

PREPARING TO VOTE THIS YEAR

The Catholic approach to faithful citizenship begins with moral principals, not party platforms. The direction 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.



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.

CALL TO FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND PARTICIPATION

The human person is not only sacred, but social. The God-given institutions of marriage—a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman—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 the larger society.

OPTION FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

Scripture teaches that God has a special concern for the poor and vulnerable. The prophets denounced injustice toward the poor as a lack of fidelity to the God of Israel. Jesus, who identified himself with the "least of these," came to preach "good news to the poor, liberty to captives...and to set the downtrodden free." The Church calls on all

of us to embrace this preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, 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 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.

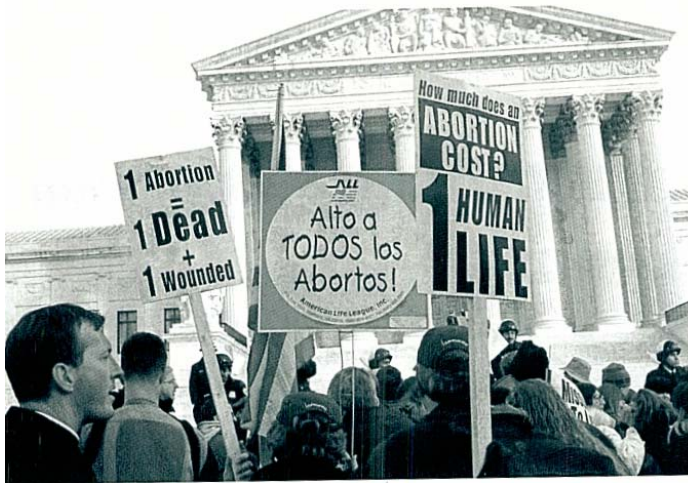
SOLIDARITY

We are one human family. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Pope John Paul insists, "we are all really responsible for all." 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." The Gospel calls us to be "peacemakers." Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we be "sentinels of peace" in a world wounded by violence and conflict.

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." 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 to select, according to their own criteria, what best corresponds to the needs of the common good."



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. **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. 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.

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 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

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.

The **education** of children is a fundamental parental responsibility. Education 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 chose 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 regulations 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 greater variety of program sources, including religious programming. We support a TV rating system and technologies 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**, 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 affirm 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.

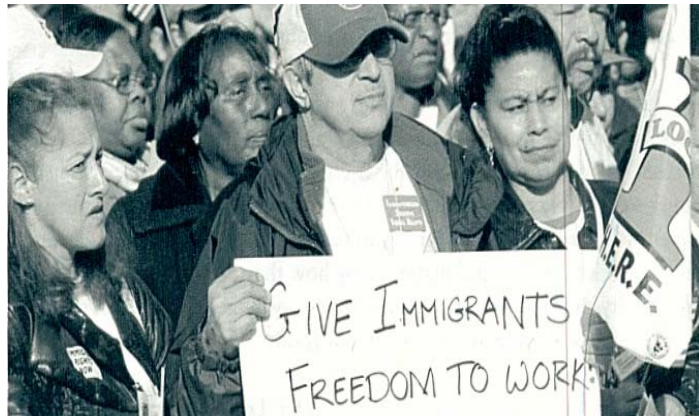
We are also concerned about the income security of low-and average-wage workers and their families when they retire, become disabled, or die. In many cases, women are particularly disadvantaged. Any proposal to change

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 Programs 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 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 persecutions 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—are 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 administrations 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 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, disability, 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.” 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 alternative, renewal, 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 rights 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 the 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, Columbia, 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 represents 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 the 2006 and beyond.