



The Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) represents the Catholic Bishops of Washington State: Archbishop Alex J. Brunett of the Archdiocese of Seattle, Bishop William S. Skylstad of the Diocese of Spokane, and Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J., of the Diocese of Yakima. This WSCC statement addresses processes involved in conscience formation in light of the Scriptures and Catholic Social Teaching in preparation for voting in November.

Catholic Values in the Public Square

"The call to faithful citizenship raises a fundamental question... What does it mean to be a Catholic living in the United States in the year 2004? As Catholics, the election and the policy choices that follow call us to carry the values of the Gospel and church teaching into the public square..."¹

We the bishops of Washington State call on all Catholics to fulfill their responsibility as citizens. Church teaching clearly summons Catholics to properly inform their conscience and provide a public witness to their discipleship in Jesus Christ. For Catholics, this witness includes a commitment to the dignity of all human life and a particular care for the poor and vulnerable. We remind all Catholics in this election year that it is our obligation to engage in constructive dialogue regarding the issues and candidates and to participate in the electoral process by casting our votes according to the dictates of a properly formed conscience.

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP 2004

The upcoming elections present us with an opportunity to choose our public leaders and apply our values to the policies that will guide our state and nation. This election year also finds many Catholics and others disillusioned with the world of politics, the elections, and the policy choices before us. It is especially difficult to remain hopeful when many who represent us at the local, state and national levels do not support all of the positions that emanate from values central

"In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation."

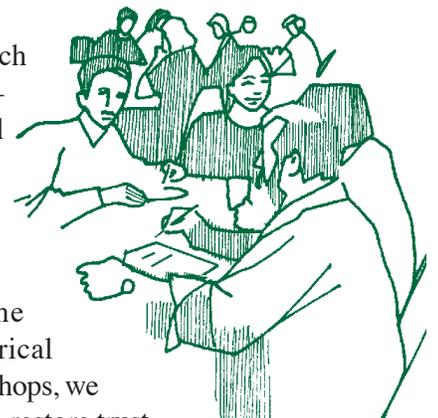
—Faithful Citizenship, USCCB

to our faith. Despite the difficulty of applying Catholic teaching and principles to the choices before us, we are nonetheless obliged to engage in public debate and exercise our right to vote. At times such as these, we must turn our attention to the Gospel and the persistence of Jesus whose

message of justice and peace was lovingly expressed to all throughout His own public ministry.

It also is important to remember that our obligation does not end with voting. Even after the elections we have an obligation to continue engaging with our political system and its elected leaders to bring our values into the public arena. It is the responsibility of every Catholic to advocate for all the public policies consistent with our beliefs and to work with faithful hope that those elected to represent us will uphold the sanctity of all human life and preserve the common good.

At this moment in church history, some may question a call to political action by your bishops. These voices may suggest that we should instead focus our attention on healing the wounds caused by clerical sexual abuse. As your bishops, we acknowledge our duty to restore trust, protect children and heal the wounds of victims. At the same time, we also recognize that as we continue to work toward reconciliation with all those hurt by past mistakes, we must not abandon or ignore the important role of the church to encourage the practice of faithful citizenship by all Catholics. We therefore commit ourselves to fully execute our pastoral responsibilities with a sense of hope for each individual entrusted to our care and for the common good.



THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

The Catholic Church does not align itself with political parties or endorse candidates. By focusing instead on the universal principles of Catholic teaching, the church properly reminds individuals about the sacredness of all human life and the need to protect and sustain it from conception

to natural death. We encourage you to avoid concentration on any one aspect of church teaching to the exclusion of all others. In the words of a recent Vatican declaration on public life, “a political commitment to an isolated aspect of the Church’s social doctrine does not exhaust one’s responsibility toward the common good.”ⁱⁱ



In this way the church exhorts every Catholic, irrespective of political ideology or partisan affiliation, to bring their beliefs into the public square in order to “defend life, advance justice, pursue peace, and find a place at the table for all God’s children.”ⁱⁱⁱ

THE IMPERATIVES OF FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

Voting in elections is an obligation for all Catholics. Responsible and faithful citizenship, however, requires more than simply casting our vote. As Catholics, and as residents of the United States, we are called by the church to ongoing involvement in the political process. This can take many forms:

As a parish community, Catholics are encouraged to:

- Advocate on issues of concern
- Organize voter registration drives
- Host nonpartisan candidate forums



Individuals are encouraged to:

- Vote
- Participate in civic activities
- Support individual candidates
- Communicate with elected officials
- Run for political office

A CALL TO FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

As your bishops, we appeal to all Catholics to become faithful citizens by seeing “civic and political responsibilities through the eyes of faith and bringing our moral convictions to public life.”^{iv} We recognize that many of us “may feel politically homeless, sensing that no political party and too few candidates share a consistent concern for human life and dignity. However, this is not a time for retreat or discouragement.”^v

In order to revitalize the public square, we ask Catholic citizens to take certain steps to ensure that basic moral princi-

ples influence public policy formation. First and foremost, we encourage celebration of the Eucharist as a source for the courage and strength needed to boldly proclaim our values in public life. Guided by the saving action of Jesus in the Eucharist, we ask Catholic women and men to follow His example by putting the dignity of all human life, the needs of the poor and vulnerable, and the pursuit of the common good ahead of private personal gain, partisanship or the narrowly defined goals of any special interest group. Furthermore, we call on every Catholic to study Catholic social teaching in its totality, analyze issues for their full social and moral dimension, and to measure all public policy choices against gospel values.

“Politics cannot be merely about ideological conflict, the search for partisan advantage, or political contributions. It should be about fundamental moral choices.

How do we protect human life and dignity? How do we fairly share the blessings and burdens of the challenges we face? What kind of nation do we want to be? What kind of world do we want to shape?”

—Faithful Citizenship, USCCB

RESOURCES

ⁱ*Faithful Citizenship, A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, USCCB, pg. 29

ⁱⁱ*Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Jan. 16, 2003

ⁱⁱⁱIbid, pg. 2

^{iv}*Faithful Citizenship, A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, USCCB, pg. 3

^vIbid, pg. 3

- *Faithful Citizenship* can be found online at: <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/bishopStatement.html>
- *The Catholic Advocate* is the e-mail advocacy alert prepared by the Washington State Catholic Conference. To subscribe send your e-mail address to: justice&peace@seattlearch.org

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