

## The Issues, The Candidates and Your Vote 2000

*It is true, political problems are not  
solved by love and mercy. But the world  
of politics is not the only world, and  
unless political decisions rest on a foundation  
of something better and higher than politics, they  
can never do any real good for others.*

*--Thomas Merton*

The year 2000 marks both significant religious and civic milestones in our country and throughout the world. For Christians, this year represents the coming of the Great Jubilee marking the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Jesus. For citizens of our state and nation, this year marks the election of those who will lead our federal, state and local governments into a new century.

In the United States and in our State of Michigan, however, too many citizens take the right to vote for granted, forgetting that it is a cherished ideal many long for in other countries. In 1998, there were more than 7.2 million people of voting age in Michigan. Of that number about 6.3 million were registered to vote and only 3.1 million people actually voted. That means that 43 percent of eligible voters elected our lawmakers. This basic right and responsibility was ignored by more than half the citizens of this state.

In this election year the voters of Michigan will be asked to elect candidates for President, United States Senator, sixteen Congressional seats, one hundred ten

State House seats, three Supreme Court seats, two State Board of Education seats, and several other important judicial and local posts.

As voters and citizens, Catholics are called to a higher responsibility to ensure that they bring a moral voice and conscience into the public forum. As the U.S. bishops wrote in their statement *Faithful Citizenship, Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*, "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."

To assist Catholic voters in this moral obligation, the Michigan Catholic Conference will provide various election year materials for parish use, including three issues of *FOCUS*. This issue of *FOCUS* has been prepared to provide a framework of the important moral questions and matters of justice that should be asked of all candidates.

**EDUCATION** The Catholic Church has long held that parents are the primary educators of their children and should have a greater role in what, how, and where their children learn. Education, the Church teaches, is a fundamental right of all people, and children have the right to an education that will best develop their potential, talents, and ability. In some cases private and/or religious schools are the best option for children. In others, public charter schools are more effective. For many, the traditional public school system provides the best educational opportunity. For this reason, education reform must continue to include a greater role for parents and families.

*“...parents have a right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental...Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise.”*

Catechism of the  
Catholic Church, no. 2229

True education reform will remove barriers which prevent civic authorities from living up to their moral obligation to ensure all families can make the choice they feel provides the best opportunity for their child. Expanding educational choice, then, is not an option; it is a requirement of social justice.

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### **Where does the candidate stand on the rights of parents to choose the educational setting for their children?**

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**ABORTION** Human life is a gift from God which all of us are called to protect, nurture and sustain. The right to life, the most basic of all human rights, must be protected by law.

*“Direct abortion is never a morally tolerable option. It is always a grave violence against a woman and her unborn child.”*

The Church rejects the 1973 United States Supreme Court abortion decisions that deny legal protection to unborn children. The Church rejects government efforts to force religious hospitals and health plans to provide this immoral procedure. Further, the Church rejects the use of partial birth abortions as heinous and barbaric acts that move our nation one step further toward acceptance of infanticide. Efforts to restrict abortion legislatively and to provide constitutional protection for unborn human life are supported. Laws and policies on medical education, medical research, health care, and related issues must respect and protect human life from the moment of conception.

*Living the Gospel of Life:  
A Challenge to American Catholics*  
United States Catholic Bishops  
November 1998

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### **Where does the candidate stand on abortion?**

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**HEALTH CARE** Health care must be promoted and supported by the cooperative efforts of the public and private sectors for the good of the individual and society as a whole. There continues to be a genuine need to reform our health care delivery system. The problems of the uninsured and the underinsured continue to escalate. The Catholic Church has spoken vigorously for reform rooted in values that respect the essential dignity of each person, ensure that human life is protected, and recognize the unique needs of the poor.

*“Access to those health care services necessary for the development and maintenance of life is a basic human right.”*

Michigan Catholic Conference  
Board of Directors, June 1993

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### **Where does the candidate stand on extending quality health benefits as a right to all people?**

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## BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

Catholic tradition calls for the community to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. Society as a whole, acting through public and private institutions, has the moral responsibility to enhance dignity and protect human rights. In addition to the clear responsibility of private institutions, government has an essential responsibility in this area. This does not mean that government has the primary or exclusive role, but it does have a positive moral responsibility in safeguarding human rights and ensuring that the minimum conditions of human dignity are met for all. Using that gauge, it must be understood that governmental programs must be designed to enhance the principles of work, family and self-reliance.

The Church is opposed to measures which would deny benefits to children who are born to unwed mothers or to mothers already receiving assistance; which treat immigrants differently from others in society; and, which unjustly classify individuals in need of assistance as abusers and exploiters of the system.

Proposals on child-care, transportation and basic job training skills are essential elements in ensuring that individuals have the tools they need for self-sufficiency and should be supported.

*“The responsibility for alleviating the plight of the poor falls upon all members of society. As individuals, all citizens have a duty to assist the poor through acts of charity and personal commitment. We also carry out our moral responsibility to assist and empower the poor by working collectively through government to establish just and effective public policies.”*

--Economic Justice for All  
The U.S. Bishops' Pastoral  
Letter on Catholic Social  
Teaching and the U.S. Economy

## Where does the candidate stand on the role of government in providing assistance and services to the poor and vulnerable members of our society?

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## DEATH PENALTY

The death penalty, or capital punishment, has been the subject of extended public debate in recent years. The intensity of the debate stems from the fact that the issue involves not only profound legal and political questions but also important moral and religious convictions.

The Catholic Church in Michigan has uniformly dealt with the death penalty as but one facet of a consistent ethic of life. In 1973, 1985 and in 1999, the Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors issued statements in opposition to the institution of the death penalty, saying, “We believe that a principled and consistent rejection of death-dealing as a policy is required to uphold the dignity of human persons and the value of human life.”

The death penalty is constitutionally prohibited in Michigan. In fact, in 1846, Michigan was the first governmental jurisdiction in the English-speaking world to abolish the death penalty. Any attempt to remove that constitutional prohibition should be vigorously opposed.

*Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. I renew the appeal I made most recently at Christmas for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary*

Pope John Paul II, January 27, 1999  
St. Louis, Missouri

## Where does the candidate stand on the death penalty?

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## ASSISTED SUICIDE

The Catholic Church has traditionally advocated public policies that respect the life and dignity of those who are dying. It has long promoted advanced directives, appropriate pain relief, and use of hospice care. Michigan's ban on assisted suicide is supported by the Catholic Church to protect the vulnerable, to prevent unscrupulous and unethical medical behavior, and, to guarantee the best possible care for all. Any effort to sanction suicide or assisted suicide or the deliberate and direct hastening of death for seriously ill patients will be vigorously opposed. A just society promotes and enhances the dignity of all of human life for the common good.

*"Suicide-the conscious choice to destroy one's own life-is always morally wrong. Concurring with someone's intention to commit suicide and cooperating in the process can never be condoned. It is especially tragic when undertaken by physicians whose very professional code charges them never to harm but always to respect life."*

*Living and Dying According  
to the Voice of Faith*  
Pastoral Letter by the Bishops of Michigan  
September 1997

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### Where does the candidate stand on assisted suicide?

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The basic premise of a liberal democracy is that governments are instituted to serve people. Therefore, individuals as voters have a right and a duty to seek out the opinion of candidates on these important questions which bear upon the moral and physical well being of all the people in Michigan.

The public policy questions facing the state and nation attest to the need for elected officials who will base their decisions on moral and religious values. The issues discussed in this *FOCUS* are the major moral questions, which Catholics, as voters, and their candidates must collectively decide through the democratic process. Other issues include the environment, housing, food and agriculture, and the taxation of religious organizations. Together, these key issues are important in discerning the question of who will best promote policies for the common good. If each citizen is to assume his or her moral responsibility, it is important to investigate the positions of candidates for public office and then VOTE for the candidate of choice.

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## FOCUS

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