



Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians, Inc. National Board

Established in 1894

Committee on Political Education

POSITION STATEMENTS

SOCIAL JUSTICE CONCERNS IN THE UNITED STATES

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The Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians (LAOH) National Political Education Committee's mission is to educate our members on political and social justice issues. As part of this mission, the LAOH National Political Education Committee is developing position statements on several social justice concerns. This article contains the first set of our position statements.

DISABILITY RIGHTS

The Catholic Church teaches the following: "All human beings are equal in dignity in the sight of God. Moreover, by reason of their Baptism, all Catholics also share the same divine calling." "Each person is created in God's image, yet there are variations in individual abilities. Positive recognition of these differences discourages discrimination and enhances the unity of the Body of Christ." ^{1,2}

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops established general principles for celebrating the sacraments with persons with disabilities. These principles include the right of persons with disabilities to fully participate in the sacraments and have full accessibility to the sacraments. ¹

Federal Law (the Americans with Disabilities Act) "...protects people's rights regarding employment, public accommodations, state and local government services...". Persons with disabilities are protected from job discrimination under Federal law and have the right to vote with special accommodation. ³

The LAOH National Political Education Committee recognizes the following:

Although the Catholic Church stipulates that all members of the church are children of God and worthy of receiving the sacraments, not all parish ministers, priests and pastors are following the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops guidelines for celebrating the sacraments with persons with disabilities.

Many parishes do not have assistive devices or make other accommodations so that persons with disabilities may attend Mass and receive the Sacraments.

Many parishioners are still unaware that Catholic family members and friends with disabilities may receive the Sacraments and they may request accommodation and assistive devices for attending Mass.

Many Catholic Charities provide community programs, for persons with disabilities, in housing, employment, and healthcare. These programs are often highly desirable for their service and care and most have long waiting lists for enrollment in their programs.

The Federal and State social programs provide aid in housing, employment, and health care for persons with disabilities, these social programs often are the first to incur cuts in funding; have long wait lists (for housing) and have restrictions to receiving aid that can change from administration to administration.

There is “discrimination and prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior....and that disabled people need fixing...”⁴

The LAOH National Political Education Committee takes the following position on Disability Rights Issues:

Disabled persons are not “other” and should not be marginalized in society. Persons with disabilities must have the same opportunities to contribute to society as non-disabled persons. All laws and policies that affect disabled persons must have input from the disabled community.

All parishes should implement and follow the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities. All parishes must be a welcoming, safe, and inclusive space, for persons with disabilities.

Individuals should work within their parishes in outreach to disabled persons and families with persons with disabilities; to insure there is accessibility to Mass, the sacraments and to all the parish activities. Persons with disabilities must be included in discussions about parish activities and events, especially in discussions about accessibility.

The LAOH should recruit and welcome members with physical and intellectual disabilities and make accommodation for their participation in all meetings and events.

Providing healthcare, residential, employment and educational opportunities to persons with disabilities should be a priority for the Catholic Church and Local, State, and Federal Governments.

Individuals should let their Local, State, and Federal elected officials know that they support legislation that promotes access to healthcare, housing, and employment for persons with disabilities, including legislation that helps the caregiving economy.

Persons with disabilities must be protected and free from abuse and neglect in their living, school, and work environments. Persons who provide services and care for persons with disabilities should receive the best training possible and should be recognized, in terms of salary and respect, for the critical and important work they do in caring for the most vulnerable.

[1] <https://www.usccb.org/committees/divine-worship/policies/guidelines-sacraments-persons-with-disabilities>

[2] https://www.usccb.org/cs_upload/8104_1.pdf

[3] <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/disability/ada>

[4] <https://www.accessliving.org>

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Environmental justice is “the principle that all people are entitled to equal environmental protection regardless of race, color or national origin. It’s the right to live and work and play in a clean environment.”¹

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines environmental justice as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.²

The recent Synod of Bishops on the Amazon proposed to define ecological sin as “an action or omission against God, against one’s neighbor, the community and environment. It is a sin against future generations, and it is committed in acts and habits of pollution and destruction of the harmony of the environment. These are transgressions against the principles of interdependence, and they destroy networks of solidarity among creatures and violate the virtue of justice.”³

The LAOH National Political Education Committee recognizes the following:

Environmental hazards and pollution sites disproportionately affect the quality of life for poorer and marginalized communities, indigenous communities, and communities of color. (ex. Flint, MI; Newark, NJ; Mossville, LA; and superfund sites).^{4, 5, 6, 7}

Lack of resources also affects the ability of poorer communities, particularly indigenous communities, to access clean water.⁸

Environmental policies and environmental abuses of today’s and prior generation’s will disproportionately affect future generations.

The shift in the United States from fossil fuel energy to other energy systems is likely to disproportionately affect communities that are economically dependent on the fossil fuel industry.

The Catholic Church is active in many ways to address environmental justice concerns. For instance, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Care for God's Creation, provides funding for many dioceses, state, and community level programs to address environmental injustice. Women religious groups, (for example, the Global Sisters Report, Network Advocacy) are particularly involved in working with communities that are struggling with environmental concerns such as clean air and clean water.

The LAOH National Political Education Committee takes the following position on Environmental Issues:

Environmental justice is a social justice concern that continues to need to be addressed by Catholic Social Justice Policies, U.S. Government Policies and individual actions. The LAOH National Political Education Committee supports the efforts of the Catholic Church to work with Local, State and Federal Governments, as well as local community groups to address environmental injustice.

Past environmental policies in the United States have disproportionately and negatively affected poor communities, communities of color and indigenous communities. Environmental injustice may be considered a sin against man and all God's creations.

All United States citizens have the right to breathe clean air and have ready access to clean water. Local, State and Federal governments must strengthen the enforcement of existing Environmental Laws with input from the affected communities.

Those communities that are most affected by proposed environmental practices and policies must be included, at every level (Local, State and Federal), in discussions and development of those policies and practices.

Plans in the U.S., on each level (Local, State and Federal), to transition to cleaner energy sources should acknowledge the potential financial effect on communities that have relied on the fossil fuel industry and include plans to aid those communities in the transition.

The effect of climate change today greatly affects future generations of US citizens. The LAOH National Political Education Committee supports U.S. efforts to join in global efforts to reduce the negative effects of climate change.

We encourage LAOH members to consider individual actions that can reduce the amount of air, land, and water pollution. Individuals can make a difference in their parishes and schools by participating in discussions and policies of ways to end polluting practices. Individuals can let their elected officials know they

support legislation that brings justice to communities suffering from environmental pollution and legislation that will lead to a cleaner environment for future generations.

[1] <https://www.drrobertbullard.com>

[2] <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>

[3] <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-02/final-document-synod-amazon.html>

[4] <https://news.umich.edu/five-years-later-flint-water-crisis-most-egregious-example-of-environmental-injustice-u-m-researcher-says/>

[5] <https://nj.gov/dep/ej/communities.html>

[6] <https://meannow.wordpress.com/>

[7] <https://blog.ucsusa.org/juan-declet-barreto/superfund-site-cleanups-ignore-communities-of-color/>

[8] <https://www.navajowaterproject.org/project-specifics>

GUN CONTROL

“The (*Catholic*) Church has been a consistent voice for the promotion of peace at home and around the world, and a strong advocate for the reasonable regulation of firearms. Christ's love and mercy must guide us. The Church recognizes that recourse to self-defense is legitimate for one's own safety. In today's world, however, weapons that are increasingly capable of inflicting great suffering in a short period of time are simply too accessible.”¹

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed legislation that will require background checks with all gun purchases and will increase the time allowed for the FBI to conduct the background checks.²

The LAOH National Political Education Committee recognizes the following:

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops provides Catholics a framework for “sensible regulation” of firearms. (A Mercy and Peacebuilding Approach to Gun Violence)³

Gun Control legislation has been a divisive issue in the U.S., however recent polls, show that a majority of Americans support background checks of gun purchasers.⁴

Suicide accounts for a greater percentage of gun deaths than homicide.⁵

The LAOH National Political Education Committee takes the following position on Gun Control Issues:

Making guns safer is a Pro-life issue.

We support the following gun control measures outlined by the U.S. Conference on Catholic Bishops:

“A total ban on assault weapons

Universal background checks on all gun purchases

Limitations on civilian access to high-capacity weapons and ammunition magazines

Federal law criminalizing gun trafficking

Improved access to and increased resources for mental health care and earlier interventions

Regulations and limitations on the purchasing of handguns

Safety measures, such as locks that prevent children and others from using gun without permission and supervision

An honest assessment of the toll of violent images and experiences which inundate people, particularly our youth.”

Individuals should contact their elected officials, State and Federal, to support gun control policy and legislative measures that uphold the safety and wellbeing of all persons in our communities.

[1] <https://www.usccb.org/resources/backgrounder-gun-violence>

[2] <https://www.usnews.com/news/top-news/articles/2021-03-11/us-house-passes-two-democratic-backed-gun-control-bills>

[3] <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/upload/Backgrounder-on-Gun-Violence-March-2018.pdf>

[4] <https://poll.qu.edu/Poll-Release?releaseid=3809>

[5] <https://preventfirearmsuicide.efsgv.org/about-firearm-suicide/statistics/>

RACISM

According to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ‘Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, and religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design.’¹ Therefore, racial discrimination in any form is morally unacceptable and an affront to our Catholic values. Pope Francis publicly reiterated this stance on racism by describing it as a virus which slows social progress.² Previously, while speaking at the General Audience last June, Pope Francis emphasized that we, as Catholics, cannot claim to defend the sacredness of human life while simultaneously turning a blind eye to racism.³

The LAOH National Political Education Committee recognizes the following:

The motto of the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians is Friendship, Unity and Christian Charity. Living our motto as Irish-American Catholic women, we recognize that discrimination and more particularly, racism, in any form, is inherently wrong and violates our Christian values. Racism is a sin.

The LAOH National Political Education Committee takes the following position on Racism:

It is our Christian duty to uphold the humanity of all human beings and to not make judgements on who is acceptable and who is not.

As Irish-American women, it is important to take a stand against violence inflicted on people regardless of their personal origin. The struggles of our ancestors and our brethren who currently fight for equality in Ireland make clear that we must strive for a more inclusive world.

Gerry Adams states in his statement on the anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement: ‘All of us have a responsibility to make a stand against such injustice and intolerance in whatever form it takes. Society must reflect and include the entirety of its people, not some of them.’⁴

We must decry racism and discrimination in all forms in order to truly practice our motto of Friendship, Unity, and Christian Charity. We must take this stand and do the hard work of combating racism in order to have a more just, equitable, and peaceful society.

[1] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (United States Catholic Conference, Inc. 1994), No. 1935 quoting Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 29.

[2] Pope Francis, @Pontifex (Twitter). 21 March 2021.

[3] “Pope Francis: No Tolerance for Racism, but without violence.” *Vatican News*, 3 June 2020.

[4] “Gerry Adams: On anniversary of Good Friday Agreement, focus should be on reconciliation.” *Belfast Media*, 2 April 2021

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