

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility

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Introduction

Elections are a time for debate and decisions about the leaders, policies, and values that will guide our nation. Since the last presidential election and our last reflection on faithful citizenship, our nation has been attacked by terrorists and has gone to war twice.¹ We have moved from how to share budget surpluses to how to allocate the burdens of deficits. As we approach the elections of 2004, we face difficult challenges for our nation and world.

Our nation has been wounded. September 11 and what followed have taught us that no amount of military strength, economic power, or technological advances can truly guarantee security, prosperity, or progress. The most important challenges we face are not simply political, economic, or technological, but ethical, moral, and spiritual. We face fundamental questions of life and death, war and peace, who moves ahead and who is left behind.

Our Church is also working to heal wounds. Our community of faith and especially we, as bishops, are working to face our responsibility and take all necessary steps to overcome the hurt, damage, and loss of trust resulting from the evil of clerical sexual abuse. While working to protect children and rebuild trust, we must not abandon the Church's important role in public life and the duty to encourage Catholics to act on our faith in political life.

These times and this election will test us as American Catholics. A renewed commitment to faithful citizenship can help heal the wounds of our nation, world, and Church. What we have endured has changed many things, but it has not changed the fundamental mission and message of Catholics in public life. In times of terror and war, of global insecurity and economic uncertainty, of disrespect for human life and human dignity, we need to return to basic moral principles. Politics cannot be merely about ideological conflict, the search for partisan advantage, or political contributions. It should be about fundamental moral choices. How do we protect human life and dignity? How do we fairly share the blessings and burdens of the challenges we face? What kind of nation do we want to be? What kind of world do we want to shape?

Politics in this election year and beyond should be about an old idea with new power—the common good. The central question should not be, “Are you better off than you were four years ago?” It should be, “How can ‘we’—all of us, especially the weak and vulnerable—be better off in the years ahead? How can we protect and promote human life and dignity? How can we pursue greater justice and peace?”

In the face of all these challenges, we offer once again a simple image—a table.² Who has a place at the table of life? Where is the place at the table for a million of our nation's children who are destroyed every year before they are born? How can we secure a place at the table for the hungry and those who lack health care in our own land and around the world? Where is the place at the table for those in our world who lack the freedom to practice their faith or stand up for what they believe? How do we ensure that families in our inner cities and rural communities, in *barrios* in Latin America and villages in Africa and Asia have a place at the table—enough to eat, decent work and wages, education for their children, adequate health care and housing, and most of all, hope for the future?

We remember especially the people who are now missing at the table of life—those lost in the terror of September 11, in the service of our nation, and in the bloody conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Africa.

A table is also a place where important decisions are made in our communities, nation, and world. How can the poorest people on Earth and those who are vulnerable in our land, including immigrants and those who suffer discrimination, have a real place at the tables where policies and priorities are set?

For Catholics, a special table—the altar of sacrifice, where we celebrate the Eucharist—is where we find the direction and strength to take what we believe into the public square, using our voices and votes to defend life, advance justice, pursue peace, and find a place at the table for all God’s children.

Tasks and Questions for Believers

Our nation has been blessed with freedom, democracy, abundant resources, and generous and religious people. However, our prosperity does not reach far enough. Our culture sometimes does not lift us up but brings us down in moral terms. Our world is wounded by terror, torn apart by conflict, and haunted by hunger.

As we approach the elections of 2004, we renew our call for a new kind of politics—focused on moral principles not on the latest polls, on the needs of the poor and vulnerable not the contributions of the rich and powerful, and on the pursuit of the common good not the demands of special interests.

Faithful citizenship calls Catholics to see civic and political responsibilities through the eyes of faith and to bring our moral convictions to public life. People of good will and sound faith can disagree about specific applications of Catholic principles. However, Catholics in public life have a particular responsibility to bring together consistently their faith, moral principles, and public responsibilities.

At this time, some Catholics may feel politically homeless, sensing that no political party and too few candidates share a consistent concern for human life and dignity. However, this is not a time for retreat or discouragement. We need more, not less engagement in political life. We urge Catholics to become more involved—by running for office; by working within political parties; by contributing money or time to campaigns; and by joining diocesan legislative networks, community organizations, and other efforts to apply Catholic principles in the public square.

The Catholic community is a diverse community of faith, not an interest group. Our Church does not offer contributions or endorsements. Instead, we raise a series of questions, seeking to help lift up the moral and human dimensions of the choices facing voters and candidates:

1. After September 11, how can we build not only a safer world, but a better world—more just, more secure, more peaceful, more respectful of human life and dignity?
2. How will we protect the weakest in our midst—innocent unborn children? How will our nation resist what Pope John Paul II calls a “culture of death”? How can we keep our nation from turning to violence to solve some of its most difficult problems—abortion to deal with difficult pregnancies; the death penalty to combat crime; euthanasia and assisted suicide to deal with the burdens of age, illness, and disability; and war to address international disputes?
3. How will we address the tragic fact that more than 30,000 children die every day as a result of hunger, international debt, and lack of development around the world, as well as the fact that the younger you are, the more likely you are to be poor here in the richest nation on Earth?
4. How can our nation help parents raise their children with respect for life, sound moral values, a sense of hope, and an ethic of stewardship and responsibility? How can our society defend the central institution of marriage and better support families in their moral roles and responsibilities, offering them real choices and financial resources to obtain quality education and decent housing?
5. How will we address the growing number of families and individuals without affordable and accessible health care? How can health care better protect human life and respect human dignity?
6. How will our society combat continuing prejudice, overcome hostility toward immigrants and refugees, and heal the wounds of racism, religious bigotry, and other forms of discrimination?
7. How will our nation pursue the values of justice and peace in a world where injustice is common, desperate poverty widespread, and peace is too often overwhelmed by violence?
8. What are the responsibilities and limitations of families, community organizations, markets, and government? How can these elements of society work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, care for creation, and overcome injustice?
9. When should our nation use, or avoid the use of, military force—for what purpose, under what authority, and at what human cost?
10. How can we join with other nations to lead the world to greater respect for human life and dignity, religious freedom and democracy, economic justice, and care for God’s creation?

We hope these questions and the 2004 campaigns can lead to less cynicism and more participation, less partisanship, and more civil dialogue on fundamental issues.

A Call to Faithful Citizenship

One of our greatest blessings in the United States is our right and responsibility to participate in civic life. Everyone can and should participate. Even those who cannot vote have the right to have their voices heard on issues that affect their communities.

The Constitution protects the right of individuals and of religious bodies to speak out without governmental interference, favoritism, or discrimination. Major public issues have moral dimensions. Religious values have significant public consequences. Our nation is enriched and our tradition of pluralism is enhanced, not threatened, when religious groups contribute their values to public debates.

As bishops, we have a responsibility as Americans and as religious teachers to speak out on the moral dimensions of public life. The Catholic community enters public life not to impose sectarian doctrine but to act on our moral convictions, to share our experience in serving the poor and vulnerable, and to participate in the dialogue over our nation's future.

A Catholic moral framework does not easily fit the ideologies of "right" or "left," nor the platforms of any party. Our values are often not "politically correct." Believers are called to be a community of conscience within the larger society and to test public life by the values of Scripture and the principles of Catholic social teaching. Our responsibility is to measure all candidates, policies, parties, and platforms by how they protect or undermine the life, dignity, and rights of the human person—whether they protect the poor and vulnerable and advance the common good.

Jesus called us to "love one another."³ Our Lord's example and words demand care for the "least of these"⁴ from each of us. Yet they also require action on a broader scale. Faithful citizenship is about more than elections. It requires ongoing participation in the continuing political and legislative process.

A recent Vatican statement on Catholic participation in political life highlights the need for involvement:

Today's democratic societies . . . call for new and fuller forms of participation in public life by Christian and non-Christian citizens alike. Indeed, all can contribute, by voting in elections for lawmakers and government officials, and in other ways as well, to the development of political solutions and legislative choices which, in their opinion, will benefit the common good.⁵

In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation. All believers are called to faithful citizenship, to become informed, active, and responsible participants in the political process. As we have said, "We encourage *all citizens*, particularly Catholics, to embrace their citizenship not merely as a duty and privilege, but as an opportunity meaningfully to participate [more fully] *in building the culture of life*. Every voice matters in the public forum. Every vote counts. Every act of responsible citizenship is an exercise of significant individual power."⁶ Even those who are not citizens are called to participate in the debates which shape our common life.

Catholic Assets in the Public Square

Our community of faith brings three major assets to these challenges.

A Consistent Moral Framework

The *Word of God and the teachings of the Church* give us a particular way of viewing the world. Scripture calls us to “choose life,” to serve “the least of these,” to “hunger and thirst” for justice and to be “peacemakers.”⁷

Catholic teaching offers consistent moral principles to assess issues, political platforms, and campaigns for their impact on human life and dignity. As Catholics, we are not free to abandon unborn children because they are seen as unwanted or inconvenient; to turn our backs on immigrants because they lack the proper documents; to create and then destroy human lives in a quest for medical advances or profit; to turn away from poor women and children because they lack economic or political power; or to ignore sick people because they have no insurance. Nor can we neglect international responsibilities in the aftermath of war because resources are scarce. Catholic teaching requires us to speak up for the voiceless and to act in accord with universal moral values.

Everyday Experience

Our community also brings to public life *broad experience in serving those in need*. Every day, the Catholic community educates the young, cares for the sick, shelters the homeless, feeds the hungry, assists needy families, welcomes refugees, and serves the elderly.⁸ In defense of life, we reach out to children and to the sick, elderly, and disabled who need help. We support women in difficult pregnancies, and we assist those wounded by the trauma of abortion and domestic violence. On many issues, we speak for those who have no voice. These are not abstract issues for us; they have names and faces. We have practical expertise and daily experience to contribute to the public debate.

A Community of People

The *Catholic community* is large and diverse. We are Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. We are members of every race, come from every ethnic background, and live in urban, rural, and suburban communities in all fifty states. We are CEOs and migrant farm workers, senators and persons on public assistance, business owners and union members. But all Catholics are called to a common commitment to protect human life and stand with those who are poor and vulnerable. We are all called to provide a moral leaven for our democracy, to be the salt of the earth.⁹

The Role of the Church

The Church is called to educate Catholics about our social teaching, highlight the moral dimensions of public policies, participate in debates on matters affecting the common good, and witness to the Gospel through our services and ministries. The Catholic community’s participation in public affairs does not undermine, but enriches the political process and affirms genuine pluralism. Leaders of the Church have the right and duty to share Catholic

teaching and to educate Catholics on the moral dimensions of public life, so that they may form their consciences in light of their faith.

The recent Vatican statement on political life points this out:

[The Church] does not wish to exercise political power or eliminate the freedom of opinion of Catholics regarding contingent questions. Instead, it intends as its proper function to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good.¹⁰

We urge our fellow citizens “to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose their political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest.”¹¹ As bishops, we seek to form the conscience of our people. We do not wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates. We hope that voters will examine the position of candidates on the full range of issues, as well as on their personal integrity, philosophy, and performance. We are convinced that a consistent ethic of life should be the moral framework from which to address issues in the political arena.¹²

For Catholics, the defense of human life and dignity is not a narrow cause, but a way of life and a framework for action. A key message of the Vatican statement on public life is that Catholics in politics must reflect the moral values of our faith with clear and consistent priority for the life and dignity of the human person.¹³ This is the fundamental moral measure of their service. The Vatican statement also points out:

It must be noted also that a well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals. The Christian faith is an integral unity, and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine. A political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the Church’s social doctrine does not exhaust one’s responsibility towards the common good.¹⁴

Decisions about candidates and choices about public policies require clear commitment to moral principles, careful discernment and prudential judgments based on the values of our faith.

The coming elections provide important opportunities to bring together our principles, experience, and community in effective public witness. We hope

parishes, dioceses, schools, colleges, and other Catholic institutions will encourage active participation through non-partisan voter registration and education efforts, as well as through ongoing legislative networks and advocacy programs.¹⁵ As Catholics we need to share our values, raise our voices, and use our votes to shape a society that protects human life, promotes family life, pursues social justice, and practices solidarity. These efforts can strengthen our nation and renew our Church.

Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

The Catholic approach to faithful citizenship begins with moral principles, not party platforms. The directions for our public witness are found in Scripture and Catholic social teaching. Here are some key themes at the heart of our Catholic social tradition.¹⁶

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, each person's life and dignity must be respected, whether that person is an innocent unborn child in a mother's womb, whether that person worked in the World Trade Center or a market in Baghdad, or even whether that person is a convicted criminal on death row. We believe that every human life is sacred from conception to natural death, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it protects and respects the life and dignity of the human person. As the recent Vatican statement points out, "The Church recognizes that while democracy is the best expression of the direct participation of citizens in political choices, it succeeds only to the extent that it is based on a correct understanding of the human *person*. Catholic involvement in political life cannot compromise on this principle."¹⁷

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The human person is not only sacred, but social. The God-given institutions of marriage and family are central and serve as the foundations for social life. Marriage and family should be supported and strengthened, not undermined. Every person has a right to participate in social, economic, and political life and a corresponding duty to work for the advancement of the common good and the well-being of all, especially the poor and weak.

Rights and Responsibilities

Every person has a fundamental right to life—the right that makes all other rights possible. Each person also has a right to the conditions for living a decent life—faith and family life, food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing. We also have a duty to secure and respect these rights not only for ourselves, but for others, and to fulfill our responsibilities to our families, to each other, and to the larger society.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

Scripture teaches that God has a special concern for the poor and vulnerable.¹⁸ The prophets denounced injustice toward the poor as a lack of fidelity to the God of Israel.¹⁹ Jesus, who identified himself with “the least of these”,²⁰ came to preach “good news to the poor, liberty to captives . . . and to set the downtrodden free.”²¹ The Church calls on all of us to embrace this preferential option for the poor and vulnerable²², to embody it in our lives, and to work to have it shape public policies and priorities. A fundamental measure of our society is how we care for and stand with the poor and vulnerable.

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God’s act of creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers, owners, and others must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and choose to join a union, to economic initiative, and to ownership and private property. These rights must be exercised in ways that advance the common good.

Solidarity

We are one human family. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Pope John Paul II insists, “We are *all* really responsible *for all*.”²³ Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that “if you want peace, work for justice.”²⁴ The Gospel calls us to be “peacemakers.”²⁵ Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we be “sentinels of peace” in a world wounded by violence and conflict.²⁶

Caring for God’s Creation

The world that God created has been entrusted to us. Our use of it must be directed by God’s plan for creation, not simply for our own benefit. Our stewardship of the Earth is a form of participation in God’s act of creating and sustaining the world. In our use of creation, we must be guided by a concern for generations to come. We show our respect for the Creator by our care for creation.

These themes anchor our community’s role in public life. They help us to resist excessive self-interest, blind partisanship, and ideological agendas. They also help us avoid extreme distortions of pluralism and tolerance that deny any fundamental values and dismiss the contributions and convictions of believers. As the Vatican’s statement on public life explains, we cannot accept an understanding of pluralism and tolerance that suggests “every possible outlook on life [is] of equal value”.²⁷ However, this insistence that there are fundamental moral values “has nothing to do with the legitimate freedom of Catholic citizens to choose among the various political opinions that are compatible with faith and the natural moral law, and to select, according to their own criteria, what best corresponds to the needs of the common good”.²⁸

Moral Priorities for Public Life

We wish to call special attention to issues that we believe are important in the national debate in this campaign and in the years to come. These brief summaries do not indicate the depth and details of the positions we have taken in the documents which are cited at the end of this statement.

Protecting Human Life

Human life is a gift from God, sacred and inviolable. Because every human person is created in the image and likeness of God, we have a duty to defend human life from conception until natural death and in every condition.

Our world does not lack for threats to human life. We watch with horror the deadly violence of terror, war, starvation, and children dying from disease. We face a new and insidious mentality that denies the dignity of some vulnerable human lives and treats killing as a personal choice and social good. As we wrote in *Living the Gospel of Life*, "**Abortion and euthanasia** have become preeminent threats to human life and dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental good and the condition for all others".²⁹ Abortion, the deliberate killing of a human being before birth, is never morally acceptable. The destruction of human embryos as objects of research is wrong. This wrong is compounded when human life is created by **cloning** or other means only to be destroyed. The purposeful taking of human life by **assisted suicide and euthanasia** is never an act of mercy. It is an unjustifiable assault on human life. For the same reasons, the **intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks** is always wrong.

In protecting human life, "We must begin with a commitment never to intentionally kill, or collude in the killing, of any innocent human life, no matter how broken, unformed, disabled or desperate that life may seem."³⁰

We urge Catholics and others to promote laws and social policies that protect human life and promote human dignity to the maximum degree possible. Laws that legitimize abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia are profoundly unjust and immoral. We support constitutional protection for unborn human life, as well as legislative efforts to end abortion and euthanasia. We encourage the passage of laws and programs that promote childbirth and adoption over abortion and assist pregnant women and children. We support aid to those who are sick and dying by encouraging health care coverage for all as well as effective palliative care. We call on government and medical researchers to base their decisions regarding **biotechnology** and human experimentation on respect for the inherent dignity and inviolability of human life from its very beginning, regardless of the circumstances of its origin.

Catholic teaching calls on us to work to **avoid war**. Nations must protect the right to life by finding ever more effective ways to prevent conflicts from arising, to resolve them by peaceful means, and to promote post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. All nations have a right and duty to defend human life and the common good against terrorism, aggression, and similar threats. In the aftermath of September 11, we called for continuing outreach to those who had been harmed, clear resolve in responding to terror, moral restraint

in the means used, respect for ethical limits on the use of force, greater focus on the roots of terror, and a serious effort to share fairly the burdens of this response. While military force as a last resort can sometimes be justified to defend against aggression and similar threats to the common good, we have raised serious moral concerns and questions about **preemptive or preventive use of force**.

Even when military force is justified, it must be discriminate and proportionate. Direct, intentional attacks on civilians in war are never morally acceptable. Nor is the use of weapons of mass destruction or other weapons that cause disproportionate harm or that cannot be deployed in ways that distinguish between civilians and soldiers. Therefore, we urge our nation to strengthen barriers against the use of **nuclear weapons**, to expand controls over existing nuclear materials and other weapons of mass destruction, and to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as a step toward much deeper cuts and the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. We also urge our nation to join the treaty to ban anti-personnel **landmines** and to address the human consequences of cluster bombs. We further urge our nation to take immediate and serious steps to reduce its own disproportionate role in the scandalous **global trade in arms**, which contributes to violent conflicts around the world.

Society has a right and duty to defend itself against violent crime and a duty to reach out to victims of crime. Yet our nation's increasing reliance on the **death penalty** cannot be justified. We do not teach that killing is wrong by killing those who kill others. Pope John Paul II has said the penalty of death is "both cruel and unnecessary".³¹ The antidote to violence is not more violence. In light of the Holy Father's insistence that this is part of our pro-life commitment, we encourage solutions to violent crime that reflect the dignity of the human person, urging our nation to abandon the use of capital punishment. We also urge passage of legislation that would address problems in the judicial system, and restrict and restrain the use of the death penalty through use of DNA evidence, a guarantee of effective counsel, and efforts to address issues of racial justice.

Promoting Family Life

God established the family as the basic cell of human society. Therefore, we must strive to make the needs and concerns of families a central national priority. **Marriage** must be protected as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman and our laws should reflect this principle. Marriage, as God intended, provides the basic foundation for family life and the common good. It must be supported in the face of the many pressures working to undermine it. Policies related to the definition of marriage, taxes, the workplace, divorce, and welfare must be designed to help families stay together and to reward responsibility and sacrifice for children. Because financial and economic factors have such an impact on the well-being and stability of families, it is important that **just wages** be paid to those who work to support their families and that generous efforts be made to aid poor families.

Children must be protected and nurtured. We affirm our commitment to the protection of children in all settings and at all times, and we support policies that ensure that the well-being of all children is safeguarded. This is reflected within our Church in the *Charter for the*

Protection of Children and Young People and other policies adopted by our bishops' conference and dioceses to ensure the safety of children.

The **education** of children is a fundamental parental responsibility. Educational systems can support or undermine parental efforts to educate and nurture children. No one model or means of education is appropriate to the needs of all persons. Parents—the first and most important educators—have a fundamental **right to choose the education** best suited to the needs of their children, including private and religious schools. Families of modest means especially should not be denied this choice because of their economic status. Government should help provide the resources required for parents to exercise this basic right without discrimination. To support parents' efforts to share basic values, we believe a national consensus can be reached so that students in all educational settings have opportunities for moral and character formation to complement their intellectual and physical development.

Communications play a growing role in society and family life. The values of our culture are shaped and shared in the print media as well as on radio, television, and the Internet. We must balance respect for freedom of speech with concern for the common good, promoting responsible regulations that protect children and families. In recent years, reduced government regulation has lowered standards, opened the door to increasingly offensive material, and squeezed out non-commercial, religious programming.

We support regulation that limits the concentration of control over these media; disallows sales of media outlets that attract irresponsible owners primarily seeking a profit; and opens these outlets to a greater variety of program sources, including religious programming. We support a TV rating system and technology that assist parents in supervising what their children view.

The Internet has created both great benefits and some problems. This technology should be available to all students regardless of income. Because it poses serious dangers by giving easy access to pornographic and violent material, we support vigorous enforcement of existing obscenity and child pornography laws, as well as efforts by the industry to develop technology that assists parents, schools, and libraries in blocking out unwanted materials.

Pursuing Social Justice

Our faith reflects God's special concern for the poor and vulnerable and calls us to make their needs our first priority in public life.

Church teaching on **economic justice** insists that economic decisions and institutions be assessed on whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person. We support policies that create **jobs for all who can work** with decent working conditions and adequate pay that reflects a **living wage**. We also support efforts to overcome barriers to equal pay and employment for women and those facing unjust **discrimination**. We reaffirm the Church's traditional support of the **right of workers to choose to organize**, join a union, bargain collectively, and exercise these rights without reprisal. We also affirm the Church's teaching

on the importance of **economic freedom, initiative, and the right to private property**, through which we have the tools and resources to pursue the common good.

Efforts to provide for the basic financial needs of poor families and children must enhance their lives and protect their dignity. The measure of **welfare reform** should be reducing **poverty** and dependency, not cutting resources and programs. We seek approaches that both promote greater responsibility and offer concrete steps to help families leave poverty behind. Welfare reform has focused on providing work and training, mostly in low-wage jobs. Other forms of support are necessary, including tax credits, health care, child care, and safe, affordable housing. Because we believe that families need help with the costs of raising children, we support increasing **child tax credits and making them fully refundable**. These credits allow families of modest means with children to keep more of what they earn and help lift low-income families out of poverty.

We welcome efforts to recognize and support the work of **faith-based groups** not as a substitute for, but as a partner with, government efforts. Faith-based and community organizations are often more present, more responsive, and more effective in the poorest communities and countries. We oppose efforts to undermine faith-based institutions and their identity, integrity, and freedom to serve those in need. We also vigorously resist efforts to abandon civil rights protections and the long-standing protections for religious groups to preserve their identity as they serve the poor and advance the common good.

We are also concerned about the income security of low- and average-wage workers and their families when they retire, become disabled, or die. In many cases, women are particularly disadvantaged. Any proposal to change **Social Security** must provide a decent and reliable income for these workers and their dependents.

Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life, a fundamental human right, and an urgent national priority. We need to reform the nation's health care system, and this reform must be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the needs of the poor and uninsured. With tens of millions of Americans lacking basic health insurance, we support measures to ensure that decent health care is available to all as a moral imperative. We also support measures to strengthen Medicare and Medicaid as well as measures that extend health care coverage to children, pregnant women, workers, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations. We support policies that provide effective, compassionate care that reflects our moral values for those suffering from HIV/AIDS and those coping with addictions.

The lack of safe, affordable **housing** is a national crisis. We support a recommitment to the national pledge of "safe and affordable housing" for all and effective policies that will increase the supply of quality housing and preserve, maintain, and improve existing housing. We promote public/private partnerships, especially those that involve religious communities. We continue to oppose unjust discrimination in housing and support measures to help ensure that financial institutions meet the credit needs of local communities.

The first priority for agriculture policy should be **food security for all**. Food is necessary for life itself. Our support for Food Stamps, the Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and other programs that directly benefit poor and low-income people is based on our belief that no one should face **hunger** in a land of plenty. Those who grow our food should be able to make a decent living and maintain their way of life. Farmers who depend on the land for their livelihood deserve a decent return for their labor. Rural communities deserve help so that they can continue to be sources of strength and support for a way of life that enriches our nation. Our priority concern for the poor calls us to advocate especially for the needs of farm workers, whose pay is generally inadequate, whose housing and working conditions are often deplorable, and who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. We urge that public policies support **sustainable agriculture** and careful stewardship of the Earth and its natural resources.

The Gospel mandate to love our neighbor and welcome the stranger leads the Church to care for and stand with immigrants, both documented and undocumented. While affirming the right and responsibility of sovereign nations to control their borders and to ensure the security of their citizens, especially in the wake of September 11, we seek basic protections for immigrants, including due process rights, access to basic public benefits, and fair naturalization and legalization opportunities. We oppose efforts to stem migration that do not effectively address its root causes and permit the continuation of the political, social, and economic inequities that contribute to it. We believe our nation must remain a place of refuge for those fleeing persecution and suffering exploitation—refugees, asylum seekers, and victims of human trafficking.

All persons, by virtue of their dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to receive a quality education. We must ensure that our nation's young people—especially the poor, those with disabilities, and the most vulnerable—care properly prepared to be good citizens, to lead productive lives, and to be socially and morally responsible in the complicated and technologically challenging world of the twenty-first century. This requires that all educational institutions have an orderly, just, respectful, and non-violent environment where adequate professional and material resources are available. We support the necessary initiatives that provide adequate funding to educate all persons no matter what school they attend—public, private, or religious—or their personal condition.

We also support providing salaries and benefits to all teachers and administrators that reflect the principles of economic justice, as well as providing the resources necessary for teachers to be academically and personally prepared for the critical tasks they face. As a matter of justice, we believe that when services aimed at improving the educational environment—especially for those most at risk—are available to students and teachers in public schools, these services should be available to students and teachers in private and religious schools as well.

Our schools and our society in general must address the growing “**culture of violence**.” We need to promote a greater sense of moral responsibility, to advocate a reduction in violence in the media, to support gun safety measures and reasonable restrictions on access to assault

weapons and hand guns, and to oppose the use of the **death penalty**. We also believe a Catholic ethic of responsibility, rehabilitation, and restoration can become the foundation for the necessary reform of our broken **criminal justice system**.

Our society must also continue to combat **discrimination** based on sex, race, ethnicity, disabling condition, or age. Discrimination constitutes a grave injustice and an affront to human dignity. It must be aggressively resisted. Where the effects of past discrimination persist, society has the obligation to take positive steps to overcome the legacy of injustice. We support judiciously administered **affirmative action** programs as tools to overcome discrimination and its continuing effects.

In the words of Pope John Paul II, **care for the Earth** and for the **environment** is a “moral issue.”³² We support policies that protect the land, water, and the air we share. Reasonable and effective initiatives are required for energy conservation and the development of alternate, renewable, and clean-energy resources. We encourage citizens and public officials to seriously address global climate change, focusing on prudence, the common good, and the option for the poor, particularly its impact on developing nations. The United States should lead the developed nations in contributing to the sustainable development of poorer nations and greater justice in sharing the burden of environmental neglect and recovery.

Practicing Global Solidarity

September 11 has given us a new sense of vulnerability. However, we must be careful not to define our security primarily in military terms. Our nation must join with others in addressing policies and problems that provide fertile ground in which terrorism can thrive. No injustice legitimizes the horror we have experienced. But a more just world will be a more peaceful world.

In a world where one-fifth of the population survives on less than one dollar per day, where some twenty countries are involved in major armed conflict, and where poverty, corruption, and repressive regimes bring untold suffering to millions of people, we simply cannot remain indifferent. As a wealthy and powerful nation, the United States has the capacity and the responsibility to address this scandal of **poverty and underdevelopment**. As a principal force in globalization, we have a responsibility to **humanize globalization**, and to spread its benefits to all, especially the world’s poorest, while addressing its negative consequences. As the world’s sole superpower, the United States also has an unprecedented opportunity to work in partnership with others to build a system of cooperative security that will lead to a more united and more just world.

- \$ The United States should take a leading role in helping to **alleviate global poverty** through a comprehensive development agenda, including substantially increased development aid for the poorest countries, more equitable trade policies, and continuing efforts to relieve the crushing burdens of debt and disease.

- \$ More concerted efforts to ensure the promotion of **religious liberty** and other basic human rights should be an integral part of U.S. foreign policy.
- \$ It is a moral imperative that the United States work to reverse the spread of **nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons**, and to reduce its own reliance on weapons of mass destruction by pursuing progressive nuclear disarmament. It also should reduce its own predominant role in the conventional arms trade.
- \$ The United States should provide more consistent political and financial support for appropriate **United Nations** programs, other **international bodies**, and international law, so that these institutions may become more effective, responsible, and responsive agents for addressing global problems.
- \$ Asylum must be afforded to all refugees who hold a well-founded fear of persecution in their homelands. Our country should support protection for **persons fleeing persecution** through safe haven in other countries, including the United States, especially for unaccompanied children, single women, women heads of families, and religious minorities.
- \$ The United States should adopt a more generous **immigration and refugee policy** based on providing temporary or permanent safe haven for those in need; protecting immigrant workers from exploitation; promoting family reunification; safeguarding the right of all peoples to return to their homelands; ensuring that public benefits and a fair and efficient process for obtaining citizenship are available to immigrants; extending to immigrants the full protection of U.S. law; offering a generous legalization program to undocumented immigrants, and addressing the root causes of migration.
- \$ Our country should be a leader in collaboration with the international community in addressing **regional conflicts** in the Middle East, the Balkans, the Congo, Sudan, Colombia, and West Africa. Leadership on the **Israeli-Palestinian conflict** is an especially urgent priority. The United States should actively pursue comprehensive negotiations leading to a just and peaceful resolution of this conflict that respects the legitimate claims and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians, ensuring security for Israel, a viable state for Palestinians, and peace in the region. The United States, working with the international community, must also make the sustained commitment necessary to help bring stability, democracy, freedom, and prosperity to **Iraq and Afghanistan**.

Building peace, combating poverty and despair, and protecting freedom and human rights are not only moral imperatives; they are wise national priorities. Given its enormous power and influence in world affairs, the United States has a special responsibility to ensure that it is a force for justice and peace beyond its borders. "Liberty and justice for all" is not only a profound national pledge; it is a worthy goal for our nation in its role as world leader.

Conclusion

We hope these reflections will contribute to a renewed political vitality in our land. We urge all Catholics to register, vote, and become more involved in public life, to protect human life and dignity, and to advance the common good.

The 2004 elections and the policy choices we will face in the future pose significant challenges for our Church. As an institution, we are called to be **political but not partisan**. The Church cannot be a chaplain for any one party or cheerleader for any candidate. Our cause is the protection of the weak and vulnerable and defense of human life and dignity, not a particular party or candidate.

The Church is called to be **principled but not ideological**. We cannot compromise our basic values or teaching, but we should be open to different ways to advance them.

We are called to be **clear but also civil**. A Church that advocates justice and charity must practice these virtues in public life. We should be clear about our principles and priorities, without impugning motives or name-calling.

The Church is called to be **engaged but not used**. We welcome dialogue with political leaders and candidates, seeking to engage and persuade public officials. But we must be sure that events and “photo-ops” are not substitutes for work on policies that reflect our values.

The call to faithful citizenship raises a fundamental question for all of us. What does it mean to be a Catholic living in the United States in the year 2004 and beyond? As *Catholics*, the election and the policy choices that follow it call us to recommit ourselves to carry the values of the Gospel and church teaching into the public square. As *citizens and residents of the United States*, we have the duty to participate now and in the future in the debates and choices over the values, vision, and leaders that will guide our nation.

This dual calling of faith and citizenship is at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic in the United States. Faithful citizenship calls us to seek “a place at the table” of life for all God’s children in the elections of 2004 and beyond.

Major Catholic Statements on Public Life and Moral Issues

The following documents from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops explore in greater detail the public policy issues discussed in *Faithful Citizenship*. To obtain copies, call 1-800-235-8722 or go to www.usccb.org.

Protecting Human Life

A Matter of the Heart: A Statement on the Thirtieth Anniversary of Roe v. Wade, 2002

Living the Gospel of Life, 1998

Faithful for Life: A Moral Reflection, 1995

Resolution on Abortion, 1989
Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Reaffirmation, 1985
Documentation on the Right to Life and Abortion, 1974, 1976, 1981
Statement on Iraq, 2002
A Pastoral Message: Living with Faith and Hope After September 11, 2001
Sowing the Weapons of War, 1995
The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace, 1993
A Report on the Challenge of Peace and Policy Developments 1983-1888, 1989
The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response, 1983
Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities, 1999
Nutrition and Hydration: Moral and Pastoral Reflections, 1992
NCCB Administrative Committee Statement on Euthanasia, 1991
Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities, 1989, 1984
A Good Friday Appeal to End the Death Penalty, 1999
Confronting a Culture of Violence, 1995
U.S. Bishops' Statement on Capital Punishment, 1980
Community and Crime, 1978

Promoting Family Life

A Family Guide to Using the Media, 1999
Renewing the Mind of the Media, 1998
Statements and testimony by the USCC Department of Communications before Congress and the Federal Communications Commission
Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions, 1998
Principles for Educational Reform in the United States, 1995
In Support of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1990
Value and Virtue: Moral Education in the Public School; 1988
Sharing the Light of Faith; National Catechetical Directory, 1979
To Teach As Jesus Did, 1972
When I Call for Help, 2002
A Family Perspective in Church and Society, 1998
Always Our Children, 1997
Statement on Same-Sex Marriage, 1996
Walk in the Light, 1995
Follow the Way of Love, 1993
Putting Children and Families First, 1992

Pursuing Social Justice

Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope, 2003
A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children, 2002
Global Climate Change, 2001
Responsibility, Rehabilitation, Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice, 2000
A Commitment to All Generations: Social Security and the Common Good, 1999

In all Things Charity, 1999
Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, 1995
One Family Under God, 1995
Confronting a Culture of Violence, 1995
Moral Principles and Policy Priorities for Welfare Reform, 1995
The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace, 1993
A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform, 1993
Renewing the Earth, 1992
Putting Children and Families First, 1992
New Slavery, New Freedom: A Pastoral Message on Substance Abuse, 1990
Brothers and Sisters to Us, 1989
Food Policy in a Hungry World, 1989
Called to Compassion and Responsibility: A Response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis, 1989
Homelessness and Housing, 1988
Economic Justice for All, 1986

Practicing Global Solidarity

A Call to Solidarity with Africa, 2001
A Jubilee Call for Debt Forgiveness, 1999
Called to Global Solidarity, 1998
Sowing the Weapons of War, 1995
One Family Under God, 1995
The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace, 1993
War in the Balkans: Moral Challenges, Policy Choices, 1993
Statements on South Africa, 1993, 1994
Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity, 1992
The New Moment in Eastern and Central Europe, March 1990
The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace, 1993
Toward Peace in the Middle East, 1989
Relieving Third World Debt, 1989
USCC Statement on Central America, 1987

¹ Since 1975, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has developed a reflection on "faithful citizenship" in advance of each presidential election. This statement continues that tradition. It summarizes Catholic teaching on public life and on key moral issues. These reflections build on past political responsibility statements and integrate themes from a recent statement on Catholics in public life from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as well as themes from several recent bishops' statements, including *Living the Gospel of Life* and *A Place at the Table*. To provide additional information on Catholic teaching on these matters, major Catholic statements on public life and moral issues are listed at the conclusion of these reflections.

² Cf. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002).

³ Jn 13:34-35.

⁴ Mt 25:40-45.

⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life* (November 24, 2002), no. 1.

⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998), no. 34.

⁷ Dt 30:19-20, Mt 25:40-45, Mt 5:3-12.

⁸ The Catholic community has a presence in virtually every part of the nation, including almost 20,000 parishes, 8,600 schools, 237 colleges and universities, 1,062 hospitals and health care facilities, and 3,044 social service agencies. The Catholic community is the largest non-governmental provider of education, health care, and human services in the United States.

⁹ Mt 13:33, Mt 5:13-16.

¹⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, no. 6.

¹¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 34.

¹² Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, no. 4.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Resources designed to help parishes and dioceses share the message of faithful citizenship and develop non-partisan voter registration, education, and advocacy programs are available from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. For more information, call 800-235-8722 or go to www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship.

¹⁶ Catholic social teaching is a rich tradition that is rooted in the Scriptures and the lived experience of the people of God. It has been developed in the writings of church leaders through the ages, and has most recently been articulated through a tradition of modern papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. For a more thorough discussion of the themes identified here and their roots, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994), *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998), the USCCB web site (www.usccb.org/publishing), and the Vatican web site (www.vatican.va).

¹⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, no. 3.

¹⁸ Ex 22:20-26.

¹⁹ Is 1:21-23; Jer 5:28.

²⁰ Mt 25:40-45.

²¹ Lk 4:18-19.

²² John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001), no. 49.

²³ John Paul II, *On Social Concern (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1987), no. 38.

²⁴ John Paul II, *World Day of Peace Message*, (January 1, 1972).

²⁵ Mt 5:9

²⁶ John Paul II, *Angelus* (February 23, 2003), no. 1.

²⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, no. 2.

²⁸ *Ibid*, no. 3.

²⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 5.

³⁰ *Ibid*, no. 21.

³¹ John Paul II, *Homily in St. Louis* (January 27, 1999).

³² John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility* (January 1, 1990), no. 15.

Prefatory Statement

Every four years since 1976, the Administrative Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has issued a statement on the responsibilities of Catholics to society. The purpose of the statement is to communicate the Church's teaching that every Catholic is called to an active and faith-filled citizenship, based upon a properly informed conscience, in which each disciple of Christ publicly witnesses to the Church's commitment to human life and dignity with special preference for the poor and the vulnerable. *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* was developed under the leadership of the Committees on Domestic and International Policy, with the Committee on Priorities and Plans, in collaboration with many other USCCB committees and offices. It was reviewed and approved in September 2003 by the Administrative Committee and is authorized for publication by the undersigned.

Msgr. William P. Fay
General Secretary
USCCB

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