



Catholic Social Teaching *for Everyone*

SESSION SIX:

Rights and Responsibilities

Opening Prayer:

Prayer for Basic Rights

LORD OF WISDOM, awaken us to our duty to care for the basic needs of all people.

Strengthen with hope people denied their human rights and freedoms.

Provide us all with the voice to cry out for justice for the poor and the oppressed.

Amen.

Source: USCCB

Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

Rights and Responsibilities

“The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities — to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.”

(USCCB)



CST 101

Rights and Responsibilities



Human Rights

“**[Human] rights are ‘universal, inviolable, inalienable.’**”

- “*Universal* because they are present in all human beings, without exception of time, place or subject.
- “*Inviolable* insofar as ‘they are inherent in the human person and in human dignity’
- “*Inalienable* insofar as ‘no one can legitimately deprive another person, whoever they may be, of these rights, since this would do violence to their nature.’”

Human Rights *cont'd*



“These rights apply to every stage of life and to every political, social, economic and cultural situation.”

(CSDC 154)

Source: UN Photo

Human Rights *cont'd*

Among these human rights are the following:



- “The right to life, an integral part of which is the right of the child to develop in the mother's womb from the moment of conception;
- “The right to live in a united family and in a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child's personality;

Human Rights *cont'd*

- “The right to develop one’s intelligence and freedom in seeking and knowing the truth;
- “The right to share in the work which makes wise use of the earth's material resources, and to derive from that work the means to support oneself and one's dependents;



Human Rights *cont'd*



- “The right freely to establish a family, to have and to rear children through the responsible exercise of one’s sexuality . . . [and]
- “Religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one’s faith and in conformity with one’s transcendent dignity as a person.”

(CSDC 155)

Collective Rights

“The field of human rights has expanded to include the rights of peoples and nations

International law rests upon the principle of equal respect for States, for each people’s right to self-determination and for their free cooperation in view of the higher common good of humanity. Peace is founded not only on respect for human rights but also on respect for the rights of peoples, in particular the right to independence.” (CSDS 157)

UNITED NATIONS



Role of Government

“The political community pursues the common good when it seeks to create a human environment that offers citizens the possibility of truly exercising their human rights and of fulfilling completely their corresponding duties.”

(CSDC 389)




Violations of Human Rights

“The solemn proclamation of human rights is contradicted by a painful reality of violations, wars and violence of every kind, in the first place, genocides and mass deportations, the spreading on a virtual worldwide dimension of ever new forms of slavery such as trafficking in human beings, child soldiers, the exploitation of workers, illegal drug trafficking, prostitution.” (CSDC 158)



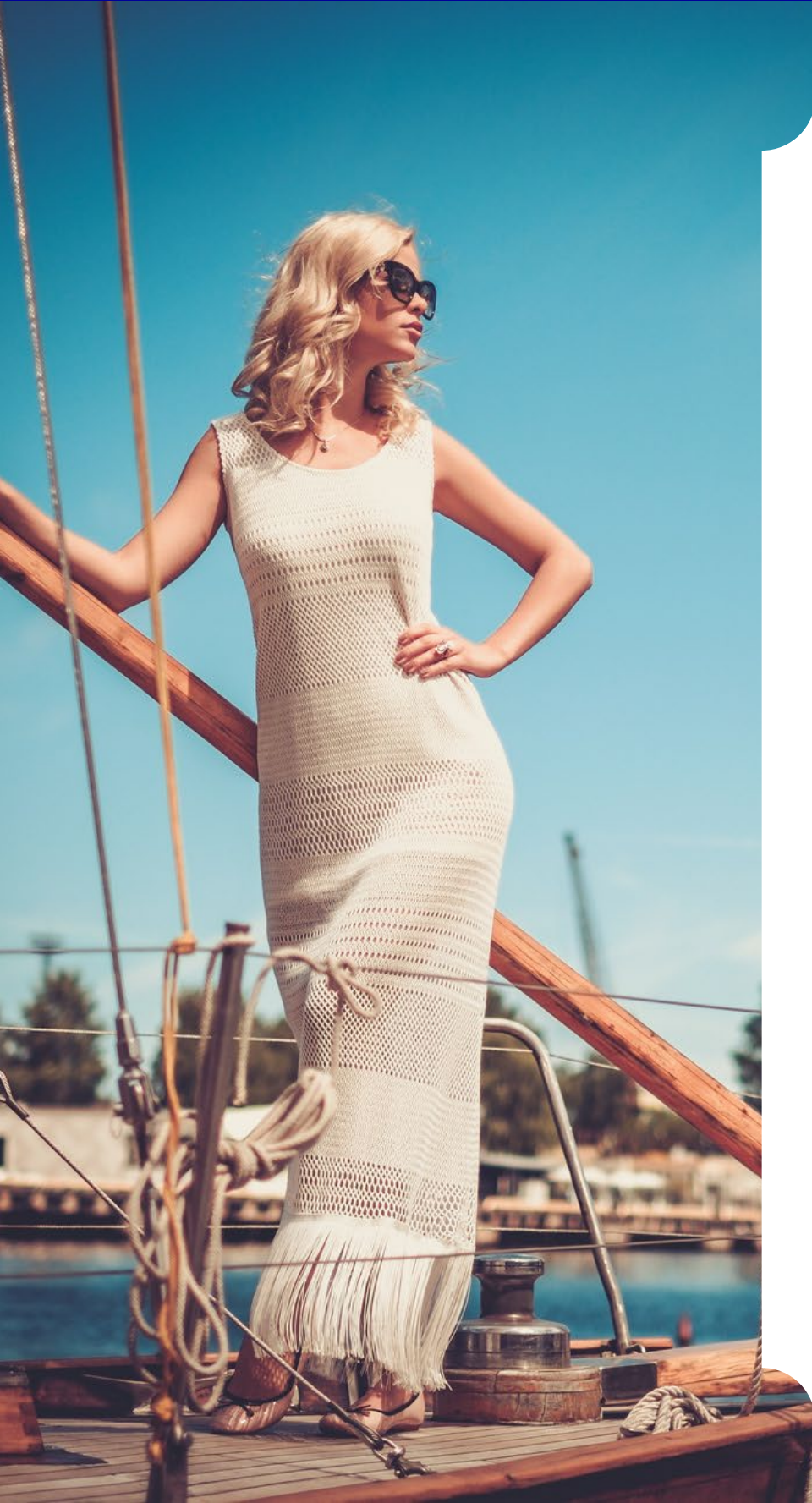
Rights and Responsibilities/Duties



“Rights presuppose duties, if they are not to become mere license. . . . An overemphasis on rights leads to a disregard for duties. . . . Duties . . . reinforce rights and call for their defense and promotion as a task to be undertaken in the service of the common good.”

Links between Rights and Responsibilities

“A link has often been noted between claims to a ‘right to excess,’ and even to transgression and vice, within affluent societies, and the lack of food, drinkable water, basic instruction and elementary health care in areas of the underdeveloped world and on the outskirts of large metropolitan centers.”



Links between Rights and Responsibilities

“The link consists in this: individual rights, when detached from a framework of duties which grants them their full meaning, can run wild, leading to an escalation of demands which is effectively unlimited and indiscriminate.”

(Caritas in Veritate 43)



Correlative Rights and Duties



- “In human society, to one [person’s] right there corresponds a duty in all other persons: the duty, namely, of acknowledging and respecting the right in question.”

(CDSC 156)

Correlative Rights and Duties *cont'd*



Example:

- Workers have rights “to productive work, to decent and just wages, to adequate benefits and security in their old age, to the choice of whether to organize and join unions, to the opportunity for legal status for immigrant workers, to private property, and to economic initiative.”
- Management and governments therefore have a duty to provide these things.

(USCCB)

(CCC 2430-2434)

Reciprocal Rights and Duties

“Workers also have responsibilities – to provide a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay, to treat employers and co-workers with respect, and to carry out their work in ways that contribute to the common good.” [\(USCCB\)](#)



Example: Citizenship



“Political authorities are obliged to respect the fundamental rights of the human person. . . . The political rights attached to citizenship can and should be granted according to the requirements of the common good.”

(CCC 2237)

Example: Citizenship *cont'd*

“It is the duty of citizens to contribute along with the civil authorities to the good of society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom. . . . Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one's country”



(CCC 2239, 2240)

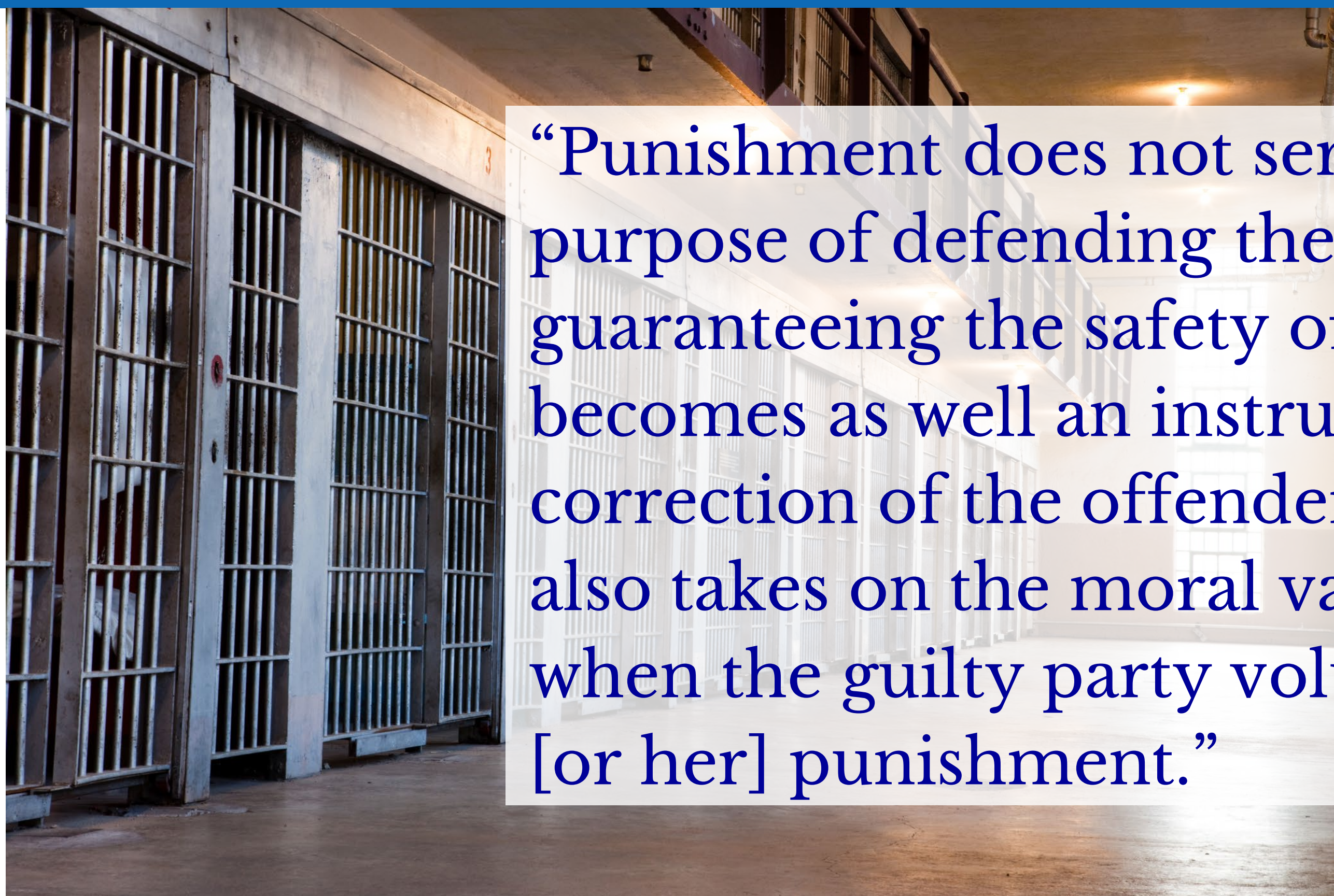
Example: Criminal Justice

“In order to protect the common good, the lawful public authority must exercise the right and the duty to inflict punishments according to the seriousness of the crimes committed.”

(CSDC 402)



Example: Criminal Justice *cont'd*

A photograph of a prison hallway with barred cell doors. The hallway is long and narrow, with a concrete floor and walls. The cell doors are made of metal bars and are set into a concrete wall. The lighting is dim, with a few overhead lights visible. The perspective is from the end of the hallway, looking down its length.

“Punishment does not serve merely the purpose of defending the public order and guaranteeing the safety of persons; it becomes as well an instrument for the correction of the offender, a correction that also takes on the moral value of expiation when the guilty party voluntarily accepts his [or her] punishment.”

(CSDC 402)

Example: Criminal Justice *cont'd*

“The activity of offices charged with establishing criminal responsibility . . . must strive to be a meticulous search for truth and must be conducted in full respect for the dignity and rights of the human person; this means guaranteeing the rights of the guilty as well as those of the innocent.”



LAW
COURTS

Q&A

Questions for Reflection *and Discussion*

Protection of the Inviolability of Rights

“If the only basis of human rights is to be found in the deliberations of an assembly of citizens, those rights can be changed at any time, and so the duty to respect and pursue them fades from the common consciousness. Governments and international bodies can then lose sight of the objectivity and ‘inviolability’ of rights. When this happens, the authentic development of peoples is endangered.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* 43)

How can this danger be prevented, or is it inevitable?

Exercise of Rights Within the Economy

“The Church’s social doctrine has always maintained that justice must be applied to every phase of economic activity, because this is always concerned with [human persons and their needs]. Locating resources, financing, production, consumption and all the other phases in the economic cycle inevitably have moral implications. Thus, every economic decision has a moral consequence.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* 37)

What do these moral consequences imply for the exercise of our economic rights, in light of our duties toward others within the economy and our brothers and sisters in need?

A group of people's hands are stacked together in a circle, symbolizing teamwork and action. The hands are of various skin tones and are wearing different colored sleeves (yellow, white, blue). A watch is visible on one of the wrists. The background is bright and out of focus, suggesting an outdoor setting. A dark blue horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text 'Take Action' in white serif font.

Take

Action

Examination of Conscience

(USCCB)

- Do I recognize and respect the economic, social, political, and cultural rights of others?
- Do I live in material comfort and excess while remaining insensitive to the needs of others whose rights are unfulfilled?
- Do I take seriously my responsibility to ensure that the rights of persons in need are realized?
- Do I urge those in power to implement programs and policies that give priority to the human dignity and rights of all, especially the vulnerable?



Taking Action — Pro-Life Ministry

- Promotes the Church's defense of life at every stage, with a particular focus on opposing abortion.

Activities include:



Mother's Day Carnation Sale, 2026

- March for Life in DC and Virginia Pro-Life Day in Richmond each January
- Celebration of World Down Syndrome Day each March
- Mother's Day corsage sale each May to benefit a pro-life organization
- Father's Day Donuts for Dad program each June
- Baby bottle campaign each October, Respect Life Month, to benefit pro-life organizations
- Raising awareness for adoptees and adoptive families each November, National Adoption Month
- Sending St. Valentine's Day, Easter, and Christmas cards to the parish homebound each February, March/April, and December
- Hour of Power ministry meetings on third Thursday of each month

Taking Action

— Kairos Prison Ministry

- Mission is to share the transforming love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ to impact the hearts and lives of incarcerated men and women to become loving and productive citizens of their communities.



- Ecumenical teams of lay volunteers conduct 4-day retreats and follow-up gatherings inside state prisons.
- More volunteers are needed to join the retreat teams, as well as many others to help with prayers, cookies, posters, placemats, and financial support.

Taking Action — Recovery & Addiction Ministry

- **Mission:** To support individuals and families facing addiction by offering compassionate, prayerful, and nonjudgmental assistance in accessing essential care and resources.
- **Action:** Our ministry provides confidential support and genuine acceptance while guiding individuals to current resources, including support groups, counseling, and treatment options in the local area and beyond.
- **Education:** Addiction is a disease that affects the whole family, not just the person experiencing substance use. We offer ongoing education on Substance Use Disorder to increase awareness, to foster physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, and to help reduce the shame and stigma often associated with addiction.



Taking Action — Pax Christi

Supports USCCB policy positions on gun violence prevention, including

- Ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines
- Universal background checks
- Federal gun trafficking bill
- Regulations on sales of handguns
- Safe storage measures
- Extreme risk protective orders
- Improved access to mental health care
- Honest assessment of violent images and experiences in our society



Closing Prayer:

Prayer for Our Nation

GOD OUR FATHER, GIVER OF LIFE, you are the rock on which this nation was founded. You alone are the true source of our cherished rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Reclaim this land for your glory and dwell among your people. Send Your Spirit to touch our hearts and those of our nation's leaders. Open our minds to the great worth of human life and the responsibilities that accompany human freedom. Remind your people that true happiness is rooted in seeking and doing Your will. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

*Adapted from "Prayer for Our Nation,"
Archdiocese of Boston.*

Thank you for your time tonight.

*We look forward to seeing you next
Wednesday!*

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