

FROM THE PASTOR'S



Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 20, 2008 A

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship—A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States.

This past November our bishops at their annual meeting issued a document with the above title. The document, issued every four years is intended to help Catholics form their conscience prior to a Presidential election. The document which is thirty pages long can be downloaded from the website of the United States Catholic Bishops Conference. (Website address is www.usccb.org.) The bishop's document is divided into three parts. Each of the first two parts are quite long and are not easily summarized. Part III is called *Goals for Political Life: Challenges for Citizens, Candidates, and Public Officials*. It is two pages long and it does a good job of summarizing policy goals or key issues that every Catholic voter should be concerned about.

Ten Policy Goals or Key Issues

Prior to outlining Ten Key Policy Goals or key issues, the bishops make the following introductory remarks.

As Catholics, we are led to raise questions for political life other than “Are you better off than you were two or four years ago?” Our focus is not on party affiliation, ideology, economics, or even competence and capacity to perform duties, as important as such issues are. Rather, we focus on what protects or threatens human life and dignity.

Catholic teaching challenges voters and candidates, citizens and elected officials, to consider the moral and ethical dimensions of public policy issues. In light of ethical principles, we bishops offer the following policy goals that we hope will guide Catholics as they form their consciences and reflect on the moral dimensions of their public choices. Not all issues are equal; these ten goals address matters of different moral weight and urgency. Some involve matters of intrinsic evil that can never be supported. Others involve affirmative obligations to seek the common good. These and similar goals can help voters and candidates act on ethical principles rather than particular interests and partisan allegiances. We hope

Catholics will ask candidates how they intend to help our nation pursue these important goals:

- Address the preeminent requirement to protect the weakest in our midst—innocent unborn children—by restricting and bringing to an end the destruction of unborn children through abortion.
- Keep our nation from turning to violence to address fundamental problems—a million abortions each year to deal with unwanted pregnancies, euthanasia and assisted suicide to deal with the burdens of illness and disability, the destruction of human embryos in the name of research, the use of the death penalty to combat crime, and imprudent resort to war to address international disputes.
- Define the central institution of marriage as a union between one man and one woman, and provide better support for family life morally, socially, and economically, so that our nation helps parents raise their children with respect for life, sound moral values, and an ethic of stewardship and responsibility.
- Achieve comprehensive immigration reform that secures our borders, treats immigrant workers fairly, offers an earned path to citizenship, respects the rule of law, and addresses the factors that compel people to leave their own countries.
- Help families and children overcome poverty: ensuring access to and choice in education, as well as decent work at fair, living wages and adequate assistance for the vulnerable in our nation, while also helping to overcome widespread hunger and poverty around the world, especially in the areas of development assistance, debt relief, and international trade.
- Provide health care for the 47 million people without it, while respecting human life, human dignity, and religious freedom in our health care system.
- Continue to oppose policies that reflect prejudice, hostility toward immigrants, religious bigotry, and other forms of discrimination.

- Encourage families, community groups, economic structures, and government to work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, and care for creation, with full respect for religious groups and their right to address social needs in accord with their basic moral convictions.
- Establish and comply with moral limits on the use of military force—examining for what purposes it may be used, under what authority, and at what human cost—and work for a “responsible transition” to end the war in Iraq.
- Join with others around the world to pursue peace, protect human rights and religious liberty, and advance economic justice and care for creation.

Other important excerpts

Paragraphs 34, 35 and 42 of the bishop’s documents received much attention in the Catholic press—both progressive and conservative, so I share them with you.

34. Catholics often face difficult choices about how to vote. This is why it is so important to vote according to a well-formed conscience that perceives the proper relationship among moral good. A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who takes a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, such as abortion or racism, if the voter’s intent is to support that position. In such cases a Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in grave evil. At the same time, a voter should not use a candidate’s opposition to an intrinsic evil to justify indifference or inattentiveness to other important moral issues involving human life and dignity.

35. There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate’s unacceptable position may decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil.

42. As Catholics we are not single-issue voters. A candidate’s position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter’s support. Yet a candidate’s position on a single issue that involves an intrinsic evil, such as support for legal abortion or the promotion of racism, may legitimately lead a voter to disqualify a candidate from receiving support.

Flag in the Sanctuary

I had one parishioner approach me about having our American Flag in the sanctuary or in the front of the

church where everyone can see it. I assume that some, if not many other parishioners would also like to have our flag in the sanctuary. As you know some churches have an American Flag and Papal Flag in their sanctuaries. Why not Ascension? These are the reasons why I have said ‘no’ to the request of having our flag in the sanctuary.

- The sanctuary is the place we celebrate the eucharist. I believe only liturgical symbols belong in the sanctuary. I have even said ‘no’ to a request to moving a statue of Mary into the sanctuary. At mass, our focus is on the eucharist.
- In this cause there is a separation between church and state. The State of Alabama would not permit the Ten Commandments to be placed in one of their buildings.
- I assume that our Flag represents everything we believe in as Americans including the laws of our land. Unfortunately, as Catholics we do not embrace some of our laws e.g. abortion and capital punishment.

I realize the Flag is a very *emotional* issue for many people. I love this country. I often defend it when I hear people, especially outsiders speak bad about it. The above are three reasons I have said ‘no’ to a request to allow the Flag to have a permanent place in front of our church. I do not have a problem having the Flag up front on special National holidays.

Some Financial Figures

Second collection last week for Fr. Gregory—
\$20,500

School Envelope for June ‘08—\$7,262—for fiscal year ‘07-08 - **\$68,402.**

Parish offertory income for fiscal year ‘07-08
\$1,671,071.00 an increase from last year of 4.19%

Olive Wood Comfort Cross is a small 1¾" x 3¾" cross that can be a beautiful sacramental to hold in times of pain and suffering. You can order this religious item from Conception Abbey by calling 800-889-0105 cost is \$5.95.

Have a blessed week,

