain terms, "Whatever you do to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you do to me" (Mt 25:40).

When he announced the *Share the Journey* campaign, Pope Francis said, "Christ urges us to welcome our brothers and sisters with our arms truly open, ready for a sincere embrace, a loving and enveloping embrace." This is characteristic of Pope Francis—to use vivid physical imagery to underscore his teaching. The Holy Father tells us, in effect, that Christ is not content with half-hearted gestures. Writing a check and dropping it in the mail to one of the relief agencies is a very good thing to do. But it is not enough. Along with our financial support, the pope says, Christ wants us to have warm, enthusiastic contact with our sisters and brothers who are poor and vulnerable.

That's not easy for most of us who lead busy lives filled with work and family obligations. Still, opportunities for hands-on engagement with those in need are not hard to find if we look for them. Catholic Charities Indianapolis has welcomed and cared for migrants and refugees for more than 42 years. And parishes throughout central and southern Indiana work hard to provide food, shelter, clothing and access to quality health care to all who are in need, including people who have left their home countries in search of a better life. Ask your pastor, or any Catholic Charities agency, how you can help. They will gladly direct you to the nearest place that will welcome your participation!

Our Church extends to all the unconditional love of Jesus. We welcome strangers, and we work to make everyone feel at home. We support our nation's efforts to secure our borders and to regulate the processes that govern immigration and refugee resettlement. However, we insist that in all instances the rights of individuals and families be protected, and we place concern for human dignity above political or practical expediency. We take this responsibility so seriously that Church teaching points out that as citizens we may be obliged in conscience not to follow laws or regulations that are contrary to the fundamental rights of persons or the teaching of the Gospel (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2242).

Share the Journey is not a political campaign. It is a way of promoting solidarity with members of our family who are in particular need of our loving support. However, *Share the Journey* does

remind us that as citizens we have a responsibility to promote the common good—for the sake of our nation and the community of nations. Peace and prosperity should be available to all peoples regardless of their race, ethnic origin, and religious preferences. We should be open to all, welcoming of all and respectful of both the differences that divide us and the fundamental humanity that unites us.

Pope Francis reminds us that Jesus, Mary and Joseph were once refugees who fled the political tyranny and vicious brutality of King Herod. They were immigrants who spent years living in a foreign land, a situation now shared by millions of people who have left their homes desperately seeking safety and a better life.

Whatever we do to the least of these brothers and sisters, we do to Christ. Let's share their journeys. Let's welcome them with "a loving and enveloping embrace" in Jesus' name.

Drug abuse

The use of drugs inflicts very grave danger on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense. Clandestine production of and trafficking in drugs are scandalous practices. They constitute direct cooperation in evil, since they encourage people to practices gravely contrary to the moral law (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2291).

In our country, drug abuse is a serious problem. Wars stimulate drug use as wounded soldiers return home wracked with pain, but even in peacetime, people turn to many different kinds of drugs, including opioids (prescription painkillers such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, or fentanyl and illegal substances such as heroin), to help them deal with painful illnesses, loneliness and the anxiety of daily life.

The abuse of any drug—legal or illegal—is deadly serious. Six out of 10 drug-overdose deaths involve opioids, and drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death. In 2015, more than 33,000 Americans died from prescription drug overdoses or heroin, and an estimated 2 million Americans are addicted to prescription pain relievers while another half million are addicted to heroin.

In addition to the grave harm done to addicts, drug abuse also affects many other family members, coworkers, friends and society as a whole. It is estimated that every addict affects at least four other people, especially spouses and children. Families suffer enormous emotional, physical and financial trauma when one or more of their members is addicted to prescription painkillers and/or illegal drugs. More than 40 percent of children placed in foster care come from families burdened with drug addiction.

This "life issue" threatens human life and dignity. Think of how many unborn children are exposed to opioids through their mother's bloodstream. These children tend to be smaller and to weigh less than other newborns. They often exhibit symptoms of withdrawal after birth, and they are at a higher risk for behavioral problems as they grow older. It's a vicious cycle—
anxiety leads to drug use which, in turn, creates further anxiety and even more drug abuse.

What's the solution? If it were simple or painless, we would have eliminated the drug problem long ago. In fact, this is a very complex and difficult problem that is broadly and deeply embedded in our society. No single solution—whether legal, moral, spiritual or sociological—presents itself as “the answer” to our current opioid crisis or to the longstanding problem of drug addiction here in Indiana or throughout the world. Still, we cannot afford to stand idly by while millions of our sisters and brothers suffer. We must act in ways that are consistent with our baptismal responsibility to bring the healing power of Jesus Christ to all who suffer—whether they are close to home or, as Pope Francis says, on the margins of human society, “the peripheries.”

As we look for ways to respond to this crisis, it's helpful to refer to the Indiana bishops' 2015 Pastoral Letter, *Poverty at the Crossroads: The Church's Response to Poverty in Indiana*. Poverty results from many different causes and takes many different forms, but drug addiction is certainly one of the main causes, and effects, of poverty. Here is a selection from the Introduction to *Poverty at the Crossroads*:

Using the simple formula of See, Judge, Act, we invite and challenge everyone, beginning with ourselves, to be more attentive to the poor in our communities, to identify the systemic issues that keep individuals and families poor, and to take concrete steps to reduce the long-term impact of poverty in our state, even as we reach out and help those who, here and now, suffer from its devastating effects.

Let's open our eyes and recognize drug addiction for what it is. Let's make serious decisions about steps we can take as individuals, families and communities to address all of the contributing factors to the current opioid epidemic. And, finally, with the help of God's grace, let's do whatever we can to help those who suffer now and in the future.

Religious liberty

“Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment...For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God... His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths” (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1776).

Religious freedom is rooted in the perennial teaching of the Church on human dignity. It teaches that religious freedom is the cornerstone of a society that promotes human dignity; it is a fundamental human right that follows on the duty of all people to seek the truth about God.

All of the fundamental principles noted above are safeguarded and reinforced by the protection of religious liberty. When religious liberty is threatened or denied, all human rights are jeopardized and the inalienable dignity of every human being is called into question. As Pope

Benedict XVI said during his visit to Cuba several years ago: *The Church lives to make others sharers in the one thing she possesses, which is none other than Christ, our hope of glory (cf. Col 1:27). To carry out this duty, she must count on basic religious freedom, which consists in her being able to proclaim and to celebrate her faith also in public, bringing to others the message of love, reconciliation and peace which Jesus brought to the world.* Professing religious faith should not make a person a second-class citizen. While religion is personal, it is never private. The right to religious freedom has as its foundation the very dignity of the human person. Religious freedom is the human right that guarantees all other rights—peace and creative living together will only be possible if freedom of religion is fully respected.

Respect for human life

Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that "everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as 'another self,' above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity" (Gaudium et Spes, #27.1). No legislation could by itself do away with the fears, prejudices, and attitudes of pride and selfishness which obstruct the establishment of truly fraternal societies. Such behavior will cease only through the charity that finds in every man a "neighbor," a brother. The duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). This same duty extends to those who think or act differently from us. The teaching of Christ goes so far as to require the forgiveness of offenses. He extends the commandment of love, which is that of the New Law, to all enemies. Liberation in the spirit of the Gospel is incompatible with hatred of one's enemy as a person, but not with hatred of the evil that he does as an enemy (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, #s 1931–1933).

The Catholic Church opposes racism, sexism, nativism and all forms of prejudice against people who are perceived to be different from us, including strangers and enemies. We support immigration reform that includes reasonable security of our nation while continuing to welcome and retain immigrants, migrants and refugees who are striving to live in a reasonable and respectful manner within our society. We especially encourage action that supports family unity and those who were previously protected under the so-called DACA and the Dream Act.

As we note in the introduction to our 2015 Pastoral Letter, *Poverty at the Crossroads: The Church's Response to Poverty in Indiana*:

As bishops who serve the people of God, our concern is for everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation, race, ethnic background, economic or social status. Christ came to save all humankind. As his ministers, we have been given the responsibility to carry on Christ's work in service to all our sisters and brothers here in the state of Indiana.

At the same time, we bishops have a particular obligation to care for the most vulnerable members of God's family. That is why we pay special attention to the unborn, to the sick and the elderly, to prisoners, to those who suffer from various forms of addiction or

mental illness, and to the education of people from many different backgrounds and circumstances. That is also why we care, in a very special way, for those brothers and sisters of ours who are poor.

The Gospels insist that God's heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that God himself has "become poor" (2 Cor. 8, 9). Jesus recognized their suffering, and he had compassion for their loneliness and fear. He never looked away from their plight or acted as if it did not concern him. Always, our Lord stood with the poor—comforting their sorrows, healing their wounds and feeding their bodies and their souls. He challenged his friends to recognize the poor and not remain unmoved.

All disciples of Jesus Christ are called to love the poor as he did. As people of faith, we are invited to see the poor, to allow the Word of God to illuminate the reality of poverty, and to respond with transformed hearts.

Using the simple formula of SEE, JUDGE, ACT, we invite and challenge everyone, beginning with ourselves, to be more attentive to the poor in our communities, to identify the systemic issues that keep individuals and families poor, and to take concrete steps to reduce the long-term impact of poverty in our state, even as we reach out and help those who, here and now, suffer from its devastating effects.

Concluding thoughts

These fundamental principles form the foundation for all Catholic social teaching and Christian anthropology. They inform the Church's response to all the pressing social questions of our day, and they should always guide the teaching (and practice) of bishops, pastors and all Christian educators and apologists.

As is frequently the case, Church teaching calls attention to the Catholic *both/and*. For example, we respect *both* the right of sovereign nations to control their borders *and* the right of individuals and families to migrate and to be treated with dignity and respect. We acknowledge *both* the constitutional right of American citizens to bear arms *and* the responsibility of governments to regulate the sale and use of firearms as a matter of public safety. We celebrate *both* the diversity of languages, cultures and races in our nation *and* the importance of bringing everyone together in unity and peace. We *both* love the poor *and* long for the day when no man, woman or child will be homeless, hungry or deprived of quality health care.

Catholic social teaching is as rich and diverse as the people it is intended to protect and defend. As Christians and as citizens, we can disagree about how best to apply these principles in specific situations by means of laws, regulations or public policies, but there can be no doubt that these principles are grounded in the truth about the human person as known by the light of reason and by divine revelation, especially the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In a spirit of solidarity and hope, may we learn to love and serve one another (even strangers and enemies) as Christ has loved us.

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