



Mend the Gaps 2020 Policy Platform

ABOUT NETWORK

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice educates, organizes and lobbies for economic and social transformation in our nation. Founded by Catholic Sisters, NETWORK works to create a society that promotes justice and the dignity of all.

For almost 50 years, NETWORK has advocated in Washington, D.C. for policies that increase access to healthcare, extend justice to immigrants, and advance racial and economic justice. Our work is rooted in Catholic Social Justice and we are open to all who share our passion. Our more than 100,000 supporters know that government policies can create positive change for those who are most marginalized in our society. The 2020 election is crucially important for correcting our nation's trajectory and altering the structures that cause poverty and inequality.

WE WORK FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Pope Francis calls on us to say "thou shalt not" to an economy of exclusion and inequality. This should be at the foundation of any presidential campaign. A just society values people over the accumulation of profits. While economic competition creates winners, it also causes harm. It is the federal government's role to provide support to those pushed to the economic margins.

Since 1996, the number of children living on \$2 a day has tripled.¹ Government spending on social programs has reached historic lows and its share of GDP is predicted to continue dropping through 2029.² President Trump deliberately exacerbated the assault on social spending through his proposed budget plans, which cut the discretionary spending of every agency, excluding the Department of Defense, by approximately 10%.³ These systematic cuts, as well as other strategic administrative attacks on programs, have destroyed the ability of our federal human needs programs to meaningfully reduce poverty. Our nation needs a comprehensive movement to fully fund, revamp, and renew beneficial human needs programs. Without a coordinated effort to increase the capacity and efficacy of social programs, millions of families will continue to struggle with poverty.

WE WORK FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

This election is a crucial opportunity to reject President Trump's harmful white supremacist rhetoric. The United States was built on structural racism, and institutional barriers continue to bar people of color from wealth, education, and equal protection of their constitutional rights. Our nation's continued legacy of racism directly contributes to the racial wealth and income gap, police brutality, and voter suppression, among other issues. The U.S. immigration system is turning its back on immigrants and asylum seekers, and now inflammatory rhetoric and fear mongering pushes undocumented immigrants further into the shadows and threatens their safety. White supremacy continues to perpetuate the unjust treatment of Native Americans. This election represents an opportunity to advocate for racial justice and continue the work of dismantling oppressive institutions; presidential candidates must demonstrate their commitment to ending structural racism in our nation.

Mend the Gaps Policy Platform

The principles of Catholic Social Justice inspired NETWORK to develop our Mend the Gaps agenda, which seeks to bridge the divides in our country, with a special focus on the policies that disproportionately impact women and people of color. We prioritize seven policy areas to mend the wealth and income gap as well as the gaps in access in our nation, while also protecting and upholding current successful federal programs and policies.

We invite all 2020 presidential candidates to join our movement to mend the gaps and transform our country.

Mending the Wealth and Income Gap

Tax Justice

We are called to invest in our shared society to meet the needs of all, especially those at the economic margins. Every person belongs to a single and interconnected human family; this is a core tenet of our faith teaching. When making individual and collective decisions, we have a responsibility to consider the good of the whole community over the interests of the few.

Right now, our tax policies favor the wealthiest in our nation and keep them from paying their fair share. Raising taxes on wealthy corporations and individuals will allow us to invest in key priorities, such as lowering healthcare costs, improving education, and protecting Medicare and Social Security from budget cuts.

Recommended Policy Proposals:

- ✓ Close loopholes for the wealthy by taxing extreme wealth, assessing higher income taxes, and strengthening the estate tax or replacing it with an inheritance tax.
- ✓ Raise corporate tax rates and close loopholes used by corporations to avoid paying taxes. End tax incentives that encourage corporations to outsource jobs and shift profit to tax havens.
- ✓ Improve the Earned Income Tax Credit and expand it to younger workers and workers not raising children in their home so that no worker is taxed into poverty.
- ✓ Expand the Child Tax Credit, making it fully refundable for families struggling with poverty.

Livable Income

Catholic Social Justice affirms work as a means of both fulfilling and expressing the inherent dignity of every human person. Ensuring just and livable compensation for work is a fundamental component of a just economy. Jobs in our nation must enable workers to provide for themselves and their families.

Recommended Policy Proposals:

- ✓ Pass a robust increase in the federal minimum wage with automatic adjustments tied to key economic indicators.
- ✓ Eliminate carve-outs for subminimum wage earnings—including tipped workers—to ensure one fair wage floor across the nation and across sectors.
- ✓ Protect and strengthen workers' role as stakeholders with a voice in their workplace.
- ✓ Encourage and enable collective organizing by workers to negotiate on their behalf.
- ✓ End the employment practices of forced arbitration in employment contracts and unjustified sub-contracting to avoid direct employment.
- ✓ Strengthen federal oversight and enforcement of existing labor laws that protect workers and their earnings and end wage discrimination.

- ✓ Ensure robust federal interventions triggered in times of economic downturn (e.g. guaranteed employment and unemployment insurance).
- ✓ Institute federal oversight policies that measure trends in income inequality and which set standards for reasonable pay ratios between highest and lowest earners in companies.

Family-Friendly Workplaces

Catholic Social Justice teaches that workplace and labor policies must recognize and respect the need and responsibility of individuals to be part of community. Family life is important and work must coexist with and accommodate the human needs of all members of our community. Instead, workers today struggle to keep up with the demands of caregiving for children and other family members. These demands are especially pronounced for women of color, which further expands the racial wealth and income gap.

No one should have to choose between their job and caring for a family member. No one should fear losing a job because of the needs of their family. Therefore, our government must institute laws to ensure family-friendly workplaces.

Recommended Policy Proposals:

- ✓ Enact paid family leave to allow workers to address a serious health concern for themselves or a loved one, or care for the birth of a new child, adopted child, or foster child, without the burden of lost income or job insecurity.
- ✓ Require employers to allow employees to earn paid sick time based on the number of hours worked.
- ✓ Support pregnant workers by clarifying reasonable accommodations, requiring an interactive process between employers and pregnant workers, and protecting workers from retaliation, intimidation, or threats for requesting or using an accommodation.
- ✓ Encourage flexible schedules to give employees and employers more tools and resources to create mutually beneficial schedules.
- ✓ Provide Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) without overly burdensome hurdles or strict work requirements.

Mending the Gaps in Access

Access to Democracy

Our faith teaches that we have a responsibility to participate in politics out of a concern for, and commitment to, the common good. Our democracy is founded on the principle of representative government—every person counts equally. This is the only way to realize the common good. NETWORK supports policies that ensure that everyone in our nation can fully participate in our democracy and that no individual or community of color is disenfranchised by federal policy. We want a system which holds our government responsible for advancing the common good and holds our representatives accountable to their constituents.

Recommended Policy Proposals:

- ✓ Expand the right to vote and make it an easier, more inclusive process. We support policies that restore and strengthen the Voting Rights Act, facilitate voter registration for citizens, and enable flexibility and unhindered access to the ballot.
- ✓ Adopt stronger, more enforceable ethics laws for the executive and legislative branches.
- ✓ Create more transparency in campaign finance donations and federal influence.
- ✓ Improve our election infrastructure and aggressively tackle interference in our elections at any stage in the election process.

- ✓ Create a clear, viable path for citizens to challenge discriminatory actions that restrict their right to vote.
- ✓ Reform the redistricting process to protect it from partisan manipulation and to eliminate gerrymandering.
- ✓ Reform the campaign finance system to limit the amount of money any person, corporation, or union can contribute.



Access to Healthcare

Our faith tells us that it is our moral responsibility to guarantee access to healthcare for all people, regardless of social or economic status, race, or ability to pay. Presidential candidates must be willing to take steps to expand healthcare affordability and access, eliminate disparities in health outcomes based on race and economic status, and curb the exploitative behavior of the pharmaceutical industry.

Recommended Policy Proposals:

- ✓ Fully fund the Affordable Care Act with Medicaid expansion in all states for families and individuals who are eligible under federal law.
- ✓ Block efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act without a responsible alternative enacted simultaneously.
- ✓ Stop any efforts to block grant, impose work requirements, or institute harmful structural changes to Medicaid and Medicare.
- ✓ Support robust reforms to prescription drug pricing, including out-of-pocket caps, allowing Medicare Part D to negotiate, and institute penalties for unjustified price spikes.
- ✓ Examine all health policy with a health equity lens, with a specific focus on racial disparities.
- ✓ Pass legislation to reauthorize and sustainably fund Children's Health Insurance Program, Community Health Centers, the Special Diabetes Program, and the Special Diabetes Program for Indians.
- ✓ Ensure that healthcare is genuinely affordable and accessible to people of all income levels, with particular concern for the most vulnerable among us—children, people with disabilities, and the elderly.
- ✓ Continue to require health insurers to offer comprehensive benefits to everyone, including preventative, primary, acute, mental health, and long-term care services.
- ✓ Build the foundation for universal coverage by introducing a public option for Medicare.



Access to Citizenship

As people of faith and a nation of immigrants, we are called to love our neighbor and welcome the stranger. Immigrants and refugees are a vibrant part of the fabric of our society and positively contribute to our churches and our communities. Our immigration system is unjust and outdated. Immigrants and asylum seekers have been villainized and scapegoated by an Administration intent on upholding white supremacy. We must enact policies that reunite families, provide meaningful opportunities for undocumented immigrants to apply for citizenship, welcome asylum seekers, and grow compassion in our communities.

Recommended Policy Proposals:

- ✓ Create a swift and attainable opportunity for undocumented immigrants to apply for citizenship.
- ✓ Reform the family-based immigration system to promote family unity and family reunification.
- ✓ End mass incarceration of immigrants by halting family detention, reducing the use of other immigration detention and, where necessary, promoting community-based alternatives to detention, which are safer, less expensive, and more effective at ensuring compliance with government-imposed requirements.

- ✓ Expand legal protections for all asylum seekers and unaccompanied children and ensure their health, safety, and well-being.
- ✓ Enact responsible border policies in cooperation with border communities that ensure all individuals are treated with dignity and respect.

Access to Housing

Housing is a basic human right and a foundation for a person's ability to meet their needs. By failing to ensure affordable housing for all members of our society, we harm family development and prevent millions from feeling the peace of this security. We support federal policies that enable everyone to have access to safe, affordable housing.

Recommended Policy Proposals:

- ✓ Establish a tax credit to help make housing affordable for renters with the lowest incomes.
- ✓ Encourage the use of specific tax incentives (Low-Income Tax Credit) among housing developers, for both construction and rehabilitation of low-income housing units.
- ✓ Fund programs to maintain existing affordable housing units and construct new ones through the National Housing Trust Fund and community development.
- ✓ Pass an equitable infrastructure bill that prioritizes investment in low-income communities and facilitates accessible public transportation near low-income housing and shelters so people can efficiently travel to places of employment.
- ✓ Expand the number of housing vouchers.

Additional Concerns

Trade Policy

Our faith affirms that we are one human family regardless of national, racial, ethnic, economic, or ideological differences. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. The rules of the global economy must work for the benefit of all, not just a privileged few. U.S. trade policy must promote the well-being of workers, the rights of indigenous communities, and the health and safety of people and the environment. The current NAFTA agreement must be improved to be mutually beneficial for the common good.

Recommended Policy Proposals:

- ✓ Ensure access to affordable medicines by eliminating proposed NAFTA revisions that would dangerously expand intellectual property protections for pharmaceuticals and have devastating impacts on the health of patients in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.
- ✓ Ensure just labor practices by improving NAFTA rules to enhance workers' rights to good wages, collective organizing, and a safe and healthy work environment.
- ✓ Strengthen critical enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with the agreement in order to protect the human rights and dignity of working people in all three countries.
- ✓ Faithfully steward the Earth and uphold environmental protections by improving the revised NAFTA agreement to protect the environment for future generations.

Equity in Criminal Justice

Our Catholic faith and social justice tradition affirm the dignity and sanctity of every person, no exceptions. Unfortunately, those values are not present in our current criminal justice system. People of color, women, and people experiencing poverty are disproportionately and systematically subjected to overcriminalization, harsh sentencing, and economic discrimination that destabilizes families and communities, as well as imprisonment

that emphasizes punishment rather than rehabilitation. Federal laws and policies enacted since 1980 have resulted in the U.S. becoming the world's leader in incarceration and arrests, with the majority of those imprisoned being Black and Latinx. This has deepened the racial divide and created a situation of structural poverty for many individuals, families, and communities. To overcome these disadvantages, we must ensure equal justice under the law through reforms to the federal criminal justice system.

Recommended Policy Proposals:

- ✓ Restore equity and proportionality in sentencing, especially drug sentencing. Eliminate life without parole and solitary confinement for juvenile offenders.
- ✓ Provide a viable path to rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society, and remove barriers to employment, education, and skills training.
- ✓ Restore the right to vote for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- ✓ Eliminate the use of private prisons in the federal system.
- ✓ Decouple immigration enforcement and the criminal justice system.

Protecting and Improving Programs That Serve the Common Good

While working to mend the gaps in the policy areas above, NETWORK continues our advocacy to ensure that existing critical federal programs with demonstrated success are protected and enhanced. A basic moral test for our nation is how our most vulnerable members fare. In a society struggling with deepening divisions, our faith instructs us to put the needs of the vulnerable first. Evidence-based government programs that are proven to help populations most in need must be protected and supported.

Over the past few years, human needs programs as we know them have been attacked on multiple fronts. To be a nation that supports the dignity of people, the next administration must reverse the devastating cuts and rollbacks so many critical human needs programs have experienced. Modifications to administrative rules have threatened basic safety net programs that provide housing, nutrition, and healthcare to millions of vulnerable individuals and families. Disaster relief and anti-hunger programs have been used as political bargaining chips. These federal programs are the foundation of a moral society. Our next administration must make the restoration of these programs their top domestic priority.

Sources:

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