

USCCB economic letter still guides voters

Priorities for voters in guiding economic choices by Catholic Social Teaching on the 40th anniversary of the pastoral letter, “[Economic Justice For All](#)”

Rose Marie Tresp, RSM; Institute Justice Team

As we prepare to vote in the midterm elections, uncertainty and fear about work and the dignity of workers are prevalent, especially with the increasing use of artificial intelligence in the workplace. Our economic future as individuals and families seems uncertain with the increasing level of inequality in the United States and the world. The wealth gap today is higher than it was in the 1920s prior to the Great Depression.

Forty years ago, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) published a pastoral letter titled “[Economic Justice for All](#)” (EJA). This letter gives us norms and guidance:

The needs of the 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; production to meet social needs over production for military purposes. (EJA paragraph 94)

Many Catholics probably don’t ever remember hearing these words. But these were spoken by Saint John Paul II during his visit to Canada in 1984 and repeated in the USCCB’s pastoral letter two years later.

The bishops’ pastoral letter provides some guidance for citizens today as we prepare to go to the polls. This guidance leaves to each person the responsibility of judging who and what to vote for while understanding that no politician and no laws or regulations perfectly fit these criteria.

In the words of pastoral letter,

the pursuit of economic justice takes believers into the public arena, testing the policies of government by the principles of our teaching. We ask you to become more informed and active citizens, using your voices and votes to speak for the voiceless, to defend the poor and the vulnerable, and to advance the common good. We are called to shape a constituency of conscience measuring every policy by how it touches the least, the lost, and the left-out among us. This letter calls us to conversion and common action, to new forms of stewardship, service, and citizenship. (EJA paragraph 27)

In 2026, the USCCB again reiterates support for the norms and guidance in this document written 40 years ago. The principles of economic justice articulated by the bishops in 1986 remain just as relevant and necessary today amid persistent poverty, growing inequality, revolutionary technological changes, and the marginalization of many people and communities.

Practically, what does the USCCB support? In brief, when deciding who to vote for, citizens are invited to consider supporting a wide range of issues that could build a just economy. The USCCB [names issues and problems](#) that people of faith should recognize and take into account when entering the polling station: “food security and hunger, work and joblessness, homelessness and affordable housing, and tax credits for low-income families, as well as protecting programs that serve poor and vulnerable people throughout the federal budget.”

A [summary resource](#) has been published for the fortieth anniversary of Economic Justice for All.