



# Issues

Office of Peace and Social Justice  
*Diocese of Gary*

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## ELECTION 2004

### Choosing the best candidates

*The times are out of joint* to paraphrase Shakespeare.

- The Church in the United States continues to struggle with the sex abuse scandal and its ramifications for Church leadership, priestly morale and formation, and the role of the laity.
- The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are far from over. Indeed, they seem to be entering a new, bloodier phase.
- The threat of terrorism seems stronger, more fearful.
- The economy improves by fits and starts, but the gap between rich and poor grows wider in this nation and around the world.
- The need for health care reform continues to be raised in Congress and in businesses and communities across the nation.
- The table the U.S. Bishops wrote about last year still has few places for the unborn, the poor, those on death row, the weakest in our society.

There is an atmosphere of distrust and accusation, partisanship, and division so deep in this country that national columnist David Brooks recently suggested we fly separate airlines because of it. Amid all this, we are preparing for a national election. Where and how to begin?

We begin by turning down the partisan rhetoric that pays attention to only one party or a single issue. We need to turn our attention to an old idea, a touchstone of Catholic Social Teaching, of the Gospel and civil society. This old idea is the “common good.” The question is not are you better or worse off than you were four years ago, but what needs to be done so that all of us, **especially the weak and vulnerable among us**, will be better off in the years to come? That is the opening question in the U.S. Bishops election year 2004 pastoral, *Faithful Citizenship: Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*. The pastoral does not say for whom to vote. It provides principles to use in making wise, just, and compassionate choices that exercise our political responsibility as Catholic citizens.

The bishops raise ten questions that seek to lift the moral and human dimensions of the choices facing voters and those running for office.

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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.

—USCCB Administrative Committee,  
*Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to  
Political Responsibility*, p.3

1. After September 11, how do we build not only a safer world—but a world that is more just, peaceful, secure, and respectful of human life and dignity?
2. How will we protect the weakest in our midst—the unborn, the aged, those on death row—without turning to violence?
3. How do we deal with the fact that more than 30,000 children die every day as a result of hunger, and that in the United States, the richest nation in the world, there are so many children living in poverty?
4. As a nation how do we help parents raise children with sound moral values, support the family, and offer real choices and financial help in education and housing?
5. How do we deal with the growing number of families and individuals without access to affordable health care?
6. How are we, as a society, dealing with prejudice and hostility to immigrants and refugees, and working to heal the wounds of racism, religious bigotry, and other forms of discrimination?
7. How will we as a nation pursue justice and peace in a world often overwhelmed by violence?
8. How can every part of our society—families, communities, organizations, markets, governments—work toward the common good of all?
9. When, how, under what authority, and at what cost should we as a nation use or avoid the use of war?
10. How can we join other nations in the pursuit of justice and peace?

Hopefully these questions can be a source of civil dialogue in the 2004 campaigns with more citizen participation and less partisanship. In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a value/virtue that proclaims active participation in the political process as a moral obligation. The Catholic moral framework does not easily fit into “right” or “left,” or the platforms of any party.

We are called to be a community of conscience within our society, to test public life by the values of the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching. We need to measure candidates, parties, platforms, and policies by



how they protect the life, dignity and rights of the human person. We must judge if they protect the poor and vulnerable and advance the common good.

As Catholics, we are helped in that task by a consistent moral framework, by broad experience in serving those in need, and by being a large and diverse community in our politics, and in the ethnic and racial diversity where we live and work. We are called to be leaven and the salt of the earth.

The bishops seek to form the consciences of Catholics, not to tell them how to vote. That choice Catholics must make after examining the position of candidates on a full range of issues, their voting records and philosophy. The consistent ethic of life ought to be the moral framework. According to the Vatican statement, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* No. 4, “It must be noted 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.”

The directions for our public witness as Christians are found in Scripture, especially the Gospels. The key themes of Catholic Social Teaching are:

- ◆ The life and dignity of the human person
- ◆ Call to family, community, and participation in social, economic, and political life
- ◆ Every person has rights to life and to the conditions for living a decent life and the responsibility to respect the rights of others
- ◆ A preferential option for the poor and vulnerable
- ◆ Work has a dignity and workers have rights to organize and to decent, fair wages
- ◆ We are one human family, called to be in solidarity with each other
- ◆ We are stewards of the earth, caring for God’s creation

These themes call attention to the moral priorities

in public life that the bishops believe are important in this 2004 campaign and in the years beyond. Those moral priorities are:

### **Protecting human life**

Human life is a gift from God. As such, it is sacred and inviolable. Abortion and euthanasia, assisted suicide, cloning and the intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks are always wrong. Decisions in biotechnology need to be based on the dignity of human life.

Catholic teaching calls us to avoid war. The bishops have raised serious moral concerns about the preemptive or preventive use of force.

As a life issue, increasing reliance on the death penalty cannot be justified.

### **Promoting family life**

Marriage and children must be protected.

Parents have a fundamental right to educate their children and to choose the education best suited to their children's needs.

All aspects of the media need to balance freedom of speech with the common good.

### **Pursuing social justice**

The bishops' teaching on economic justice insists that economic decisions and institutions pay attention to the dignity of the human person. They support policies that create jobs for all those who can work, and a living wage for all workers. There should be equal pay and employment opportunities for women and men. Workers have the right to organize without reprisal.

The right to private property is affirmed in the context of the common good. Welfare reform should reduce poverty and dependency. The bishops favor increasing child tax credits and making them fully refundable.

The bishops welcome faith-based groups not as a substitute, but a partner with government efforts.

They have concerns about Social Security and affordable and accessible health care for everyone.

The bishops feel that a lack of safe, affordable housing is a national crisis. Also, an agriculture policy should be developed with food security for all. No one should go hungry in this nation of plenty. Farmers, especially family farmers, need support, and farm workers need decent wages and housing and working conditions that are safe and humane.

There needs to be care for the earth, a real stewardship, and a program of sustainable, environmentally friendly agriculture is part of that care.

The Gospels call on us to love our neighbor and to welcome the stranger. This leads the Church to care for and stand with the immigrant.

Everyone has a right to a quality education. The bishops support that being available for all and support affirmative action program to overcome discrimination and increase opportunities. The necessary resources should be available to all schools—public, private, and religious.

Schools and society need to address the growing culture of violence and promote a greater sense of moral responsibility and a reduction in violence in the media and throughout our culture.

### **Practicing Global Solidarity**

The United States has been greatly blessed. It has the capacity and responsibility to address the scandal of poverty and underdevelopment, and to humanize the process of globalization. We need to work to promote religious liberty. We must work to reverse the spread of nuclear,

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Jesus called us to “love one another.” Our Lord’s example and words demand care for the “least of these” 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.

—USCCB Administrative Committee,  
*Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to*

chemical, biological, and conventional weapons.

The United Nations and other international bodies need more consistent political and financial support from the United States. As a nation, we need to have a more generous immigration and refugee policy and support protection for those fleeing persecution. With the cooperation of the international community, we need to address just and peaceful resolutions to regional conflicts—especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Working with the international community we need to be committed to bring help, stability, freedom, and prosperity to Iraq and Afghanistan.

In *Faithful Citizenship* Catholics are called to be political but not partisan, principled but not ideological, clear but also civil, and to be engaged but not used. In the 2004 election and beyond, we need to commit ourselves to carry the values of the Gospel and the Church’s social teaching into the public square. The bottom line, the norm, is how life can be

made better for the weakest and most vulnerable

among us, how they can be given a “place at the table”

and how we advance not the good of some, but of all—the common good.

The focus on the common good calls into question partisanship and single-issue voting. Voter registration campaigns, candidate forums and education on social teaching are all encouraged in parishes. However, none of those activities can tell people whom to vote for. To do so flies in the face of what *Faithful Citizenship* is all about. It violates the separation of Church and State and is prohibited by the Church.

— — — — — James M. Dixon, S.J.

- Speakers are available to visit Peace and Justice Commissions, parish forums, and other groups for discussions on *Faithful Citizenship*, the election and its issues. Call Heartland Center, 219.844.7515
- Information about Faithful Citizenship on the web : [www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship](http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship)
- Be an informed voter. A range of election information is provided at [www.vote-smart.org](http://www.vote-smart.org)

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