

A Catholic View To Election 2002

Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors

The year 2002 is a critical year for leadership in the state of Michigan. Voter enacted term limits require that 27 of 38 senate members and 23 of 110 house members will be new faces. In addition, Michigan citizens will elect a new Governor, Attorney General and Secretary of State. On the federal level a U.S. Senate seat will be decided and 15 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. Scores of local government positions will also be decided.

We are at an important crossroads in our state's history. The Board of Directors of the Michigan Catholic Conference believes it is important for every citizen to bring together the guidance of the Gospel and the opportunities of our democracy to help shape a society more respectful of human life and dignity, and more committed to justice and peace.

It is not the desire of the Michigan Catholic Conference to create a Catholic voting block. We believe, however, that every candidate, policy, and political platform should be measured by how they touch the human person; whether they enhance or diminish human life, dignity, and human rights; and how they advance the common good.

We have a stake in the greatness of our state. We also have the privilege to use our voice and votes in searching out leadership in the candidates of our most important public offices nationally and on the state and local levels. As Catholics we must challenge candidates to present a clear moral vision for our nation and our state.

The Gospel of Life affirms that while the rights of the human person are championed and the value of life publicly declared, the most basic human right, "the right to life, is being denied or trampled upon, especially at the more significant moments of existence: the moment of birth and the moment of death" (Pope John Paul II, The Gospel of Life [Evangelium Vitae], 18).

Respect for the dignity of the human person demands a commitment to human rights across a broad spectrum: "Both as Americans and as followers of Christ, American Catholics must be committed to the defense of life in all its stages and in every condition" (Pope John Paul II, Homily in Giants stadium, October 5, 1995; 25 Origins, p. 301 October 19, 1995. Abortion is the preeminent threat to human dignity because it directly attacks life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others.

Of key concern too is a commitment to the needy and the marginal members of our society. Such a concern will demand sacrifices from all of us and as much heroism and selflessness as has been exhibited in the recent national tragedy that has shaken our nation. As we consider the best way to effect change, we must not forget that our Catholic tradition is grounded in the Scriptures which exhort us to "Speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves - open our mouth, decree what is just and defend the needy and the poor." Proverbs 31 :8-9

The American Bishops in their Economic Pastoral make that point powerfully when they insisted that it is a universal ethical principle that "The obligation to provide justice for all means that the poor have the single most urgent economic claim on the conscience of the nation." (Economic Justice For All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy 1986, #80)

The Statement on Political Responsibility by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops identifies basic principles that lie at the heart of Catholic social teaching. All citizens should evaluate the issues discussed in this election year, and the policy proposals made by candidates in light of whether they support or diminish these principles.

- 1) *The Life and Dignity of the Human Person.* Each public policy must be evaluated in light of its impact on human life and dignity.
- 2) *Human Rights and Responsibilities.* Human dignity and the ability to fulfill our responsibilities require that human rights be respected.
- 3) *A Call to Family and Community.* The human person is not only sacred, but social. We exercise our rights and fulfill our responsibilities in community, the most basic of which is the family.
- 4) *The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers.* Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a vocation, a participation in creation. Basic rights of workers must be protected.
- 5) *The Option for the Poor.* Poor and vulnerable persons have a special place in church teaching. We need to put the needs of people who are poor first.
- 6) *Solidarity.* We are one human family despite differences of race, creed, or nationality. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions.
- 7) *Care for God's Creation.* We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

The Church is obligated to play an important role in the political order by educating citizens on the teachings of the Church and the responsibilities of the faithful; by analyzing issues for their social and moral dimensions; by measuring public policy against Gospel values; by participating with other concerned parties in debate over public policy; and, by speaking out with courage, skill, and concern on public issues involving human rights, social justice, and the life of the Church in society.

Faithful Citizenship teaches us that as citizens, we can and must participate in the debates and choices over the values, vision, and those who seek to lead our state and nation. This dual calling of faith and citizenship is at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic as we look with hope to the future.

Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors
Adam Cardinal Maida, Chairman
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