

PART III

Goals for Political Life: Challenges for Citizens, Candidates, and Public Officials

91. As Catholics, we are led to raise questions for political life other than those that concentrate on individual, material well-being. Our focus is not on party affiliation, ideology, economics, or even competence and capacity to perform duties, as important as such issues are. Rather, we focus on what protects or threatens the dignity of every human life.

92. Catholic teaching challenges voters and candidates, citizens and elected officials, to consider the moral and ethical dimensions of public policy issues. In light of ethical principles, we bishops offer the following policy goals that we hope will guide Catholics as they form their consciences and reflect on the moral dimensions of their public choices. Not all issues are equal; these ten goals address matters of different moral weight and urgency. Some involve intrinsically evil acts, which can never be approved. Others involve affirmative obligations to seek the common good. These and similar goals can help voters and candidates act on ethical principles rather than particular interests and partisan allegiances. We hope Catholics will ask candidates how they intend to help our nation pursue these important goals:

Address the preeminent requirement to protect the weakest in our midst— innocent unborn children— by restricting and bringing to an end the destruction of unborn children through abortion and providing women in crisis pregnancies the supports they need to make a decision for life.

- Keep our nation from turning to violence to address fundamental problems—a million abortions each year to deal with unwanted pregnancies, euthanasia and assisted suicide to deal with the burdens of illness and disability, the destruction of human embryos in the name of research, the use of the death penalty to combat crime, and imprudent resort to war to address international disputes.
- Protect the fundamental understanding of marriage as the life-long and faithful union of one man and one woman and as the central institution of society; promote the complementarity of the sexes and reject false “gender” ideologies; and provide better support for family life morally, socially, and

economically, so that our nation helps parents raise their children with respect for life, sound moral values, and an ethic of stewardship and responsibility.

- Achieve comprehensive immigration reform that offers a path to citizenship, treats immigrant workers fairly, prevents the separation of families, maintains the integrity of our borders, respects the rule of law, and addresses the factors that compel people to leave their own countries.
- Help families and children overcome poverty: ensuring access to and choice in education, as well as decent work at fair, living wages and adequate assistance for the vulnerable in our nation, while also helping to overcome widespread hunger and poverty around the world, especially in the areas of development assistance, debt relief, and international trade.
- Provide health care while respecting human life, human dignity, and religious freedom in our health care system.
- Continue to oppose policies that reflect prejudice, hostility toward immigrants, religious bigotry, and other forms of unjust discrimination.
- Encourage families, community groups, economic structures, and government to work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, and care for creation, with full respect for individuals and groups and their right to address social needs in accord with their basic moral and religious convictions.
- Establish and comply with moral limits on the use of military force— examining for what purposes it may be used, under what authority, and at what human cost—with a special view to seeking a responsible and effective response for ending the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East and other parts of the world.
- Join with others around the world to pursue peace, protect human rights and religious liberty, and advance economic justice and care for creation.

Notes

- 1 The common good is “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1906).
- 2 “Ignorance of Christ and his Gospel, bad example given by others, enslavement to one’s passions, assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience, rejection of the Church’s authority and her teaching, lack of conversion and charity: these can be at the source of errors of judgment in moral conduct” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1792).
- 3 “When political activity comes up against moral principles that do not admit of exception, compromise, or derogation, the Catholic commitment becomes more evident and laden with responsibility. In the face of *fundamental and inalienable ethical demands*, Christians must recognize that what is at stake is the essence of the moral law, which concerns the integral good of the human person. This is the case with laws concerning *abortion* and *euthanasia*. . . . Such laws must defend the basic right to life from conception to natural death” (*Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, no. 4).
- 4 See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2297.
- 5 These themes are drawn from a rich tradition of principles and ideas that are more fully described in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005).
- 6 See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2297.
- 7 See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 501.
- 8 See *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons*.

References

- Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana–United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000.
- Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad)*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2018.
- Pope Francis. *Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home)*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2015.
- Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2013.
- Pope Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth)*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2009.
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life. In Readings on Catholics in Political Life*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006.
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, 2003.
- Pope Benedict XVI. *Deus Caritas Est (God Is Love)*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006.
- Pope Benedict XVI. *Sacramentum Caritatis (The Sacrament of Charity)*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2007.
- Pope John XXIII. *Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth)*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1963.
- Pope John Paul II. *Christifideles Laici (On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World)*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1989.
- Pope John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life)*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1995.
- Pope John Paul II. *Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of Truth)*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1993.
- Second Vatican Council. *Dignitatis Humanae (Declaration on Religious Liberty)*. Vatican website.
- Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*. Vatican website.

USCCB. *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1998.

Major Catholic Statements on Public Life and Moral Issues

The following documents from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) explore in greater detail the public policy issues discussed in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. The documents are listed chronologically, except for under the first heading, where they are grouped generally by topic and then by year.

For more information on these and other documents, visit the USCCB website: www.usccb.org. Documents marked with an asterisk are not available online.

Protecting Human Life

Life-Giving Love in an Age of Technology, 2009

Married Love and the Gift of Life, 2006

On Embryonic Stem Cell Research, 2008

Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Campaign in Support of Life, 2001

Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics, 1998

Faithful for Life: A Moral Reflection, 1995

A Matter of the Heart: A Statement on the Thirtieth Anniversary of Roe v. Wade, 2002

Resolution on Abortion, 1989

Documentation on the Right to Life and Abortion, 1974, 1976, 1981*

A Call for Bipartisan Cooperation on Responsible Transition in Iraq, 2007

Statement on Iraq, 2002

A Pastoral Message: Living with Faith and Hope After September 11, 2001

Sowing the Weapons of War, 1995

The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace, 1993

A Report on the Challenge of Peace and Policy Developments, 1983-1888, 1989*

The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response, 1983

To Live Each Day with Dignity: A Statement on Physician-Assisted Suicide, 2011

Nutrition and Hydration: Moral and Pastoral Reflections, 1992*

Statement on Euthanasia, 1991

Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities, 1999*

Pastoral Statement of United States Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities, 1984*

Confronting a Culture of Violence, 1995

A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death, 2005

Statement on Capital Punishment, 1980

Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services (Fifth Edition), 2009

Promoting Family Life

Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan, 2009

National Directory for Catechesis, 2005*

Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium,
2005

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions, 1998

Principles for Educational Reform in the United States, 1995*

To Teach as Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education, 1972*

When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women, 2002

A Family Perspective in Church and Society, 1998

Blessings of Age, 1999

Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions, 2003

Walk in the Light: A Pastoral Response to Child Sexual Abuse, 1995

Follow the Way of Love: A Pastoral Message to Families, 1993

Putting Children and Families First: A Challenge for Our Church, Nation and World, 1992*

Pursuing Social Justice

Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love—A Pastoral Letter Against Racism, 2018

Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services (Fifth Edition), 2009

For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers, 2003

Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope, 2003

A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children, 2002

Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good, 2001

Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice, 2000

A Commitment to All Generations: Social Security and the Common Good, 1999

In All Things Charity: A Pastoral Challenge for the New Millennium, 1999

One Family Under God, 1995*

Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action, 1995

*Moral Principles and Policy Priorities for Welfare Reform, 1995**

The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace, 1993

*A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform, 1993**

Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on the Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching, 1992

*Putting Children and Families First: A Challenge for Our Church, Nation and World, 1992**

*New Slavery, New Freedom: A Pastoral Message on Substance Abuse, 1990**

Brothers and Sisters to Us: Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day, 1989

Called to Compassion and Responsibility: A Response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis, 1989

*Homelessness and Housing: A Human Tragedy, A Moral Challenge, 1988**

Practicing Global Solidarity

A Call for Bipartisan Cooperation on Responsible Transition in Iraq, 2007

A Call to Solidarity with Africa, 2001

A Jubilee Call for Debt Forgiveness, 1999

Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for US Parishes, 1998

Sowing the Weapons of War, 1995

*One Family Under God, 1995**

The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace, 1993

*The New Moment in Eastern and Central Europe, 1990**

Toward Peace in the Middle East, 1989

Statement on Central America, 1987

Major Policy-Related Speeches of Pope Francis During His Apostolic Visit to the United States, September 22-27, 2015

Pope Francis. Address of the Holy Father, Welcoming Ceremony, South Lawn of the White House, Washington, DC, September 23, 2015.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150923_usa-benvenuto.html

Pope Francis, Address of the Holy Father, Visit to the Joint Session of the United States Congress, United States Capitol, Washington, DC, September 24, 2015.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150924_usa-us-congress.html

Pope Francis. Address of the Holy Father, Meeting with the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, United Nations Headquarters, New York City. September 25, 2015.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html

Pope Francis. Address of the Holy Father, Meeting for Religious Liberty with the Hispanic Community and Other Immigrants, Independence Mall, Philadelphia. September 26, 2015.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150926_usa-liberta-religiosa.html