



## THE ISSUES, THE CANDIDATES AND YOUR VOTE 2004

*Faithful citizenship calls Catholics to see civic and political responsibilities through the eyes of faith and to bring our moral convictions to public life.*

— *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*  
*September 2003*

The months leading up to this November's election are expected to be one of the most important and challenging time periods in recent American history. This can be attributed to our nation's current social climate, and the fact that several political candidates possess marked differences when it comes to matters of public policy. Certainly, the progression of our state and nation will greatly depend upon the guiding principles that the victorious candidate works to implement. In all 83 counties of Michigan the democratic process will take full effect this fall as we elect a president of the United States, members of Congress, the state Supreme Court, other important judicial posts and state representatives.

Catholics in Michigan, as well as those across the country, have a moral obligation to take an active part in the election by working to advance the moral fiber and common good of our society. Over the years a growing percentage of the American population has become increasingly secular – a disturbing trend that tragically leads to a sense of moral anarchy and eventually the death of legitimate pluralism. While the final result of such an equation may seem distant, it is inherent for faith-based individuals and organizations to take action in the present in order to thwart such a disturbing movement.

What does taking action mean? Is it communicating with elected officials verbally or electronically? Writing letters to a local newspaper's editorial board? Convening focus groups at a local parish? Or, perhaps simply aligning candidates' positions and comparing their differences? This decision must be left up to individual voters, their consciences and the level of participation he or she wishes to engage. Yet underlying themes, critical themes, must be adhered to throughout this time of evaluation. Those themes include: how would each candidate protect the sanctity and dignity of human life? Will the candidate advocate for issues of social justice, maintain marriage as between one man and one woman, care for the poor, respect religious freedom - and will he or she fight for equal health care and educational choice?

The Michigan Catholic Conference provides this *FOCUS* publication in an effort to raise awareness of the central themes that Catholic voters must consider while forming a voting conscience. Based on Catholic social teaching, the following categories ought to be given priority when comparing political candidates' positions on issues that will shape our state and national community for years to come.

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# HUMAN LIFE

*Man's life comes from God. It is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life.  
God therefore is the sole Lord of this life: man cannot do with it as he wills.<sup>i</sup>*

The Catholic Church is steadfast in her belief that from the point of conception to the point of natural death, all human beings are sacred, deserving of respect and must be protected. This critical issue is absolute in the eyes of Catholic doctrine, leaving no room for misunderstanding. Human life is the origin of all human activity – without it, human society would have nothing to build upon. To support policies allowing for the promotion and protection of God's greatest gift would display proper conscience formation, clear understanding of Catholic social teaching and the will to help guide our human community toward a consistent culture of life. Adherence to one's faith must always impel public social action in true regard of faithful citizenship. In this aspect it is dishonest to claim one's conscience is opposed to abortion yet supports the procedure as public policy.

Catholic social teaching also implores us as Christians to protect even those who take the lives of others. Opposition to capital punishment is tied to the Church's doctrine of mercy, as has been the position of His Holiness Pope John Paul II. Therefore, capital punishment, state sanctioned killing, must be opposed by the Catholic voter. This position has been consistently upheld by the bishops of Michigan, who have stated: "*We believe that a principled and consistent rejection of death-dealing as a policy is required to uphold the dignity of the human person and the value of human life.*"

Euthanasia and embryonic stem cell research are two further life issues that must be consistently rejected by a well-formed Catholic conscience. Euthanasia is understood as an action or omission which of itself or by intention causes death in order for suffering to be eliminated. Moreover, "the pleas of gravely ill people who sometimes ask for death are not to be understood as implying a true desire for euthanasia; in fact, it is almost always a case of an anguished plea for help and love. What a sick person needs, beside medical care is love, the human and supernatural warmth with which the sick person can and ought to be surrounded by all those close to him or her, parents and children, doctors and nurses."<sup>ii</sup> It is necessary to reaffirm that nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being.

While human stem cells are derived from adult tissue and can be retrieved without harming the donor, the only way to obtain embryonic stem cells is to kill the living embryo. Not only do the creation and destruction of embryonic cells violate the sanctity of human life, but they also violate central principles of civilized codes on human experimentation. Such research is both immoral and unnecessary. It is immoral because it constitutes the act of taking life. It is unnecessary because only adult stem cells have proven to be scientifically worthwhile and deserve even further research to isolate their potential capabilities. Because embryonic stem cell research lacks respect for basic human dignity, federal funds must not be used to further escalate the creation of a culture of death.

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- **Where does the candidate stand on abortion?**
  - **Where does the candidate stand on capital punishment?**
  - **Where does the candidate stand on euthanasia and embryonic stem cell research?**
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# EDUCATION & HEALTH CARE

*...parents have a right to choose a school for (their children) 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.<sup>iii</sup>*

One fundamental right of human decency and dignity is the right to an 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 are educated. 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, educational reform must continue to include a greater role for parents and families. Competition created by viable school choice policies will serve to better public schools and force all schools to focus on their most important mission, educating children.

True education reform removes barriers that prevent the state from living up to its moral obligation to ensure all children receive a quality education, and all families have the ability to make the choice they feel provides the best opportunity for their children. Expanding educational choice then is not an option. It is a tenet of social justice.

- **Where does the candidate stand on the rights of parents to choose the educational setting for their children and the state's obligation to provide the means to exercise that right?**

Equitable, accessible and ethical health care is an essential safeguard of human life. Health care is a human right, and genuine health care reform, recognizing the dignity of persons and the unique needs of the poor, is a matter of fundamental justice.

Quality health care is another fundamental right that must be promoted and supported by the cooperative efforts of the public and private sectors for the dignity 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.

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

# ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND FISCAL ISSUES

*Poor children, workers and families may not have the most powerful lobbies, but they have the greatest needs. We welcome a broad debate on economic life, but we cannot support a retreat in the fight against poverty and economic injustice. And let us as citizens and believers continue to advocate for people who are poor and vulnerable in our communities, nation and world.<sup>iv</sup>*

The state budget is a moral statement for the people of the State of Michigan. Through it, the values of the state are expressed. With it, basic needs of citizens are guaranteed. By it, the mandate to work for a just society comes closer to realization. Similarly, the challenges to care for God's creation and an environmentally rich Michigan also offer fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

A clear indicator of the moral strength of a society is the assistance it provides its citizens who are most needy. Certainly, there is a direct correlation between moral government and the moral behavior and attitude of its citizens; therefore, a moral budget created by the state should foster broad implications upon the civility of its

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citizens. Matters of importance such as economic justice, social responsibility, human dignity and concern for the common good must all be considered when policymakers come to the table.

In achieving the common good, Catholic social teaching recognizes that excessive intervention by the state can threaten personal freedom and initiative and interfere with work best completed by smaller bodies, such as local communities, churches and families. Additionally, all individuals have the responsibility to try and care for themselves and their families. This teaching, however, also calls on government to assist individuals and communities when they cannot help themselves. In performing this role, the state is fulfilling its moral responsibility to promote the common good.

Of particular concern to the Catholic faithful must be the various state and federal programs which are most responsible for ensuring the health and safety of Michigan's children, poor, elderly, sick and homeless. This concern is especially relevant when often times legislators of various fiscal beliefs contend that such programs should be drastically cut from government. Therefore, it is critical to advocate support for programs that directly benefit our society's most vulnerable population. For the state to practice the virtue of solidarity allows our society to learn that "love thy neighbor" has global dimensions in an interdependent world.

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Where the global economy leaves individuals behind, it is the moral function of government to protect human rights and secure basic rights of all members of the human family. Government must assume responsibility for guaranteeing that the minimum conditions for social activity, including both human rights and justice, are met. The Church's teaching on international justice and peace is not just a mandate for a few large agencies, but a challenge for every Catholic and every individual who seeks to lead our nation and state.

- **Does the candidate support preserving and promoting programs that lend the most support to the poor and most vulnerable members of our society?**
- **How does the candidate address issues of globalization and solidarity with those who are left behind?**

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*The freedom or immunity from coercion in matters religious which is the endowment of persons as individuals is also to be recognized as their right when they act in community.<sup>v</sup>*

Freedom of religion, including conscience, is a primary and inalienable right of the human person, as it is guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States. Insofar as it touches the innermost sphere of the spirit, one can even say that it upholds the justification, deeply rooted in each individual, of all other liberties. Legislation that protects religious freedom, limits government intrusion into religious matters, and allows for reasonable collaboration between public and religious entities must be respected by those running for public office.

As our nation evolves in a pluralistic manner, we must be able to find ways to honor and respect our neighbor's concerns, needs and beliefs. The tradition of meeting society's needs, particularly in health care, through a combination of public and private institutions is a source of strength and diversity that we should find ways to support rather than weaken. The Church believes that accepting conscience clause legislation and the principles they represent would be a gain for society and an acceptance of our nation's heritage of pluralism and respect for differences.

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Consequently, individual and institutional health care providers can and should be allowed to provide health care without being forced to compromise their conscience rights. Catholic health care providers should be protected, by law, from being coerced into providing such services as sterilization, euthanasia, in-vitro fertilization, embryonic stem cell research, cloning, and any other non-emergency procedure that undermines the dignity of the human person. This regard for diversity of beliefs protects against oppression of religions and honors the role of religious organizations in providing critically needed social services.

- **Where does the candidate stand on defending religious freedom by protecting a right of conscience for institutional and individual health care providers?**

## CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

*No ideology can erase from the human spirit the certainty that marriage exists solely between a man and a woman, who by mutual personal gift, proper and exclusive to themselves, tend toward the communion of their persons. In this way, they mutually perfect each other, in order to cooperate with God in the procreation and upbringing of new human lives.<sup>vi</sup>*

Children are among the most vulnerable members of the human family. As policies are advanced to help children, they must support families, since children's lives are nurtured or neglected, enhanced or diminished, by the quality of family life. While God established the means for family as the basic cell of human society, public policies must support the concept of family. Therefore, the needs and concerns of families must be a central 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. Since the family is the primary, indispensable and essential unit of society, policies must strengthen the family and maintain and promote marriage as between one man and one woman.

If we look to marriage as something different from the union of one woman and one man we essentially change the societal equation. It cuts out rationale for marriage altogether, turning it into just one more additional lifestyle, one more partnership option, one more contract. To say otherwise is to say that marriage and married couples do not make a unique contribution to the human community. Marriage is essential to the continuation of the human race, and to the dignity, stability and peace and prosperity of family and society.

The facts are that neither the state, nor religion, Catholic or otherwise, created the institution of marriage. It cannot simply be redefined beyond what we know has always been. Just as we have learned to respect the natural ecology of the state, we should respect its societal ecology as well. The Catholic Church is earnest in its belief that marriage between one man and one woman is the fundamental institution of civil society.

- **Does the candidate support marriage as between one man and one woman?**
- **Where does the candidate stand on creating incentives for adoption?**

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## Reflection:

“A Catholic moral framework does not easily fit the ideologies of ‘right’ or ‘left,’ nor the platforms of any party. Our values are often not ‘politically correct.’ Believers are called to be a community of conscience within the larger society and to test public life by the values of Scripture and the principles of Catholic social teaching. Our responsibility is to measure all candidates, policies, parties, and platforms by how they protect or undermine the life, dignity, and rights of the human person – whether they protect the poor and vulnerable and advance the common good.”<sup>vii</sup>

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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 opinions of candidates on these important questions, which bear upon the moral and physical well being of all the people of 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 principled values. The issues discussed in this *FOCUS* are the major moral questions, which Catholics, and their candidates must collectively decide through the democratic process. Together, the key issues identified in the tenets of Catholic social teaching 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 civic and moral responsibility, it is important to examine the positions of candidates for public office and then VOTE for the candidate of choice.

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<sup>i</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae* (March 25, 1995), 39.

<sup>ii</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Euthanasia*, (May 5, 1980), II.

<sup>iii</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2229.

<sup>iv</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Decade After Economic Justice For All*, November 1995

<sup>v</sup> Second Vatican Council *Dignitatis humanae*, 4.

<sup>vi</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, (November 24, 2002), 2.

<sup>vii</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, September 2003.

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