



NewsNotes

March 2024

So much of what we read in the news, or watch on TV brings difficult messages, War and starvation in Gaza, the status of Ukraine, the inability of Congress to fund the government (its main responsibility). The opening stories in this edition of NewsNotes tells us the situation in the UK is not appreciably better. Repeated stories of bad news can bring us down and make us lethargic in responses to needs, feeling there is little we can do.

As Christians in Lent, we have the chance to hear of God's plan for salvation and of God's promises in the daily scriptures. We have a season long call to repentance from our own complicity in the world's evils that surround us and also a chance to throw off despair and once again place our hope in God's plan for the reign of God to come alive among us now.

Another opportunity we can benefit from is to take actions to help others. There are suggestions herein from NETWORK on webinars to watch to positively prepare us for the elections that are coming up globally. Just about half of the global population will be going to the polls this year. There is an opportunity for change and we can do our part.

Saturday, Eileen and I travelled to Trenton to join in the Poor People's Campaign, calling for a moral revival. There we met Blair who leads Waterspirit and was filling in for Rachel who is a co-organizer of the campaign.

We sang a lot and listened to the heartfelt words of many who

are low income and some words as well from those who work for and with them. It was a rainy day and I had plenty of temptation to stay home, but I am glad I did not. With so many dedicated and engage people, it would be difficult to come away without hope infused from the love and compassion shared there. For me, that kind of event can help chase the blues away and revive my spirit.

I know it is often a refrain in NewsNotes but “just do something” you will feel better for having acted.

Frank

Frank McCann
Peace through Justice Facilitator
Congregation's NGO Representative to the UN
Laudato Si' Action Platform Coordinator



English water companies are accumulating significant debt

by David Richardson

UK water companies are failing to meet the needs of the Common Good and improve the well-being of people in our society; instead, they continue to focus on the shareholders.

[The Guardian](#) reports that between 1990 and 2023, English water companies paid £53bn in dividends to their shareholders, almost equivalent to the amount they currently owe in debt. In contrast, the publicly owned Scottish Water spends only 10% of its revenue on debt-related costs and has not paid dividends.

Since 1989, when Margaret Thatcher's government privatised England's water companies, they have accumulated debt yearly. In 2023, their combined debt stands at £60.3bn. While the water companies claim that they have used the debt for investment, it is argued that it has been taken to pay substantial shareholder returns. In the last three decades, these companies have paid their shareholders dividends close to £53.1bn, equivalent to over £83.7bn in today's prices.

Severn Trent Water, which provides my water, charges me approximately £518 annually but spends 11% on servicing debt, which has accumulated to £6.9bn,

yet since 1990, it has paid out £8.2bn to its shareholders.

Catholic social teaching strongly emphasises the need to act as responsible stewards of the environment. Practices that lead to water pollution and unsustainability are inconsistent with the principle of safeguarding God's creation. The existing privatisation of water companies falls short of ensuring a fair distribution of benefits and burdens. Water companies must be more accountable for balancing their profit-seeking objectives with social and environmental concerns.

Labour drops £28bn green pledge

by David Robinson

The UK Labour Party had announced a green prosperity plan, which pledged to invest an additional £28bn through government borrowing on climate-tackling technologies, creating jobs and encouraging private investment. However, the party has scaled back its spending pledge.

Instead of a guarantee to borrow and spend the large sum, it will now be a target to work towards. The party accused the Conservatives of causing an economic downturn, resulting in record-high interest rates and inflation.

Labour confirmed the axing of the £28bn figure, and it plans to spend £23.7bn on environmental schemes over its first term in office, equivalent to just under £5bn a year. However, the party says it will commit to becoming a leading green nation by 2030 and, despite the reduced funding, will still meet existing promises made under the original green prosperity plan.

This change in funding is a lost opportunity; investing £28bn annually in green technologies would have been a positive step forward in addressing the challenges facing the UK. From restoring nature, insulating our homes, and reducing emissions, the investment would have provided a more sustainable future for our common home.



Criminalizing sacred duties?

The attorney General of the state of Texas is trying to close **Annunciation House** in El Paso, Texas. The AG considers it a crime for a Catholic Organization to provide welcome to undocumented refugees, which has been doing for 46 years since its founding. Annunciation House is backed by Bishop Sitze, the local bishop who is also the chair of the American Bishops'

Committee on Migration together saying that this is part of the Gospel mission given to all Christians: to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless. From his statement:

Let me be clear. For the church's part, we will endeavor to work with all in pursuit of the common good of our city and nation. We will vigorously defend the freedom of people of faith and goodwill to put deeply held religious convictions into practice. We will not be intimidated in our work to serve Jesus Christ in our sisters and brothers fleeing danger and seeking to keep their families together.

As one El Paso community, this is our promise today. We will not surrender the identity of our borderlands, a place which chooses compassion over indifference, human fraternity over division, and radical hope and evangelical love over hatred and exclusion.

In 2018, our CSJP connection to Annunciation House began when several members of the congregation, myself included, spent two weeks at a time assisting with a large influx of refugees brought to Annunciation house daily by ICE, the federal Immigration and Custom Enforcement administration. We continued that ministry for two years until the pandemic caused a halt. The congregation has been making monthly donations to Annunciation House since we began service there.

The work of Annunciation House is authentic people-centered gospel work. The state of Texas has no business in our democracy, for as long as we have one, in shutting down ministries of the church. The Congregation has signed onto a letter in support of Annunciation House and will continue to monitor the situation.

[Bishop Mark Seitz, of El Paso & Chair of the USSCB committee on Migration statement in support of Annunciation House](#)

[Statement of Bishop Rhodes \(USSCB Chair of Committee for Religious Liberty\)](#)

Palestine lives matter

by David Richardson

"Palestine Lives Matter," said the placard, held by a young lady wearing a white woolly hat obscured by the Palestinian flags and banners at a recent Free Palestine demonstration in London.

Regular protests in London in response to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza have attracted people from various religions, organisations, and walks of life, often exceeding a hundred thousand. Despite the high numbers of protesters, arrests have been low, and the behaviour is good. The protests provided a melting pot of views and understanding about the conflict but with a clear sense of injustice and anger towards Israel over their treatment of the Palestinians.

In her article published in The Occasional Papers Winter 2024, Kim-Phuong

Tran expresses the feeling of helplessness in times of war, emphasising the importance of showing solidarity and offering prayers for those affected. The people of the UK, along with the global community, often feel powerless in their efforts to end conflicts. This may explain why so many have attended demonstrations in London, as it provides a sense of unity and solidarity.

Despite the good nature of the protests, the conflict has caused some division in the UK, which has seen an increase in anti-Semitism. The [Guardian newspaper](#) reported a 589% increase in incidents compared with the same period in 2022. The BBC reported that the Tell Mama organisation documented 2,010 Islamophobic incidents between 7 October 2023 and 7 February 2024, a significant increase from the 600 incidents recorded during the same period the previous year.

The major political party's view is to support Israel's right to defend itself proportionally, but this view is probably because of the UK's significant volume of arms sales to Israel. However, there is growing pressure on UK politicians to endorse a ceasefire.

On Wednesday, 21 February, hundreds of protesters gathered outside Parliament, urging MPs to support a ceasefire while a debate on the topic took place in Parliament. However, the debate turned chaotic, leading to the departure of large numbers of MPs from Parliament. The three largest political parties tried to out maneuver each other over a vote on the ceasefire. Lindsay Hoyles, the speaker, made an unprecedented move by allowing a vote to effectively avoid a large-scale rebellion among Labour Party MPs regarding their position on the Israel-Hamas war.

Lindsay Hoyles clarified that he allowed MPs to vote on different views because of concerns about their safety. Some MPs had received threats of violence because of their stance on the war. The incident sparked a new political debate from the political right wing. They argue Islamists are exerting an influence on British society and intimidating MPs, [58% say Islam poses a threat to the UK](#).

The history between Palestine and Israel is long and complex and poses difficulties in reaching any satisfactory conclusion. The Bible and our 23rd Congregation Chapter provide a posture for us to take. Mark 12:31 *'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'* The 23rd Congregation Chapter guides in *"Addressing, healing, and being present to the wounds and broken relationships among ourselves and all of God's Creation"*.

The Russian opposition leader and anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny passed away recently under suspicious circumstances. During his last trial, he was asked if he had any last words, to which he replied:

"At some point, we all come to the realisation that the things we achieved by looking the other way and keeping quiet do not matter. The only moments that matter in life are the moments when we do the right thing when we don't have to look the other way, and when we can raise our eyes from the floor and look each other in the eye. Nothing else matters."

The young lady in the white woolly hat holding the placard that reads "Palestine Lives Matter" challenges us. In her obscurity, she stands in solidarity with others, not to

look the other way.

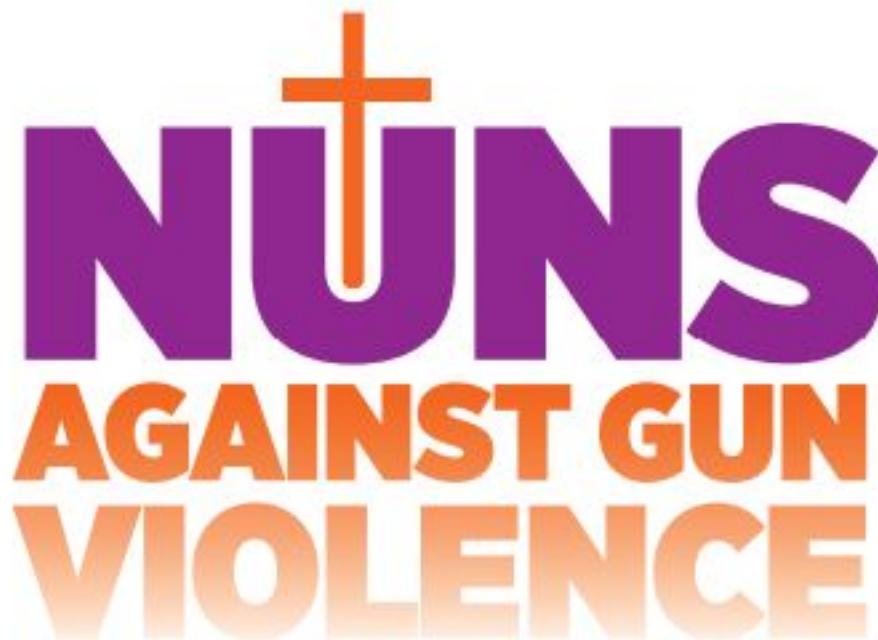
CSJP Leaders sign join Statement on Gaza with the Archdiocese of Seattle

"We call for a humanitarian cease-fire, knowing that the continued fighting will not resolve the root causes of this relentless cycle of violence but, instead, sow seeds of intergenerational hatred and animosity."

Find the full statement here:

<https://files.constantcontact.com/6cf9e118601/01b5065f-970e-422d-97af-90f314c65827.pdf?rdr=true>

Nuns Against Gun Violence



A Matter of Spirit, published by the Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center in Seattle, a CSJP sponsored ministry, issued its most recent issue of AMOS, A Matter of Spirit that is dedicated totally to gun violence. The issue features an article by Angela Howard McParland, the convener of Nuns Against Gun Violence, that lays out the Catholic social teaching that underlies nun's opposition to gun violence. Ms. McParland can also be heard in [one of IPJCs podcasts](#) with her enthusiastic and hope-filled description of the work of Nuns Against Gun Violence.

The gun violence issue of A Matter of Spirit (Winter 2024) [can be read online](#)

[or downloaded here.](#)

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The Lenten fast against gun violence has begun. For CSJPs it began at St. Michael's when the sisters there participated remotely with the Nuns Against Gun Violence Ash Wednesday Prayer service that included over 120 groups across the country.

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The Archbishop of St. Louis has asked all parishes in his state to offer a Gun Violence Stations of the Cross on Friday. Anyone wants a copy of the Gun Violence Station can obtain one here.

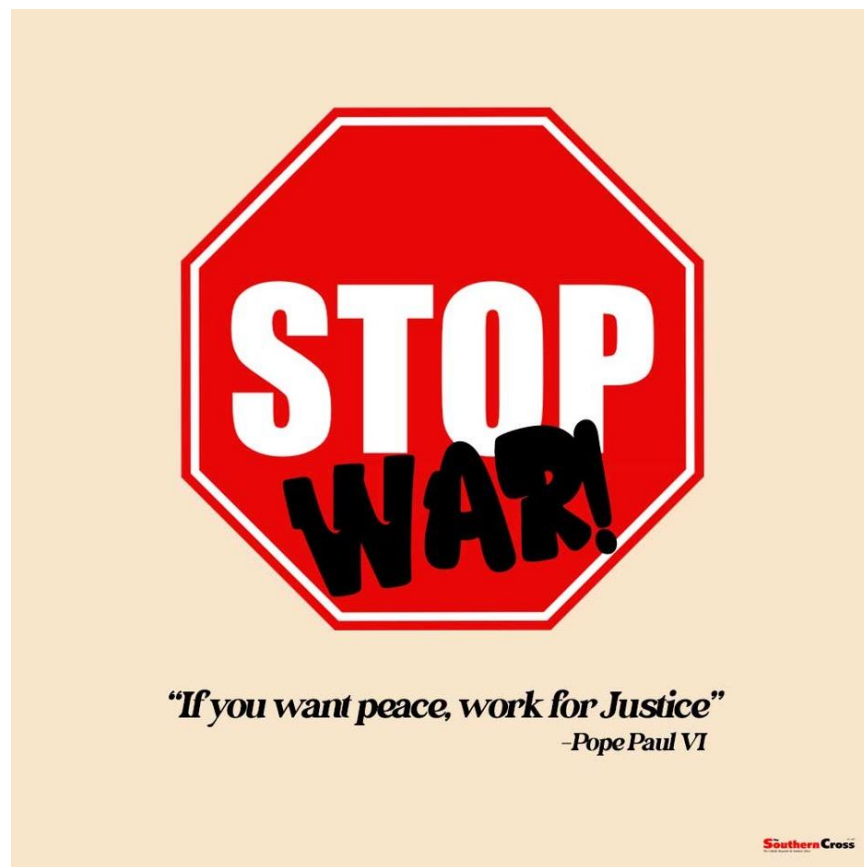
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The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia will hold a workshop on March 11, from 7-8:15 pm, in person and on line, celebrating Catholic Sisters week.

Shane Claiborne will speak about his community's work of transforming hearts, laws and guns-turning tools of death into garden tools and other instruments of life.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Pope Francis: 'Stop the bombs and missiles now!'



by [Tony Magliano](#)

In a recent interview with the Italian newspaper La Stampa, Pope Francis powerfully stated: "I will never tire of reiterating my call, addressed in particular to those who have political responsibility: 'stop the bombs and missiles now, end hostile stances [everywhere].'"

A global cease-fire is urgent: either we do not realise it, or we are pretending not to see that we are on the brink of the abyss" (see: <https://bit.ly/3I9MvJN>).

It is tragic that many heads of state throughout the world – especially those who have "political responsibility "for dropping the bombs and firing the missiles – are ignoring the pleas and warnings of Pope Francis.

And it is also obvious that most Catholics and other Christians – especially those living in countries that have the greatest influence and who are producing the most weapons – are also ignoring the Holy Father's pleas to stop the bombings.

Why are believers in the nonviolent Jesus, the Prince of Peace, so silent? Is it because most of those who are not in harm's way don't really care because the bombs are not falling on them?

According to United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, the world is experiencing the highest number of violent conflicts since World War II. A quarter of humanity – 2 billion people– live in places affected by armed conflict.

Research conducted by Brown University's Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs reveals that since 2001 at least 940,000 people have been killed by direct war violence in just the five countries of Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Pakistan; with the number wounded far higher, along with the huge amount of civilians who have died indirectly as a result of the destruction of hospitals, infrastructure, and environmental contamination, together with other war-related problems.

The Brown University study further reveals that "thousands of United States service members have died in combat, as have thousands of civilian contractors. ...

"Far more of the people killed have been civilians. More than 432,000 civilians have been killed in the fighting since 2001" (see: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human>).

Those of us living in declining democracies still have the power of the people, the power of peacefully demanding an end to the madness of war which is draining essential goods and services from the poorest half of our human family – hundreds of thousands of whom face starvation.

After two years of bloody warfare between Russia and NATO-backed Ukraine, there is no end in sight. Instead, there are signs of ramping up the war which could spiral out of control at any time.

And why are we not demanding an immediate end to the genocide in Gaza? A heartbreaking example of how the bombs and missiles of war continue to crush the little ones, is the ongoing brutal indiscriminate Israeli bombing of Gaza where more than 11,500 Palestinian children have been killed (see this movingly sad link: <https://bit.ly/48ul9Ze>). Can't we at least protect the children?

In his recent La Stampa interview Pope Francis once again expressed his belief that dialogue is the only path toward a peaceful future.

And building on the indispensable peaceful concept of dialogue is the equally indispensable concept of development.

U.N. Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed said, "There is only one route to durable peace," the route of sustainable development. It is the only reliable tool with which to break through cycles of instability and address the underlying drivers of fragility and humanitarian need."

Mohammed further insightfully added that "investments in development, people, human security and shared prosperity are also investments in peace" (see: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15184.doc.htm>).

In a very similar line of moral reasoning, St. Pope Paul VI titled his 1972 Day of Peace message with the now famous words: "If you want peace, work for Justice"(see: <https://bit.ly/3P0CUc6>).

And that's exactly it! By working with the poor, both locally and globally, to acquire what is justly needed to live, and to live with dignity, we build peace, lasting peace!

Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings.

Human trafficking webinar given in Ireland

Kindness of Sr. Angela

On St. Bakhita's day, the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles in Cork, Ireland presented a webinar on human trafficking with David Lohan presenting on "[The Weaponisation of Cultural Beliefs in Human Trafficking.](#)"

The direct link to the webinar is: <https://youtu.be/oTV9fM91768>

During the webinar, many of us pondered the actions we can take to combat the heinous crime of human trafficking here in Ireland. The first crucial step is to raise public awareness about the reality of human trafficking in our country. You can contribute to this effort by sharing the webinar link with your friends, family, and colleagues. Additionally, sharing the resources provided by David's presentation can further spread awareness.

Equally important is educating ourselves about this issue and supporting the often overlooked and unacknowledged organisations that are tirelessly working behind the scenes. By staying informed and backing these vital initiatives, we can collectively make a significant difference. You will find a list on our website.

We have run numerous webinars over the years focusing on the different aspects of this complex issue, and when appropriate, we have shared action steps for advocating to our government for changes to legislation around relevant issues. As Brian O'Toole mentioned in his summation, the Third National Action Plan to Prevent Human Trafficking was launched in November last year by Minister Helen McEntee. We will be taking a deeper look at this piece of legislation to inform future action.

Together, we have the power to effect positive change in our community.



Waterspirit events this month

[Spring Equinox Celebration](#)

- Tuesday, March 19, 2024
- 7:00 PM 8:00 PM
- 4 E. River Road Rumson, NJ 07760 ([map](#))

Daylight is lengthening, temperatures are warming, trees are blooming and we are celebrating. Join Waterspirit on March 19 as we celebrate the arrival of Spring with music, movement, poetry and contemplation. The Spring Equinox is a time to reflect on the freshness and excitement of the rebirth of nature.

We look forward to the April showers which will water our gardens and bring forth new life.

Bring your family and friends to Waterspirit and join in the celebration.

The program will be celebrated in person and livestreamed on our [YouTube channel](#).

[Register here](#)

[Waterspirit's Microplastics Beach Survey Spring 2024](#)

- Wednesday, March 20, 2024
- 11:30 AM 12:30 PM
- Snug Harbor Beach ([map](#))

Join us on Wednesday March 20 at 11:30 am as we monitor the beaches of Snug Harbor in Highlands, NJ for Microplastics. Plastic pollution continues to enter our coastal waters and the list of wild animals affected by plastic debris is growing to include not only sea turtles, whales and seabirds, but shellfish and planktonic fish. Participants will join Waterspirit's program manager, Anne Price, as she collects samples from the beach near the Highlands Borough Community Center to be studied for microplastics. We will discuss what we are looking for, why we are monitoring, and what is done with the data. Registration required.

[Register here](#)

[Joys of the Sea](#)

- Friday, March 22, 2024
- 4:00 PM 7:00 PM
- Rooney's Oceanfront Restaurant ([map](#))

Join your fellow water protectors at this community-building fundraiser. This special event will include delicious plant-based food, a silent auction, and stunning ocean views. Joys of the Sea will feature remarks from the 2024 Suzanne Golas Spirit of Water Award winner, Jenna Reynolds of Save Coastal Wildlife.

*** PLEASE NOTE: THIS EVENT IS AT CAPACITY.

Please email water@waterspirit.org if you would like to be added to the wait list. ***

We are grateful to our sponsors: Kathryn and Robert Chambers, and Ann Marie and Robert Reardon.

Are you interested in reaching thousands of water protectors by sponsoring this event or donating an auction item? Reach out to water@waterspirit.org to learn more about [sponsorship opportunities](#).



Bishops invite us to synod listening session on migration

If you are Catholic and want to make your voice heard on the Church's engagement on migration, please join us as a participant in an upcoming listening session for the Synod on Synodality. As you are likely aware, the Synod on Synodality is a three-year process of listening and dialogue that began with a solemn opening in Rome on October 9 and 10, 2021 and which concludes later this year. An important part of this process consists in a series of listening sessions, during which time Catholics can make their voice heard, express joys and concerns, and offer suggestions related to a wide range of issues.

The specific dates when these sessions will take place are being finalized, but it seems they will occur during the second and third week of March. Should you be interested in helping us out and letting the Church hear your voice on key issues of importance related to its engagement on social justice, [please fill out this form so that we can note your interest.](#)

Meditation for Earth



Meditation for Earth is held every Tuesday at 12:15 p.m. ET.
In-person in the Sanctuary at Rumson Presbyterian Church 4 East River Rd.
Rumson, NJ
Join our virtual meditation on our YouTube channel [HERE](#)



EQUALLY SACRED CHECKLIST

How can we know we are voting for candidates who promote the common good?

Pope Francis makes it clear: **Catholics and all people of good will are called to be multi-issue voters, not single-issue voters**, in the 2024 elections and in our continued participation in public life. This resource can support you in educating yourself as a faithful voter on the issues and concerns that are "equally sacred."

"We cannot uphold an ideal of holiness that would ignore injustice in the world."



—Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, par. 101

FREEDOM TO BE HEALTHY

Will you vote for candidates who...

- will protect and expand affordable health care for all and end the injustice of medical debt?
- support policies to reduce the cost of prescription medicines so patients can afford lifesaving care?
- support ending the Black maternal health crisis by investing in the expansion of critical programs to support the lives of parents and babies?
- support ending hunger in our nation with needed food assistance programs, such as SNAP, WIC, and school lunch programs?

The Catholic Church affirms that food and health care are not privileges reserved for the wealthy, but universal rights.

FREEDOM TO LIVE ON A HEALTHY PLANET

Will you vote for candidates who...

- will address the climate crisis and invest in a rapid, just transition to renewable energy?
- will end policies that benefit fossil fuel corporations, such as tax subsidies and approval of pipelines?
- will address pollution and toxic dumping that disproportionately affect Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, and ensure clean air and water for all?

Care for our common home is a requirement of the Catholic faith.

FREEDOM TO PARTICIPATE IN A VIBRANT DEMOCRACY

Will you vote for candidates who...

- refuse to use violent language or threats of violence against other candidates or groups of people?
- will ensure all eligible voters have access to voting, and restore voting for formerly incarcerated people?
- will limit the power of the wealthy to manipulate our democracy through unlimited dark money and gerrymandering?

Catholic teaching affirms that every person has both a right and a responsibility to participate in our shared political processes, which we must structure to serve the common good.

FREEDOM TO CARE FOR OURSELVES AND OUR FAMILIES

Will you vote for candidates who...

- will reduce costs for families, including via a robust Child Tax Credit, paid leave, and funding for childcare?
- will ensure all workers can earn a living wage and have the right to join a union?
- will ensure the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes, including by supporting a billionaire's tax?
- will address skyrocketing housing costs, including by investing in affordable housing, housing assistance programs, and a renter's tax credit?
- will support future generations by expanding training and apprenticeship programs and free college?

Catholic teaching promotes the dignity of work, the rights of workers, and an inclusive economy that places people over profit and ensures that we all have what we need to thrive.

FREEDOM FROM HARM

Will you vote for candidates who...

- support common sense gun control, including banning the use of AR-15s and other weapons of war, so our children and communities can live safely?
- will protect the rights of marginalized communities including Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities as well as LGBTQ+ people?

The Catholic Church insists upon every person's intrinsic worth, dignity, and right to live in safety—with no exceptions.

FREEDOM TO LIVE IN A WELCOMING COUNTRY THAT VALUES DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Will you vote for candidates who...

- support the right to asylum and paths to citizenship, and prioritize integration?
- promote inclusive policies that support border communities rather than militarization?

The Catholic Church affirms that we all have a right to migrate to seek a safe and good life for ourselves and our families, and that nations have a moral imperative to welcome immigrants.

networkadvocates.org

NETWORK is rejoicing that the Child Tax Credit was passed in the House by a wide, bi-partisan margin. Although it is not as strong as the Child Tax Credit that was in place in 2020, it does give 13 million more of the 16 million who were enrolled in 2020, an opportunity to receive these benefits. In 2020 the child poverty rate was cut in half under that child tax credit but the rate of child poverty increased when the program was defunded in 2021.

The work is not yet over. Although passed by the House, the Senate must approve the legislation as well. It is important for us, as advocates for children in low-income families to **call our Senators** and ask them to pass the child tax credit measure without any further cuts from what the House approved.

NETWORK has also begun education engaged Catholics about the

upcoming election and the issues that are of importance. They released their [Equally Sacred Checklist](#) showing the reasons we, as Catholics cannot afford to be single issue voters. To watch the video of the training session that introduced the Scorecard, [click here](#).

NETWORK is also planning a four-part election education series beginning on April 9th at 7 PM Eastern and 4 PM Pacific. To see other times that are available and to read descriptions of all four sessions, [visit this webpage](#).

[**REGISTER HERE**](#)

A Blessing for us all



I have always marveled at how special our world is. This picture shows how water has frozen into special shapes - fractals - out in a field of grass and mud. So beautiful - so delicate. To experience this in nature is to become more aware of our world and all of creation around us. This is always a WOW moment for me and I come to appreciate being alive and a part of our world.

Bob Chambers, CSJP-A

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