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Juan Vasquez, a grocery store worker in Uniondale, New York, cuddles with his toddler Robert while watching TV at home March 28, 2020. His wife, Tanya Granillo de Vasquez, said the Catholic family prays together before he leaves for work each morning during the COVID-19 pandemic. (CNS/Courtesy of Tanya Granillo de Vasquez)



by Linda T. Sánchez

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Editor's note: *In the weeks preceding the inauguration of the country's second Catholic president, National Catholic Reporter asked Catholic politicians, activists and scholars to offer advice to President-elect Joe Biden in a series that takes its title from Pope Francis' encyclical* Fratelli Tutti*: "Building a Common Future."*



(NCR graphic/Toni-Ann Ortiz)

As I was growing up in a Mexican-American household, life revolved around family and faith. My immigrant parents came from humble beginnings. Through grueling work — my father as a machinist and my mother first selling Avon and cleaning houses to make ends meet, and later as a teacher — my parents persevered and instilled in us the importance of work to better yourself, your family and your community. That's why Sundays were sacred: My six siblings piled in the car with our parents to Mass, always followed by a family gathering.

That deeply held faith has been tested many times but perhaps no more frequently than through the past four years. I often recalled the wisdom of my grandmother and mother: that, without faith, there is no hope for the future. On Jan. 20, as I watched Joe Biden swear his oath as our next president, my faith flickered and hope felt restored.

The work to restore the soul of our nation has begun in earnest. To do so, we must revive the heart of our nation: working people and families. As we comprehend the scale of the crises we face and ponder how to best build back better, I rely on my faith. Catholic social teaching enumerates a respect for work, the rights of working people, and the needs of the poor and vulnerable.

Therefore, to build back better, we must restore our economy so that working people and families are centered, and equality, justice and equity are prioritized for the good of all.

Urgently, we must address the pervasive issue of income inequality. Through the tax code we can expand tax credits that promote work and fight poverty. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for low- and moderate-income workers encourages and rewards work, offsets federal payroll and income taxes and helps meet basic needs. This is a critical tool that helps put money back in the pockets of working people, both with and without children. Overhauling the EITC to include workers without children can help combat pervasive inequality and would potentially benefit veterans and military service members, young people and rural workers.

The House of Representatives began work in the last Congress, but I am pleased that President Biden is already taking steps to address this critical matter. COVID-19 relief legislation would expand the EITC to more than 17 million adults without children who work hard at important, yet low-wage jobs: part of the backbone of our economy. We must pass this without delay.

The pandemic has laid bare the deepening rifts of inequality in our society, with the brunt falling on Black and Brown people, those with lower incomes and folks with less than a college education. It's simple, really. Essential work is *essential.* We can and must ensure essential workers have the tools and resources they need to do their jobs with dignity.

Biden's plan includes landmark investments in child care, which is critical for ensuring all workers are able to safely return to work. In the meantime, I will keep

fighting for solutions that I sponsored and passed through the House of Representatives to provide hazard pay directly to frontline essential workers who must risk their lives every day and show up to work to keep our society functioning.

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As we examine these inequities, we're reminded of the caregiving crisis our country faces that disproportionately affects working people and families. Too often, our society asks women and working moms like me to make an impossible choice of prioritizing our jobs or our families.

That is why I have long championed legislation like the Credit for Caring Act to provide a permanent support for family caregivers through the tax code. When debilitating diseases like Alzheimer's fall on a family, too often it is women who are forced to pick up the pieces. The least our society can do is ensure they do not have to sacrifice their financial security at the same time.

At the core of an economy that puts working families first is the labor movement. For generations, workers have come together to improve the terms and conditions of their employment. Biden has already taken significant steps to restore collective bargaining rights for civil servants and ensure federal agencies protect workers' rights. More can and must be done.

As co-chair of the Labor Caucus, I am proud to support the Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2021, a bill to restore workers' collective power and voice in the workplace. Workers are stronger together, and I am ready to take immediate action to pass this legislation.

Every legislative effort must prioritize those who power our economy and our communities, and that is why I will continue serving as a voice for working families in Congress.

Our country has a long way to go to right the wrongs of the past four years. In doing so, it is my hope that Biden and his administration will take to heart the words of Pope Francis: "Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person. Work ... 'anoints' us with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God, who has worked and still works, who always acts."

While I'm not given to public displays of faith, I do believe that by placing working people at the heart of what we do, together we can make our union more perfect. After all, with faith there is hope for the future.

This story appears in the **Building a Common Future** feature series. View the full series.
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