

# State's Catholic leaders encourage voters to 'Civilize It' this election season (VIDEO)



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A woman in Louisville, Ky., votes during the primary election June 23, 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' "Civilize It" campaign encourages voters to keep debates productive and avoid personal attacks in an election season rife with division. (CNS photo/Bryan Woolston, Reuters)

## In a year of heated arguments over pandemic, race relations and electoral politics, campaign seeks to bring human dignity back to debate

**LANSING** — Tomorrow is primary day in Michigan, when voters select candidates on partisan ballots to appear on the Nov. 3 general election ballot.

Besides the candidates and proposals, voters have a lot to think about this year. Many voters are submitting absentee ballots through the mail or in person at their local clerk's office, while others consider safety precautions when they visit the polls in person.

But the state's Catholic leaders are asking voters to remember one more thing this election season: their dignity.

In a year of strife in the midst of a pandemic, economic anxiety, heightened racial tensions and a debate over police-community relations, the Michigan Catholic Conference is encouraging voters to remember that while the debates might be passionate, they don't need to be nasty.

That's why the conference is promoting the nonpartisan "Civilize It: Dignity Beyond the Debate" campaign, which "encourages Catholics and others to go through this 2020 election season in a way that recognizes the human dignity of other persons," said Dave Maluchnik, vice president of communications for the Michigan Catholic Conference.

The campaign is a project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that seeks to encourage participation in the political process without resorting to divisive personal attacks.



"We are called to bring the best of ourselves and our faith to the public square — and yet today, many shy away from such involvement because our national and local conversations are filled with vitriol and harsh language, often directed at people themselves," according to the campaign's website, [CivilizeIt.org](https://civilizeit.org).

The campaign invites people to take a three-part "pledge" to model civility, clarity and compassion during the election season, Maluchnik said.

People can visit the ["Civilize It" page](#) on the Michigan Catholic Conference's website to take the pledge and receive resources from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on promoting respectful civic dialogue and engagement.

"With everything that has been taking place in the last few months, from the virus to protests against police brutality, it has led to a certain amount of pent-up frustration going into this election season," Maluchnik said. "The effort calls for people to participate in the democratic process in a way that seeks to have dialogue through a spirit of peace and healthy conversation."

Detroit Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron, along with five of the other six diocesan bishops in Michigan, are participating in the campaign by recording a video of themselves taking the pledge, and those videos will be combined with videos of lay faithful doing the same, Maluchnik said.

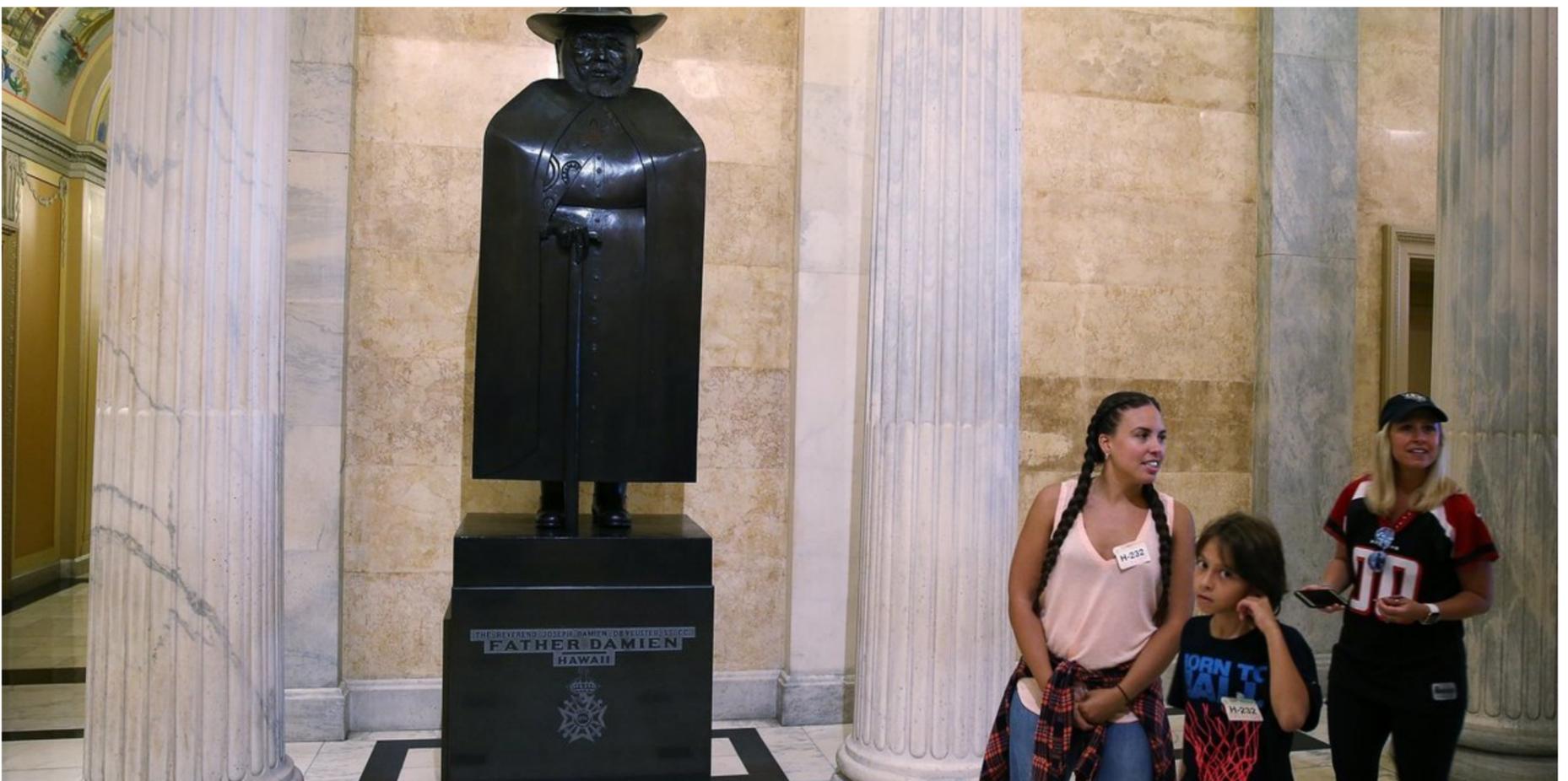
Maluchnik said the conference plans to release the videos throughout the election season as part of its "Faithful Citizenship" guide, which highlights elements of Catholic teaching people should consider before voting.

“We want to set a tone and show leadership in what is likely to be a very acrimonious election season,” Maluchnik said. “We are very grateful for the participation of the bishops and their interest in helping set the tone for the months leading up to the general election in November.”

To learn more about the “Civilize It” campaign and to take the pledge, visit [www.CivilizeIt.org](http://www.CivilizeIt.org).

# St. Damien's relatives speak up against criticism of saint's statue in U.S. Capitol

BY [PATRICK DOWNES](#) SEP 8, 2020 [NATIONAL/WORLD](#)



A sculpture of St. Damien of Molokai is seen at the U.S. Capitol in Washington in this 2017 file photo. (CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn)

**H**ONOLULU (CNS) -- Upset by the suggestion raised by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-New York, that St. Damien was a white supremacist colonizer, two of the saint's Belgian relatives, representing his extended family, wrote her an open letter Aug. 20.

"Like many Belgians -- fellow countrymen of Damien, who in 2005 elected him as 'Greatest Belgian' for his achievements at the other side of the world -- we got a shock when reading in the newspaper that you chose, amongst the 102 statues in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall Collection in Washington, the one of our relative, Father Damien, as a 'typical example of white colonialism, patriarchy and white supremacist culture,'" the letter said.

Fr. Damien, a missionary of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts, was assigned to the Hawaii mission in 1864. He spent the last 16 years of his life caring for the victims of Hansen's disease, or leprosy, who were permanently quarantined in Kalaupapa, Molokai. He died of the disease in 1889 and was canonized a saint in 2009.

The letter was signed by Rob Van den Broeck and Herman Van Roost, chairman and representative of the Fr. Damien family association, respectively. Both are descendants of daughters of Fr. Damien's brother Gerard de Veuster.

They said they would be sending the letter to newspapers in Belgium and the United States and providing additional background information about St. Damien and his statue.

Descendants of St. Damien's 10 nieces and cousins, the children of his brothers Leonce and Gerard De Veuster, are all part of the Fr. Damien Family Association.

Ocasio-Cortez on July 31 said: "Even when we select figures to tell the stories of colonized places, it is the colonizers and the settlers whose stories are told -- and virtually no one else. This is what patriarchy and white supremacy culture looks like!"

"Check out Hawaii's statue," she said, without mentioning Hawaii's second statue of King Kamehameha I. "It is Fr. Damien. This isn't to litigate each and every statue, but to point out the patterns that have emerged among the totality of them in who we are taught to deify in our nation's Capitol: virtually all men, all white, and mostly both."

The New York congresswoman said that a better choice would have been Queen Liliuokalani.

The queen had presented Fr. Damien with the Royal Order of Kalakaua, a high honor, for his work among the Hawaiians with leprosy.

Upon conferring the commendation she wrote: "I desire to express to you my admiration of the heroic and distinguished service you are rendering to the most unhappy of my subjects; and to pay, in some measure, a public tribute to the devotion, patience and unbounded charity with which you give yourself to the corporal and spiritual relief of these unfortunate people, who are necessarily deprived of the affectionate care of their relations and friends."

The letter writers did not claim any authority to decide who should represent the 50th state in Statuary Hall but stressed that "nobody other than the Hawaiians themselves have the privilege to judge whether Damien still deserves to be their first representative in the Statuary Hall of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, or to prefer a native Hawaiian queen: not our family association, but also not a U.S. representative from New York!"

The family members also pointed out that the "final Hawaiian choice for Damien in 1965 was very thorough, with the widest possible popular support, with opposing consideration of all counter-arguments and without any exclusion of female native Hawaiian personalities."

Others in the running when Fr. Damien was picked in 1965 to represent Hawaii included native Hawaiians Prince Jonah Kuhio Kalaniana'ole, King Kamehameha I, who was also chosen, Bernice Pauahi Bishop and the early Hawaiian Christian Henry Opukahaia.

The writers expressed gratitude to Ocasio-Cortez "for reviving the worldwide attention for our famous relative. Your perfect sense of timing in this COVID-19 era allows us to explain his achievement like never before. Now the U.S. Capitol in Washington will receive visitors who come exclusively to salute the statue of Fr. Damien."

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