

Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium

Statement by the United States Bishops (October 1999)

Contents

- [Introduction](#)

- [Challenges for Believers](#)

- [Questions for the Campaign](#)

- [A Call to Faithful Citizenship](#)

- [Catholic Assets in the Public Square](#)
 - [A Consistent Moral Framework](#)
 - [Everyday Experience](#)
 - [A Community of Citizens](#)

- [The Role of the Church](#)

- [Themes of Catholic Social Teaching](#)
 - [Life and Dignity of the Human Person](#)
 - [Call to Family, Community, and Participation](#)
 - [Rights and Responsibilities](#)
 - [Option for the Poor and Vulnerable](#)
 - [Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers](#)
 - [Solidarity](#)

- [Care for God's Creation](#)
- [Moral Priorities for Public Life](#)
 - [Protecting Human Life](#)
 - [Promoting Family Life](#)
 - [Pursuing Social Justice](#)
 - [Practicing Global Solidarity](#)
- [Conclusion](#)

Introduction

The year 2000 marks a great spiritual milestone and offers an important civic challenge. For Christians, this year represents the coming of the Great Jubilee, marking the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. For U.S. citizens, this year brings the election of those who will lead our government into a new century and a new millennium.

For U.S. Catholics, these two events bring special responsibilities and opportunities. This is a time to bring together the guidance of the Gospel and the opportunities of our democracy to shape a society more respectful of human life and dignity, and more committed to justice and peace.¹

Challenges for Believers

Our nation has been blessed with great freedom, vibrant democratic traditions, unprecedented economic strengths, abundant natural resources, and a generous and religious people. Yet not all is right with our nation. Our prosperity does not reach far enough. Our culture does not lift us up; instead it may bring us down in moral terms. This new world we lead is still too dangerous, giving rise to ethnic cleansing and an inability to confront hunger and genocide. We are still falling short of the American pledge of "liberty and justice for all," our declaration to defend the inalienable rights of the human person—"life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Signs of the challenges surround us:

1.4 million children are destroyed before birth every year. In many cities, a majority of our children never see the day of their birth.

The younger you are, the more likely you are to be poor. A quarter of our preschool children are growing up poor.

We watch with horror as some schools become almost war zones. Too many of our young people have lost their moral direction, their sense of belonging, and even their will to live. More and more they are finding community in gangs and cliques, instead of family and faith.

Hate and intolerance haunt our nation and turn the diversity we should celebrate into a source of division, bigotry, racism, and conflict.

A powerful economy pushes our nation forward, but it widens the gaps between rich and poor in our nation and around the world. Some Americans are moving far ahead, but too many are being left behind.

Families are facing serious challenges. Millions do not have basic health care, many cannot afford housing, and in rural areas, many family farmers are losing their way of life.

Scandal, sensationalism, and intense partisan combat diminish public life. Too many of our leaders seem to focus more on seeking campaign contributions than the common good.

Violence surrounds us. War, ethnic cleansing, religious persecution, the denial of other human rights, poverty, debt, and hunger destroy the lives and dignity of tens of thousands each year.

The next millennium requires a new kind of politics, focused more on moral principles than on the latest polls, more on the needs of the poor and vulnerable than the contributions of the rich and powerful, more on the pursuit of the common good than the demands of special interests. As Catholics and as voters, this is not an easy time for faithful citizenship. By this we mean more than people who consistently participate in public life, but disciples who view these responsibilities through the eyes of faith and bring their moral convictions to their civic tasks and choices. Sometimes it seems few candidates and no party fully reflect our values. But now is not a time for retreat. The new millennium should be an opportunity for renewed participation. We must challenge all

parties and every candidate to defend human life and dignity, to pursue greater justice and peace, to uphold family life, and to advance the common good.

We hope the campaigns and elections of the year 2000 become turning points in our democracy, leading to more participation and less cynicism, more civil dialogue on fundamental issues and less partisan posturing and attack ads. Let us turn to a new century with renewed commitment to active citizenship and to full democratic participation.

Questions for the Campaign

Politics is about more than our own pocketbooks or economic interests. Catholics, other believers, and men and women of good will raise different questions for ourselves and for those who would lead us:

How will we protect the weakest in our midst—innocent, unborn children?

How will we overcome the scandal of a quarter of our preschoolers living in poverty in the richest nation on earth?

How will we address the tragedy of 35,000 children dying every day of the consequences of hunger, debt, and lack of development around the world?

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 society better support families in their moral roles and responsibilities, offering them real choices and financial resources to obtain quality education and decent housing?

How will we address the growing number of families and individuals without affordable and accessible health care? How can health care protect and enhance human life and dignity?

How will our society best combat continuing prejudice, bias, and discrimination, overcome hostility toward immigrants and refugees, and heal the wounds of racism, religious bigotry, and other forms of discrimination?

How will our nation pursue the values of justice and peace in a world where injustice is common, destitution is widespread, and peace is too often overwhelmed by warfare and

violence?

What are the responsibilities and limitations of families, voluntary 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?

How will our nation resist what Pope John Paul II calls a growing "culture of death"? Why does it seem that our nation is turning to violence to solve some of its most difficult problems—to abortion to deal with difficult pregnancies, to the death penalty to combat crime, to euthanasia and assisted suicide to deal with the burdens of age and illness?

We believe 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.

A Call to Faithful Citizenship

One of our greatest blessings in the United States is our right and responsibility to participate in civic life. The Constitution protects the right of individuals and of religious bodies to speak out without governmental interference, endorsement, or sanction. It is increasingly apparent that major public issues have clear moral dimensions and that religious values have significant public consequences. Our nation is enriched and our tradition of pluralism enhanced when religious groups contribute to the debate over the policies that guide the nation.

As bishops, it is not only our right as citizens but our responsibility as religious teachers to speak out on the moral dimensions of public life. As members of the Catholic community, we enter the public forum to act on our moral convictions, share our experience in serving the poor and vulnerable, and add our values to the dialogue over our nation's future. Catholics are called to be a community of conscience within the larger society and to test public life by the moral wisdom anchored in Scripture and consistent with the best of our nation's founding ideals. Our moral framework does not easily fit the categories of right or left, Democrat or Republican. Our responsibility is to measure every party and platform by how its agenda touches human life and dignity.

Jesus called us to love our neighbors by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and afflicted, and comforting the victims of injustice.² Our Lord's example and

words demand a life of charity from each of us. Yet they also require action on a broader scale in defense of life, in pursuit of peace, in support of the common good, and in opposition to poverty, hunger, and injustice. Such action involves the institutions and structures of society, economy, and politics. As Pope John Paul II wrote in his recent exhortation to the people of America living together in this hemisphere:

For the Christian people of America conversion to the Gospel means to revise "all the different areas and aspects of life, especially those related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good." It will be especially necessary "to nurture the growing awareness in society of the dignity of every person and, therefore, to promote in the community a sense of the duty to participate in political life in harmony with the Gospel."³

For Catholics, public virtue is as important as private virtue in building up the common good. In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation. Every believer is called to faithful citizenship, to become an informed, active, and responsible participant in the political process. As we said a year ago, "We encourage all citizens, particularly Catholics, to embrace their citizenship not merely as a duty and privilege, but as an opportunity [more fully] to participate 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."⁴

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 teaching 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." Jesus called us to be the "leaven" in society, the "salt of the earth . . . [and] the light of the world."⁵

Catholic teaching offers a consistent set of moral principles for assessing issues, platforms, and campaigns. Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we start with the dignity of the human person. Our teaching calls us to protect human life from conception to natural death, to defend the poor and vulnerable, and to work toward a more just society and a more

peaceful world. 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 turn away from poor women and children because they lack economic or political power. Nor can we neglect international responsibilities because the Cold War is over. For us, the duties of citizenship begin with Gospel values and Catholic teaching. No polls or focus groups can release us from the responsibility to speak up for the voiceless, to act in accord with our moral convictions.

Everyday Experience

Our community also brings broad experience in serving those in need. 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.⁶ In defense of life, we reach out to children and to the sick and elderly who need help, support women in difficult pregnancies, and assist those wounded by the trauma of abortion and domestic violence. On many issues, we speak for those who have no voice; we have the practical expertise and everyday experience to enrich public debate.

A Community of Citizens

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. We are CEOs and migrant farm workers, senators and persons on public assistance, business owners and union members. But we are all called to a common commitment to protect human life and stand with those who are poor and vulnerable. We cannot be indifferent to or cynical about the obligations of citizenship. As voters and advocates, candidates and contributors, we are called to provide a moral leaven for our democracy.⁷

The Role of the Church

Beyond the responsibilities of every Catholic, the Church as an institution also has a role in the political order. This includes educating its members about Catholic social teaching, highlighting the moral dimensions of public policy, participating in debate on matters affecting the common good, and witnessing to the Gospel through the many services and ministries provided by the Catholic community. Our efforts in this area should not be misconstrued. The Church's participation in public affairs does not undermine but enriches

the political process and affirms genuine pluralism. The leaders of the Church have the right and duty to share the Church's teaching and to educate Catholics on the moral dimensions of public life, so that they may form their consciences in light of their faith.

As bishops, we do not seek the formation of a religious voting block, nor do we 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 all issues in the political arena. 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 simply party affiliation or mere self-interest.⁸

The coming elections provide important opportunities to bring together our principles, experience, and community in effective public witness. We hope parishes, dioceses, schools, and other Catholic institutions will encourage active participation through non-partisan voter registration and education efforts.⁹ 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 will 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. Following are key themes at the heart of our Catholic social tradition.¹⁰

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. The conviction that human life is sacred and that each person has inherent dignity that must be respected in society lies at the heart of Catholic social teaching. Calls to advance human rights are illusions if the right to life itself is subject to attack. 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 or not it enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The human person is not only sacred but inherently social. The God-given institutions of marriage and the family are central and serve as the foundations for social life. They must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. Beyond the family, every person has a right to participate in the wider society 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

As social beings, our relationships are governed by a web of rights and corresponding duties. Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things that allow them to live a decent life—faith and family, food and shelter, health care and housing, education and employment. In society as a whole, those who exercise authority have a duty to respect the fundamental human rights of all persons. Likewise, all citizens have a duty to respect human rights and to fulfill their responsibilities to their 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.¹¹ The prophets denounced injustice toward the poor as a lack of fidelity to the God of Israel.¹² Jesus, who identified himself with the least of these,¹³ came to preach the good news to the poor and told us, "Give to him who asks of you, do not refuse one who would borrow from you."¹⁴ The Church calls on all of us to embrace this preferential love of the poor and vulnerable, to embody it in our lives, and to work to have it shape public policies and priorities.

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. Work is a way of fulfilling part of our human potential given to us by God. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers, owners, and managers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and join unions, to economic initiative, and to ownership and private property.

Solidarity

Because of the interdependence among all the members of the human family around the globe, we have a moral responsibility to commit ourselves to the common good at all levels: in local communities, in our nation, in the community of nations. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. As Pope John Paul II has said, "We are all really responsible for all."¹⁵

Care for God's Creation

The world that God created has been entrusted to us, yet our use of it must be directed by God's plan for creation, not simply by our own benefit. Our stewardship of the earth is a kind of participation in God's act of creating and sustaining the world. In our use of creation, we must be guided by our concern for the welfare of others, both around the world and for generations to come, and by a respect for the intrinsic worth and beauty of all God's creatures.

Moral Priorities for Public Life

We wish to suggest some issues which we believe are important in the national debate during 2000 and beyond. These are not the concerns of Catholics alone; in every case we are joined with others in advocating these concerns. These brief summaries are not intended to indicate in any depth the details of the positions we have taken in past statements on these matters. For a fuller discussion of our positions on these and related issues, we refer the reader to the documents listed at the end of our statement.

Protecting Human Life

Human life is a gift from God, sacred and inviolable. This is the teaching that calls us to protect and respect every human life from conception until natural death. Because every human person is created in the image and likeness of God, we have a duty to defend human life in all its stages and in every condition. Our world does not lack for threats to human life. We watch with horror the deadly violence of war, genocide and massive starvation in other lands, and children dying from lack of adequate health care. Yet as we wrote in our 1998 statement, *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."¹⁶ Abortion, the deliberate killing of a human being before birth, is never morally acceptable. The purposeful taking of human life by assisted suicide and euthanasia is never an act of mercy, but is an unjustifiable assault on human life. In assessing our obligation to protect 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."¹⁷

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 wrong. We support constitutional protection for unborn human life, as well as legislative efforts to oppose 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 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.

The Church has always sought to have conflicts resolved by peaceful means between and among nations. Church teaching calls on us to avoid and to limit the effects of war in many different ways. Thus, direct and intentional attacks on civilians in war are never morally acceptable, nor is the use of weapons of mass destruction or other weapons that cannot distinguish between civilians and soldiers.

War, genocide, and starvation threaten the lives of millions throughout the world. We support programs and policies that promote peace and sustainable development for the world's poor. We urge our nation to join the treaty to ban anti-personnel landmines and to promptly ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as a step toward much deeper cuts in and the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. We further urge our nation to take more 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 is extremely troubling. Respect for human life must even include respect for the lives of those who have taken the lives of others. It has become clear, as Pope John Paul II has taught, that

inflicting the penalty of death is cruel and unnecessary. The antidote to violence is not more violence. As a 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. Respect for human life and dignity is the necessary first step in building a civilization of life and love.

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 as God intended it provides the basic foundation for family life and needs to be protected in the face of the many pressures working to undermine it. Tax, workplace, divorce, and welfare policies 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 special efforts be taken to aid poor families.

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. All parents—the first, most important educators—should have the opportunity to exercise their 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. The government should, where necessary, 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 spiritual 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 and on radio, on television, and on 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.

However, television and radio broadcasters, cablecasters, and satellite operators are still

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

The internet has created both benefits and problems. Since it offers vastly expanded capabilities for learning and communicating, this technology should be available to all students regardless of income. Because it poses a serious danger by giving easy access to pornographic and violent material, we support vigorous enforcement of existing obscenity and child pornography laws with regard to material on the internet, as well as efforts by the industry to develop technology that assists parents, schools, and libraries in blocking out unwanted material.

Pursuing Social Justice

In accordance with God's plan for human society, we are called to commit ourselves to protect and promote the life and dignity of the human person and the common good of society as a whole. We must always remember God's special concern for the poor and vulnerable and make their needs our first priority in public life. We are concerned about a wide range of social issues, including economic prosperity and justice, welfare reform, health care, housing, agricultural policy, education, and discrimination.

Church teaching on economic justice insists that economic decisions and institutions be judged on whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person. We support policies that create jobs with adequate pay and decent working conditions, increase the minimum wage so it becomes a living wage, and overcome barriers to equal pay and employment for women and minorities. We reaffirm the Church's traditional teaching in support of the right of all workers to choose to organize and bargain collectively and to exercise these rights without reprisal. We also affirm church teaching on the importance of economic freedom, initiative, and the right to private property, which provide 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 dignity. The goal should be reducing poverty and dependency, not simply cutting resources and programs. We seek approaches that promote greater responsibility

and offer concrete steps to help families leave poverty behind. Recent attempts to reform the welfare system have focused on providing productive work and training, mostly in low-wage jobs. Until new workers find jobs that pay a living wage, they will need other forms of support including tax credits, health care, child care, and safe, affordable housing.

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 those who depend on them.

Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. Any plan to reform the nation's health care system must be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the unique needs of the poor. We support health care that is affordable and accessible to all. As part of our efforts to achieve fundamental health care reform, we will support measures to strengthen Medicare and Medicaid and work for incremental measures that extend health care coverage to children, pregnant women, workers, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations. Additionally, we support policies that provide effective, compassionate care 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 all forms of discrimination in housing and support measures such as the Community Reinvestment Act to help ensure that financial institutions meet the credit needs of the local communities in which they are located.

The first priority for agriculture policy should be food security for all. Food is not like any other commodity: it is necessary for life itself. Our support for Food Stamps, the Women, Infant and Children program (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 deserve a decent return for their labor. Our priority concern for the poor calls us to advocate especially for the needs of farm workers whose pay is often inadequate and whose housing and working conditions are often deplorable. Many farm workers are undocumented and are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. We also urge

that public policies support the practice of sustainable agriculture and careful stewardship of the earth and its natural resources.

Care for the earth and for the environment is a "moral challenge" in the words of Pope John Paul II.¹⁸ We support policies that protect the land, water, and the air we share, and encourage environmental protection, sustainable development, and greater justice in sharing the burdens of environmental neglect and recovery.

The gospel mandate to love our neighbor and welcome the stranger leads the Church to care for immigrants, both documented and undocumented. 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 cause it.

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 and most vulnerable, are properly prepared to be good citizens, to lead productive lives, and to be socially and morally responsible in the complicated and technologically advanced world of the twenty-first century. This requires an orderly, just, respectful, and non-violent environment where adequate professional and material resources are available. We support initiatives that provide adequate funding to educate all children no matter what school they attend or what 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." Concern about violence leads us 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 death penalty.

Our society must also combat discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity, or age. Such 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.

Practicing Global Solidarity

Since the human family extends across the globe, our responsibility to promote the common good requires that we do whatever we can to address human problems wherever they arise around the world. As a very wealthy and powerful nation, the United States has a responsibility to help the poor and vulnerable, promote global economic prosperity and environmental responsibility, foster stable and peaceful relations among nations, and uphold human rights in the world community. In order to advance these goals, we urge the United States to pursue the following:

Debt relief to overcome poverty in the poorest countries, which are shackled by a debt burden that forces them to divert scarce resources from health, education, and other essential services

A leading role in helping to alleviate global poverty through foreign aid programs that support sustainable development and provide new economic opportunities for the poor without promoting population control, and through trade policies that are tied to worker protection, human rights, and environmental concerns

More concerted efforts to ensure the promotion of religious liberty and other basic human rights as an integral part of U.S. foreign policy

More consistent financial and diplomatic support for the United Nations, other international bodies, and international law, so that these institutions may become more effective, responsible, and responsive agents for addressing global problems

Protection for persons fleeing persecution, who should be provided safe haven in other countries, including the United States. In protecting refugees, special consideration must be given to vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied children, single women and women heads of families, and religious minorities. Asylum must be afforded to all

refugees who hold a well-founded fear of persecution in their homelands.

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; and addressing the root causes of migration

An affirmative role, in collaboration with the international community, in addressing regional conflicts from the Middle East and the Balkans, to Africa, Colombia, and East Timor. Assistance in resolving these conflicts must include a willingness to support international peacekeeping, as well as long-term post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

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 any world leader.

Conclusion

We hope these reflections will contribute to a renewed political vitality in our land. We urge all citizens to register, vote, and stay involved in public life, seeking the common good and renewing our democracy.

The call to faithful citizenship raises a fundamental question. What does it mean to be a believer and a citizen in the year 2000 and beyond? As Catholics, we can celebrate the Great Jubilee by recommitting ourselves to carry the values of the Gospel and church teaching into the public square. As citizens, we can and must participate in the debates and choices over the values, vision, and leaders that will take our nation into the next century. This dual calling of faith and citizenship is at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic in the United States as we look with hope to the beginning of a new millennium.

Notes

1. Since 1975, the U.S. bishops' conference has developed a reflection on "political

responsibility" 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 several recent bishops' statements including *Living the Gospel of Life and Everyday Christianity*. To give a fuller sense of Catholic teaching on these matters, major Catholic statements on public life and moral issues are listed at the conclusion of these reflections.

2. Mt 25:31-46.

3. John Paul II, *The Church in America (Ecclesia in America)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1999), no. 27.

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

5. Dt 30:19-20, Mt 25:40-45, Mt 5:3-12, Mt 13:33, Mt 5:13-16.

6. The Catholic community has a presence in virtually every part of the nation, including almost 20,000 parishes, 8,300 schools, 231 colleges and universities, 900 hospitals and health care facilities, and 1,400 Catholic charities agencies. The Catholic community is the largest non-governmental provider of education, health care, and human services in the United States.

7. United States Catholic Conference, *Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998).

8. United States Catholic Conference, *Living the Gospel of Life*.

9. Resources designed to help parishes and dioceses share the message of faithful citizenship and develop non-partisan voter registration, and education and advocacy programs are available from the U.S. Catholic Conference; for more information, call 800-235-8722.

10. For a fuller discussion of these themes, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*.

11. Ex 22:20-26.

12. Is 1:21-23; Jer 5:28.

13. Mt 25:40-45.

14. Mt 11:5; 5:42.

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

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

17. *Ibid*, no. 21.

18. John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, 1990 World Day of Peace Message (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1989).

Copyright © 1999, United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright holder.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops/United States Catholic Conference
3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20017-1194 (202) 541-3000

November 24, 1999 Copyright © by United States Catholic Conference

[More Statements by the US Bishops](#)



Priests for Life
PO Box 141172

Staten Island, NY 10314
Tel. 888-PFL-3448, (718) 980-4400
Fax 718-980-6515
Email mail@priestsforlife.org

Subscribe to Fr. Frank's bi-weekly prolife column (free): subscribe@priestsforlife.org

[Click here to See What Abortion Looks Like!](#)

[Home](#)

[Search](#) || [Crisis Pregnancy Help](#) || [About Us](#) || [Support our Work](#)
[Latest News](#) || [Guestbook](#) || [About Other Groups](#) || [Online Store](#)

This site is updated [daily!](#)

Online Hosting by: [Catholic Online](#)