

No. 24-154

IN THE
Supreme Court of the United States

CATHOLIC CHARITIES BUREAU, INC.,
BARRON COUNTY DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES, INC.,
DIVERSIFIED SERVICES, INC., BLACK RIVER INDUSTRIES,
INC., AND HEADWATERS, INC.,
Petitioners,

v.

STATE OF WISCONSIN LABOR AND INDUSTRY REVIEW
COMMISSION AND STATE OF WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT
OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT,
Respondents.

**On Petition for a Writ of Certiorari to the
Supreme Court of Wisconsin**

**BRIEF OF WISCONSIN CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE AS *AMICUS CURIAE* IN
SUPPORT OF PETITIONERS**

DAVID EARLEYWINE
WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
106 East Doty Street, Suite 300
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

BRADLEY G. HUBBARD
Counsel of Record
BENJAMIN D. WILSON
ELIZABETH A. KIERNAN
JESSICA A. LEE
JASON J. MUEHLHOFF
JAIME R. BARRIOS
GIBSON, DUNN & CRUTCHER LLP
2001 Ross Avenue, Suite 2100
Dallas, Texas 75201
(214) 698-3100
BHubbard@gibsondunn.com

Counsel for Amicus Curiae

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**BRIEF FOR *AMICUS CURIAE*
IN SUPPORT OF PETITION FOR
A WRIT OF CERTIORARI**

INTEREST OF *AMICUS CURIAE**

The Bishops of Wisconsin founded the Wisconsin Catholic Conference in 1969 to fulfill the vision of the Second Vatican Council, which called upon the Church to be more involved in the world. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ¶¶ 863, 1915 (2d ed. 1992), <https://t.ly/aPH0>.

Led by the Bishops, the Conference—with teachings of the Church at its foundation—serves to promote dignity, preserve justice, and advance the common good by offering a specifically Catholic contribution to public policy debates. The Conference responds to issues facing the Church’s five dioceses, their Catholic Charities organizations, and the more than 1,700 priests and deacons that minister in over 700 parishes, 275 Catholic schools, and 30 hospitals across Wisconsin. Wisconsin Catholic Conference, *The Catholic Presence in Wisconsin*, <https://t.ly/c5jTl>.

The Conference’s significant interest in this case, specifically in remediating the Wisconsin Supreme Court’s diminution of the First Amendment, stems from its mission as the Church’s public policy voice in

* Pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 37.6, *amicus* represents that this brief wasn’t authored in whole or in part by any party or counsel for any party. No person or party other than *amicus* or its counsel made a monetary contribution to the preparation or submission of this brief. *Amicus* timely notified counsel for all parties of its intention to file this brief as required by Supreme Court Rule 37.2.

Wisconsin and its role as the “informational clearing-house” for the Church Unemployment Pay Program (CUPP). CUPP, *CUPP Policy Handbook 2* (Oct. 1, 2022), <https://t.ly/DVPS>.

The Conference submits this brief to explain how the Wisconsin Supreme Court’s decision interferes with the Church’s internal affairs, impedes its sincere religious mission to serve *all people* in a nonjudgmental, nonproselytizing fashion, and requires courts to become arbiters of religiosity in violation of the First Amendment.

INTRODUCTION

This case asks whether the Catholic Charities Bureau—a nonprofit ministry that operates under the Catholic Diocese of Superior and engages in charitable work on behalf of the Catholic Church—has a “primarily religious purpose.” Diminishing the import of two millennia of Catholic teaching and interfering with how the Diocese of Superior organizes and structures its charitable activities, the Wisconsin Supreme Court reduced that question of “religious purpose” to whether stereotypical activities, such as liturgies or traditional evangelism, take place. Pet. App. 26a–27a. Notwithstanding that charity is a fundamental principle of Catholicism, that the Bishop leads the Catholic Charities Bureau, and that the Catholic Charities Bureau functions as the diocese’s charitable-ministry arm, the court nevertheless ruled that the Catholic Charities Bureau wasn’t operated for a primarily religious purpose.

That conclusion ignores the overwhelming evidence of the Catholic Church’s direction and control over the Catholic Charities Bureau and its charities,

as well as the Church’s view of charity as a command from Christ. Even worse, it errs in asserting courts have any authority to determine the religiosity of a faith-driven activity. The First Amendment abhors that notion. See *Presbyterian Church in U.S. v. Mary Elizabeth Blue Hull Memorial Presbyterian Church*, 393 U.S. 440, 449 (1969) (“First Amendment values are plainly jeopardized when * * * litigation is made to turn on the resolution by civil courts of controversies over religious doctrine and practice.”). Indeed, the government—including the judiciary—has long been barred from interfering with church autonomy or imposing its own views of religiosity on religious organizations, and that is likely why even the Wisconsin appellate court foresaw its decision, if upheld, would have “constitutional implications” and be “of crucial importance to religiously affiliated nonprofit organizations throughout the state, to employees of such organizations, and to the [State].” Pet. App. 171a. This Court should grant review to correct these fundamental errors that endanger religious liberty.

STATEMENT

I. CATHOLIC CHARITY IS BOTH FUNDAMENTAL TO THE FAITH AND INHERENTLY RELIGIOUS.

The duty to spread Christian love through charity—providing care for the most vulnerable without seeking to impose one’s faith on others—is foundational to Catholicism. Christ’s command to his followers was to practice charity: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” *John* 13:34 (NRSV-CE). He taught his followers that their acts of charity were so essential that they would be judged by how they served the hungry and the thirsty, welcomed the

stranger, clothed the naked, and visited the ill and the incarcerated. *Matthew* 25:34–46. Keeping Christ’s command, the Church has always taught that “[r]eligion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress.” *James* 1:27.

Simply put, the Church “cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word.” Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* ¶ 22 (2005), <https://t.ly/Bxvi>. Indeed, without charity, a person can “gain nothing.” *Catechism, supra*, ¶ 1826 (quoting *1 Corinthians* 13:1–4).

This command to care for the most vulnerable is at the core of the Catholic Church. It’s inherently religious in that it expresses the love that binds Catholics to Christ, to each other, and to all those they encounter. Work undertaken to fulfill that command, therefore, can’t be likened to some secular social service. As Pope Francis has explained, “Charity is always the high road of the journey of faith, of the perfection of faith.” Pope Francis, *Angelus* (Aug. 23, 2020), <https://t.ly/K3y6>. “Christian charity is not simple philanthropy”—it “is looking at others through the very eyes of Jesus” while, at the same time “seeing Jesus in the face of the poor.” *Ibid.* Indeed, “Catholic Charities and related organizations exist essentially to spread Christian love.” Pope John Paul II, *Address to the Members of Catholic Charities USA* ¶ 8 (Sept. 13, 1987), <https://t.ly/rTMCW>.

But when spreading Christian love through charity, Catholic charity is distinct in that it remains free from proselytization. As Pope Benedict XVI explained, “charity is an action of the Church as such”

and “has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginning,” but it “cannot be used as a means of engaging in * * * proselytism.” *Deus Caritas Est*, *supra*, ¶¶ 31(c), 32.

Accordingly, those “who practise charity in the Church’s name will never seek to impose the Church’s faith upon others,” because a “Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak.” *Id.* ¶ 31(c). And it’s “the responsibility of the Church’s charitable organizations,” like the Conference, the Catholic Charities Bureau, and its charities, “to reinforce this awareness in their members, so that by their activity—as well as their words, their silence, their example—they may be credible witnesses to Christ.” *Ibid.*

II. THE STRUCTURE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH PROMOTES UNITY AND EFFECTIVE SERVICE.

The understanding of what it means to be “the Church” is also core to the Catholic faith. The Church was instituted by Christ himself during his earthly ministry when he said to one of the Apostles, “[a]nd I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” *Matthew* 16:18. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Catholics have built His Church for two millennia to fulfill the mission to “profess[] the faith” and “liv[e] it in fraternal sharing.” *Catechism*, *supra*, ¶ 3.

There’s only one Catholic Church. *E.g.*, *Catechism*, *supra*, ¶¶ 865–866; *Codex Iuris Canonici (Code of Canon Law)*, 1983 CIC c.368, <https://t.ly/abL3> (“Particular churches, in which and from which the one and only Catholic Church exists.”). The Church is led by the Pope, who is the direct successor of Peter. 1983 CIC, *supra*, cc.330–335 (the Pope “possesses

power over the universal Church” and “all particular churches and groups of them”).

The Church is divided into dioceses. A diocese “is a portion of the people of God” that is “defined territorially” and “constitutes a particular church in which the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative.” *Id.* cc.368–370. Wisconsin has five dioceses that serve 1.1 million Catholics. *Catholic Presence in Wisconsin, supra.*

Each diocese is “entrusted to a bishop for him to shepherd.” 1983 CIC, *supra*, c.369. Bishops, who are successors to the Apostles, are appointed by the Pope to be “teachers of doctrine, priests of sacred worship, and ministers of governance.” *Id.* c.375 § 1, c.377. A bishop derives from the Pope the legislative, executive, and judicial power over his diocese and represents the diocese “in all its juridic affairs.” *Id.* c.391 § 1, c.393. While exercising “pastoral office over the portion of the People of God assigned to them,” a bishop is also called to care “especially [for] the poor.” *Catechism, supra*, ¶ 886. In this way, the diocesan bishops “are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches.” *Ibid.* (quoting Pope Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution of the Church* ¶ 23 (1964), <https://t.ly/JtB3>).

And in response to the Church’s high calling to practice charity, the early Church recognized that it “need[ed] to be organized if it [was] to be an ordered service to the community.” *Deus Caritas Est, supra*, ¶ 20. The Apostles “put[] this fundamental ecclesial principle into practice” by establishing “*diaconia*”: the “ministry of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way.” *Id.* ¶ 21. Over five centuries, the *diaconia*

“evolved into a corporation,” entrusted by civil authorities to store public grain and feed the citizenry. *Id.* ¶ 23.

The *diaconia* thus effectuate the Church’s duty to spread love through charity: “[T]he social service which they were meant to provide was absolutely concrete, yet at the same time it was also a spiritual service.” *Deus Caritas Est, supra*, ¶ 21. This is because charity “does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, something which often is even more necessary than material support.” *Id.* ¶ 28(b). As Pope Benedict emphasized, those “who work for the Church’s charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling [others] to experience the richness of their humanity.” *Id.* ¶ 31(a). These spiritual commitments ensure that Catholic charities aren’t “just another form of social assistance” or “welfare activity.” *Id.* ¶¶ 25(a), 31.

This faithful commitment to charity spread to America from its earliest settlement, with Catholic charities opening schools and orphanages. See Brief of The Catholic Association Foundation et al. as *Amici Curiae* Supporting Petitioners at 3–19, *Little Sisters of the Poor Saints Peter & Paul Home v. Pennsylvania*, 591 U.S. 657 (2020); *Address to the Members of Catholic Charities USA, supra*, ¶ 3 (discussing how Catholic charities “go back to before the Declaration of Independence”). Indeed, in the late 1700s, Bishop John Carroll instructed that one third of parish revenues be devoted to relief for the poor. Brief of The Catholic Association Foundation et al. at 5, *Little Sisters of the*

Poor, 591 U.S. 657, *supra*. This charitable mission continued thriving in the early 1800s, with Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton—founder of the first American congregation of religious sisters, the Sisters of Charity—famously establishing schools and orphanages and inspiring her order to spread across the United States to open childcare charities, hospitals, and schools. *Id.* at 6–8.

By the 1840s, the Catholic Church had responded, even amidst social persecution, to an increased need for its charitable practice by adopting a formalized corporate form. Charles E. Degeneffe, *What Is Catholic About Catholic Charities?*, 48 Soc. Work 374, 376–377 (2003). Doing so allowed the Church to cohesively respond to broad societal ills and maximize positive impact, while still respecting the religious hierarchy of Church leadership. *Ibid.* The newer corporate structure both lengthened the Church’s charitable arm and clarified its position under the head of Catholic leadership. *Ibid.* In this way, it differed from contemporary Protestant charities, which were more individualistic and often less submissive to Church authorities. *Ibid.* The Church’s corporate structuring was so successful that “Catholics were major providers of social services in the United States by the turn of the century.” *Id.* at 377.

Today, the Pope appoints each bishop to serve as the Apostles’ successors as “president of the assembly and minister of charity in the Church.” Congregation for Bishops, *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* ¶¶ 193–198 (2004), <https://t.ly/YQon>; see 1983 CIC, *supra*, cc.331, 368–373; *Catechism*, *supra*, ¶¶ 880–881. The bishop then oversees the local charitable arms of the Church, including, in Wisconsin,

the Catholic Charities Bureau and its subunits. Pet. App. 7a–8a, 130a–131a. These entities, as part of the Church, answer to the bishop, and then to the Pope. This structure promotes order and efficiency while maintaining Church unity.

**III. THE WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE,
THE CHURCH UNEMPLOYMENT PAY PRO-
GRAM, AND THE CATHOLIC CHARITIES BU-
REAU ALL FURTHER THE CHURCH’S CHARI-
TABLE WORK.**

Continuing in the tradition of the *diaconia* and to further the Church’s charitable work, the Bishops of Wisconsin, through the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, founded the Church Unemployment Pay Program (CUPP) for lay employees in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and the Dioceses of La Crosse, Madison, and Superior. *CUPP Policy Handbook, supra*, at 2; see Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (1981), <https://t.ly/Bx8o> (“The obligation to provide unemployment benefits * * * is a duty springing from the fundamental principle of the moral order in this sphere, * * * the right to life and subsistence.”).

CUPP is “housed under the umbrella” of the Conference, which serves as CUPP’s “informational clearinghouse.” *CUPP Policy Handbook, supra*, at 2. The Conference’s executive director chairs CUPP’s interdiocesan board of directors, which comprises one member from each participating diocese, appointed by the bishop of that diocese. *Ibid.* CUPP’s board “determines general policies and criteria for the Program and serves as the final-level appeal body for the benefit claims process.” *Ibid.*

Importantly, the Bishops of Wisconsin maintain ultimate juridical power and direct the Conference in administering CUPP and sharing the Church’s principles of Catholic social teaching. This allows the members of the Catholic Church within Wisconsin to more faithfully answer the Lord’s call “to be good and faithful servants who serve the hungry and the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the ill and the incarcerated.” Archbishop of Milwaukee Jerome E. ListECKI et al., *A Letter to Wisconsin Catholics on Faithful Citizenship 2* (Aug. 2022), <https://t.ly/FEpN>.

As described, the bishops maintain ultimate juridical power over the Catholic charities in their dioceses. The Catholic Charities Bureau, for example, is under the pastoral leadership of the Bishop of the Diocese of Superior. Pet. App. 7a–8a. As part of the Church’s extensive charitable network, the Catholic Charities Bureau serves as an arm of the Church’s social ministry and operates “in compliance with the Principles of Catholic social teaching.” Pet. App. 7a–8a, 84a. Under the Bishop’s leadership, the Catholic Charities Bureau “works to be an effective sign of the charity of Christ” by operating 127 programs in 59 communities and serving all—especially the “disadvantaged and vulnerable.” Catholic Charities Bureau, Diocese of Superior, *A Growing Legacy: 2021 Annual Report*, <https://t.ly/2voI>; see *Deus Caritas Est, supra*, ¶ 33 (“every Catholic charitable organization want[s] to work with the Church and therefore with the Bishop, so that the love of God can spread throughout the world”).

When a charity is made part of the Catholic Charities Bureau, the Bureau makes clear that the

agreement between it and the charity “confirms the importance of the role Catholic Charities Bureau, Inc. and [the charity] have in fulfilling the social ministry of the Diocese of Superior.” Pet. App. 425a. The charity also affirms that it “will not engage in activities that violate Catholic Social Teachings.” Pet. App. 425a.

That isn’t an empty affirmation—the Catholic Charities Bureau takes significant steps to maintain this unique Catholic charitable ministry:

- It explains to each charity that a “clear understanding of the corporate relationship between Catholic Charities Bureau, Inc. and [the charity] is necessary to effectively encourage teamwork and to *mutually implement our shared mission.*”
- It retains the ability to hire and fire directors.
- It provides management services.
- And it “[e]stablish[es] and coordinate[s]” the charity’s mission.

Pet. App. 422a (emphasis added).

In short, each of the Catholic Charities Bureau’s charities—including those at issue in this case—act under, at the direction of, and to further the charitable ministry of the Catholic Church. See Pet. App. 8a–9a.

ARGUMENT

It’s a foundational premise of our constitutional system that religious organizations enjoy the “power to decide for themselves, free from state interference, matters of church government as well as those of faith and doctrine.” *Kedroff v. St. Nicholas Cathedral of*

Russian Orthodox Church in North America, 344 U.S. 94, 116 (1952). When the church and the court disagree on a religious matter, the church’s interpretation prevails. *Id.* at 120–121; *Serbian Eastern Orthodox Diocese for United States of America & Canada v. Milivojevic*, 426 U.S. 696, 709 (1976). The decision below flouts this basic principle, results in impermissible judicial oversight of religious teaching and structure, and introduces great uncertainty for any group that sincerely believes it operates “for a religious purpose.”

In concluding that the charities here don’t operate for a “religious purpose,” the Wisconsin Supreme Court made two fundamental errors: (1) it divorced the Church from its charities, based exclusively on corporate form, see Pet. App. 18a–19a, 28a–29a, 46a; and (2) it appointed itself the arbiter of religiosity—charged with parsing which actions are “primarily religious in nature” and which are “wholly secular.” Pet. App. 29a–30a. These errors ignore centuries of Church organization and teaching that charity—separate from proselytism—is foundational to the Church. Worse still, they threaten bedrock principles of independent governance to which churches are entitled under the First Amendment.

1. The Catholic Church’s organization and structure—from the Pope to the bishops to the Catholic Charities Bureau to its Wisconsin-based charities—are designed and directed intentionally to accord with the Church’s teachings. That is why the Bishop of the Diocese of Superior has plenary control over the Catholic Charities Bureau and its charities: “The bishop effectively has the ability to control all of the various

educational, charitable, and religious organizations and entities within the diocese.” Pet. App. 214a.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court, however, treats the Church’s structure as happenstance or poor planning. See Pet. App. 18a, 46a. But that rationale ignores bedrock constitutional principles of church autonomy. Religious entities, like the Church, are entitled to “independence in matters of faith and doctrine and in closely linked matters of internal government.” *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, 591 U.S. 732, 747 (2020); *Demkovich v. St. Andrew the Apostle Parish*, 3 F.4th 968, 975 (7th Cir. 2021) (en banc) (same). That includes, as here, independence from government coercion to assume a particular corporate form.

2. Further, were the Wisconsin Supreme Court’s decision to stand, Wisconsin agencies and courts would be required regularly to decide what activities are “primarily religious in nature.” Pet. App. 29a. But the “prospect of church and state litigating in court about what does or does not have religious meaning touches the very core of the constitutional guarantee against religious establishment.” *New York v. Cathedral Academy*, 434 U.S. 125, 133 (1977); U.S. Const. Amend. I. That is why courts have long recognized that they aren’t equipped to draw and enforce such an illusory distinction. See *Our Lady of Guadalupe School*, 591 U.S. at 761 (“Deciding such questions would risk judicial entanglement in religious issues.”).

The Wisconsin Supreme Court acknowledged that the First Amendment forbids any “evaluation of religious dogma,” Pet. App. 38a, but its own analysis betrays this command. The court took upon itself to

determine that charitable services such as “job training” and “coaching” aren’t religious because they lacked “religiously infused” aspects like “evangelism” or “worship,” Pet. App. 30a—even though that directly contradicts *actual* Catholic teaching on how charity should be performed, see *supra* at 4–5.

To be sure, a court may consider activity and purpose in deciding whether an entity has a religious purpose, but in doing so it may not dictate to a religion which of its practices are worship, and which aren’t. See *Serbian Eastern Orthodox Diocese*, 426 U.S. at 709 (“where resolution of the disputes cannot be made without extensive inquiry by civil courts into religious law and polity, * * * courts shall not disturb the decisions of the highest ecclesiastical tribunal * * * in their application to the religious issues of doctrine or polity before them”). That’s because the Constitution leaves no room for “an individual judge” to decide what activity is “inherently religious” based on what he or she “subjectively regards as religious enough.” Pet. App. 79a (Bradley, J., dissenting).

The Wisconsin Supreme Court’s cramped view of religious purpose as it relates to the charities here bears these concerns out. In attempting to describe primarily religious activity, the court imposed its own definition of religion, observing that such activity would include “liturgical rituals,” “corporate worship services,” or “evangelical outreach.” Pet. App. 26a (quoting *United States v. Dykema*, 666 F.2d 1096, 1100 (7th Cir. 1981)). So it concluded that the charities’ activities were inherently secular even though the Church has long viewed charity as both a form of “participation in the divine nature” of God and “the source and the goal of [virtuous] Christian practice.”

Catechism, supra, ¶¶ 1812, 1827. The court’s dividing line thus puts charitable work at odds with Catholic teaching, even though “there is no daylight” between the two. Pet. App. 81a (Bradley, J., dissenting).

Worse still, the Wisconsin Supreme Court flipped the Church’s view of charity on its head—diminishing the charities’ activities as mere “services” any organization could provide. Pet. App. 30a; *contra Deus Caritas Est, supra*, ¶ 31 (“[I]t is very important that the Church’s charitable activity maintains all of its splendour and does not become just another form of social assistance.”); *id.* ¶ 25(a) (“charity is not a kind of welfare activity”). In doing so, it established a system in which the Church and its charities are presented a Hobson’s choice: To obtain the statutory benefit to which She is entitled, the Church must either structure the Church’s charitable work by government dictate or use charity as primarily a means to proselytize.

Fundamentally, the Wisconsin Supreme Court’s decision requires what the First Amendment prohibits: “government interference with an internal church decision that affects the faith and mission of the church itself.” *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church & School v. EEOC*, 565 U.S. 171, 190 (2012).

CONCLUSION

The Conference respectfully asks the Court to grant the petition for a writ of certiorari.

Respectfully submitted.

DAVID EARLEYWINE
WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
106 East Doty Street, Suite 300
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

BRADLEY G. HUBBARD
Counsel of Record
BENJAMIN D. WILSON
ELIZABETH A. KIERNAN
JESSICA A. LEE
JASON J. MUEHLHOFF
JAIME R. BARRIOS
GIBSON, DUNN & CRUTCHER LLP
2001 Ross Avenue, Suite 2100
Dallas, Texas 75201
(214) 698-3100
BHubbard@gibsondunn.com

Counsel for Amicus Curiae

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