

# PERSPECTIVE Public Policy

## from a Catholic Viewpoint

### **Your Faith, The Issues, The Candidates, and Your Vote in 2000**

The North Dakota Catholic Conference has prepared a voter guide to help the state's Catholics apply their faith to the fall elections. The voter guide lists questions that voters can ask their candidates on issues of concern to the church. The actual voter guide is on a small card so that it is easily accessible, such as in a purse or on a refrigerator door. The list of issues is not complete. It identifies only some of the important issues touching upon our faith. In this newsletter, we expand on the card size guide to give more information on the issues and the Church's perspective on the issues. It also contains web site addresses for further information.

#### **Introduction**

*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. Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for the New Millennium (<http://www.nccbuscc.org/faithfulcitizenship/citizenship.htm>)*

The public policy questions facing our state and nation attest to the need for elected officials who will base their decisions on moral and religious values. The issues discussed here are some of the major moral questions facing our state and nation. To assume his or her moral responsibility, it is important that each citizen investigate the positions of candidates for public office and VOTE for the candidate of choice. When so doing, see beyond party politics, analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and choose political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest.

The Dakota is one place where voters can still meet candidates face-to-face. This card has been designed to provide easy access to important questions for political candidates. Consider keeping it with you or putting it on the refrigerator so it is ready when a candidate comes to your door. Do not pass up the opportunity to ask your candidates important questions concerning life, the dignity of human persons, and the common good.

**Where Does the Candidate Stand?**

## ***On Human Life***

- On abortion? Use of taxpayer funds for abortion?
- On the death penalty?
- On assisted suicide and euthanasia?

All human life is sacred and respect for human life must be at the center of all public policy. Abortion is the fundamental human rights issue of our day.

(*Evangelium Vitae*, No. 58; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2273.) Legislation should protect the life of unborn children from conception, no matter what the reason for the abortion or the destruction of human life. As the fall election approaches, new threats to human life are emerging. Last June, the U.S. Supreme Court opened the door to infanticide by ruling that the abortion “right” of *Roe v. Wade* covers even the killing of children in the process of being born. Government and legislative officials, meanwhile, are looking for support for stem cell research that unnecessarily involves the destruction of human life in its earliest forms.

On the *death penalty*, Pope John Paul II said in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, that “punishment . . . ought not to go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: In other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today, however, . . . such cases are rare if not practically nonexistent.” (No. 5.) The Catechism was recently revised to reflect this.

Respect for human life also demands opposition to threats on life by *assisted suicide* and *euthanasia*. (*Evangelium Vitae*, No. 65; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 2276-2279.) The assisted suicide and euthanasia forces continue to look for ways to build upon their “success” in Oregon.

families.

The 77th Anniversary Meeting of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, *Jubilee for the Agricultural World*, will be held in Bloomington, Minneapolis November 10 - 11. For registration information, call 515-270-2634.

### ***On Family Farms and Rural Life***

- On farm policies that support small to moderate-sized family-owned and operated farms and provide a “safety net” in times of prices and natural disasters?
- On supporting access to health care, education, and jobs in rural areas?

Catholic teaching has long emphasized the importance of ownership and voice in the subject of one’s labor. (See, e.g., *Rerum Novarum*, Nos. 15-16; *Laborem exercens*, Nos. 53, 102.) Policies should exist that support family farms and a wide distribution of ownership. The call to support rural communities also stems from the recognition that the life and dignity of human persons is best respected and fostered in strong communities.

North Dakota’s own bishops, James S. Sullivan of Fargo and Paul A. Zipfel of Bismarck, issued a very important statement on rural issues in 1998. (*Giving Thanks Through Action*:

<http://ndcatholic.org/ruralstmt.htm>) It remains a timely guide for Catholic involvement in rural policy. Since then, bishops across the nation have made similar statements in support of a just system of agriculture.

Our focus, however, cannot be on agriculture alone. The Church’s concern extends to rural communities and the land on which they rest. The health, education, economic development, and environmental needs of rural communities must be given greater attention. These services are essential to the life and dignity of human persons and preservation of

## **Top Ten Things You Can Do With Your Voter Guide:**

- (10) Cut it out.
- (9) Make copies for your friends.
- (8) Put it on your refrigerator door next to the pizza coupons. When a candidate rings the doorbell, grab the issues card -- not the pizza coupon.
- (7) Ask your pastor to order more to hand out at Mass. Tell him they're free!
- (6) Take it to a Catholic Daughters or Knights of Columbus meeting.
- (5) Make it a subject for high school confirmation classes.
- (4) When a candidate hands you campaign material, hand her back an NDCC voter guide.
- (3) Take it to a candidate appearance and say "Excuse me, but could you please respond to these fifteen questions in five minutes or less?"
- (2) Be willing to slightly change your request.
- (1) Prayerfully let it inform your own voting behavior.

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.

*Faithful Citizenship*

## *On Help For Families*

- On providing assistance and services to the most vulnerable members of our society?
- On policies that help pregnant women choose life?
- On policies that address the high social and public costs of failed marriages and lack of marriage, especially as it impacts children?
- On the right to just wages, to organize and join unions, to economic initiative, and to private property.

As Catholics, we believe that the life and dignity of the human person is fostered only in true community. The basic institution of community is the family. Too often our legal, economic, and social policies hurt rather than help families, especially the most vulnerable.

Society has an obligation to support children and families in need.(See *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 26; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 1908, 2211.) The Catholic Church has long worked for a welfare system that encourages work, respects human dignity, and provides necessary support. Welfare reform has been successful at reducing the number of persons on assistance. However, the verdict is still out on whether society has succeeded in ensuring that all families, especially those moving from dependence to self-sufficiency, receive a decent and fair wage sufficient to support a family. The next phase of welfare reform must focus on helping both the working poor and those receiving assistance but still facing difficulties.

Our obligation to help those in need includes helping women choose life for their unborn children. According to pro-life and pro-abortion organizations, North Dakota has the most pro-life laws in the nation. Nevertheless, while other states have seen their abortion numbers decline, North Dakota's numbers have gone up. We must buttress our restrictions on abortion help for women facing a crisis pregnancy so that no woman will feel forced to choose an abortion.

Marriage is a fundamental institution important to the fostering of healthy families and children. Failed marriages and the lack of marriage carry social and

emotional costs, especially for children. Everyone, including our elected officials, must ask what we can do to strengthen marriage, fatherhood, and parental obligations.

To raise and support a family a person must have their economic rights respected. (Catechism, No. 2211.) The Catholic church teaches that everyone is entitled to a just and fair wage. (Catechism, No. 2434.) Since bargaining power is not always equal the Church has long held that workers have a right to unionize and, in most cases, a right to strike. (Laborem exercens, Nos. 94 - 100.) While the right is not absolute, people have the right to economic initiative and the right to private property. (Catechism, No. 2403, 2406, 2429.)

### ***On Education***

- On financial assistance to all parents, enabling them to exercise their right to choose an educational setting for their children?
- On strengthening special education?

Education is a basic human right. (*Pacem in terris*, No. 13; *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 26; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1908.) Contrary to the claims of some, the Catholic Church is not concerned only with Catholic schools. The Church supports authentic education, whether it be in government, Catholic, private, or home schools.

Indeed, parents have a fundamental right to choose a school for their children Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of *ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise*. (*Gaudium et Spes*, No. 6; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2229.) These two rights, the right to education and the right of parents to choose the educational setting are not mutually exclusive. (For more information on a Catholic perspective on education see <http://ndcatholic.org/spr98.htm>)

When providing education, a priority concern exists for those most in need. Presently, our special education services need attention and financial support. This attention and support must extend to all needy students, what ever their educational setting. (For more discussion on special education, see

<http://ndcatholic.org/fall99.htm#sped>)

### ***On the Environment***

- On policies to protect God's creation and promote good stewardship of natural resources?

North Dakota faces great challenges and promises concerning the environment. New methods of farming and ranching pose serious questions about how to steward the land and water. Suburban sprawl and the need for flood control raise new issues for both rural and urban communities. Developments in biotechnology raise both environmental and fundamental questions about the ownership rights of life components.

At the same time, many North Dakotans are trying to tap into the state's wind energy potential and greater attention is being given to sustainable agricultural practices. How do we address care for creation?

In the encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II said: "It is the task of the State to provide for the defense and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces." (No. 40; see also, *Evangelium Vitae*, No. 10; and Pope John Paul II, *Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*.) Environmental policies should build upon the stewardship granted to landowners by God. Therefore, while everyone has personal obligations to care for creation, it also a political issue. The state has also duty to protect the environment and foster good stewardship. (For more information on the Church's teaching on the environment, see <http://ndcatholic.org/ndcc42.html>)

When addressing issues concerning the environment we must consider the need to care for creation, the rights of local communities, authentic rights of private property, and the unique needs of small operators. Concerning rural issues, the bishops of North Dakota, in their statement on rural issues stated: "By virtue of their vocation, ranchers and farmers, are to be responsible stewards of creation. Agriculture and economic policies must support them in the exercise of their stewardship responsibility and not promote exhaustion of the earth's resources."

They also called for the state to support research, education, and markets for sustainable farm and ranch practices.

### ***On Health Care***

- On ensuring that basic health care is available to all persons, especially poor families and children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and the mentally ill?
- On safeguarding the right and ability of religious based health care institutions to carry on their health ministry?

Basic health care is a human right that society has an obligation to provide when necessary. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 2211, 2288.) From a Catholic perspective, it is essential to the life and dignity of the human person that all persons, especially those most in need, have access to health care. Too many North Dakotans lack health insurance and those that have it are finding it increasingly expensive or limited in its coverage. Priority concern

should be given to the poor, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, the working poor, and the mentally ill.

Continuing the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, Catholic health care entities have provided health care services in North Dakota since before statehood. Now, however, their very existence is threatened. Declining reimbursements threaten their financial stability. Meanwhile, organizations hostile to the Church are trying to pass laws requiring Catholic health care facilities to provide procedures that violate Church teachings. Elected officials should respect the religious liberty of religious institutions and work to ensure just reimbursement for services.

**Remember to Vote!**

## **Perspective:Public Policy from a Catholic Viewpoint**

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- Issues for the 2000 Election**

