

A Charter of Rights and Responsibilities for Christ's Faithful

The Principles for a Charter of fundamental rights and responsibilities for Catholics were articulated by the Ordinary Synod of Bishops in 1971. Its final document was entitled "Justice in the World." Importantly, the document preserves the remaining core of a larger project commissioned by Paul VI at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. It came to be known as the *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis* (The Basic Law of the Church) and was meant to stand alongside of Paul's *Credo of the People of God*. Together they were intended to capture Vatican II's evangelical vision and mission of the Church and function as the moral principles that would inform the interpretation of Canon Law as well as provide a guide for the life and governance of the Church.

Most importantly, the moral foundations of right relationship in the Christian community are grounded in the teaching of Jesus: *So, whatever you wish that others do to you, do to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.* (Mt 7: 12).

1. Primacy of Conscience: Every Catholic has the right and responsibility to develop an informed conscience and to act in accord with it.
2. Right of equality: All Catholics have to be treated equally in respect in the community of the church and by its laws. There is no place among Christ's faithful for any discrimination on the basis of gender, nationality, language, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, age, social status, political or theological views.
3. Community: Every Catholic has the right and responsibility to participate in a Eucharistic community and the right to responsible pastoral care. Catholics also have the right to be members of organizations in the church and in society including unions. They have the right to participate in gatherings on Church properties including churches or chapels. The right to use rooms may be conditional but any restrictions and reasons for them should be made clear by Church authorities.

4. Universal Ministry: Every Catholic has the right and responsibility to proclaim the Gospel and to participate in appropriate ministries according to their gifts.
5. Freedom of Expression: Every Catholic has the right to freedom of expression including the freedom to dissent but always within the context of the Christian obligation to protect the rights, views and human dignity of others. This includes the freedom of scientific and especially theological research and publication and the freedom of expression in arts.
6. Information: Every Catholic has the right of unlimited access to information, except where there are legitimate concerns regarding confidentiality, privacy and the good name of others.
7. Sacraments: Catholics, according to age and disposition, have the right and responsibility to participate in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church.
8. Family status: All faithful have the right to choose their family status freely.
9. Reputation: All Catholics have the right to a good name and to due process.
10. Governance: All Catholics and their local communities have the right to genuine participation in decision making including the selection of their leaders. Institutions observing the principles of good governance should be implemented at all organizational levels. These principles include participation in decision making and election of leaders by all those concerned, separation of legislative, executive and judicative powers, limited term of office, checks and balances, accountability of holders of ministries, subsidiarity, synodality, unanimity in decision making as far as possible. The Holy See should amend Canon 129 to appoint lay women and men to positions of jurisdiction at all levels of governance in the Church.
11. Social Justice. Every Catholic has the right and the responsibility to promote social justice in the world at large as well as within the communal structures of the Church.
12. Participation: All Catholics and their local communities have the right and responsibility to share in the discernment of the Sacred Scriptures and the Church's Tradition. They also have the right and responsibility to participate in regular Faith education and development opportunities.

13. Due process: Catholics accused of Church crimes have the right to due and transparent process. Trials must be conducted openly and fairly by an independent judiciary according to the principles found in the Scriptures and Church teaching and Law (Matt 18: 15-22; The Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, *Constitutions* n. 8; *Justice in the Church* 1971, n. 45). They must be performed in a language understood by all concerned. Every party in a trial has the right of legal assistance. The parties or their legal assistants have the right to access the records of the judicial process.
14. Children: Children have the right to be protected from violence and sexual abuse and to receive adequate education and appropriate religious celebrations. Children must be informed about their rights and responsibilities and every individual engaged with any ministry or activity of the Catholic Church has a responsibility to do their part to keep children safe.”
15. Freedom to leave the Church: Everybody has the right to leave the church. People who left the church should have their names and personal details removed from church registers and should henceforth not be subject to financial demands or claims of any kind. The Roman Catholic church has embraced and committed itself to the international declarations of human rights and, in doing so, the church has pledged:
 - to accept the rights contained in this declarations;
 - to observe these rights even where their violation would be possible because of the weakness of the secular legal system;
 - not to oppress anybody to renounce certain rights;
 - to stand up for the implementation of human rights in the secular world.

“While the Church is bound to give witness to justice, she recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes, Hence we must undertake an examination of the modes of acting and of the possessions and life style found within the Church itself”. *Justice in the World* n. 40