

## **Voting: a right and responsibility**

Canadian Catholics are being called upon as citizens to exercise their right to vote. The Church encourages and reasserts its belief in “the political freedom and responsibility of citizens.”<sup>1</sup> By exercising their right to vote, citizens fulfill their duty of choosing a government and at the same time send a clear signal to the candidates being presented by the political parties.

Political candidates are citizens too. In addition, they assume responsibility for the well being of the public. Their commitment and dedication are a generous contribution to society’s common good. Indeed, the purpose of the political community is the common good.<sup>2</sup> What is the common good? It is “the sum of those conditions of ... social life whereby people, families and associations more adequately and readily may attain their own perfection.”<sup>3</sup>

Examples of the application of Catholic moral and social teaching

The following are examples of how Catholic moral and social teaching is to be applied. They do not constitute a political platform but a magnifying glass by which to analyze and evaluate public policies and programs.

### **1. Respect for life and human dignity: from conception to natural death**

#### ➤ **Choosing life means:**

- Demanding the right to life for even the smallest among us – the human embryo and the foetus – since they too belong to the human family, while also providing assistance to pregnant women facing difficulties;
- Protecting all persons from being exploited by biomedical technologies;
- Respecting the life and dignity of the dying, accompanying them until their natural death and promoting greater access to palliative care;
- Rejecting capital punishment, promoting the rehabilitation of criminals and ensuring support for their victims;
- Defending and caring for individuals in all circumstances, beginning with the poorest and most vulnerable;

- Supporting and accompanying individuals with disabilities, the elderly, the sick, the poor and those who are suffering.

**What do the political parties say about these issues?  
What positions are the candidates taking?**

### **2. Building a more just society**

#### ➤ **The desire to create a more just society includes:**

- Adopting measures to reduce poverty;
- Introducing equitable fiscal policies for companies and individuals;
- Ending excessive, unjustified spending;
- Promoting access to safe, affordable housing for destitute families;
- Coming to the aid of the homeless;
- Fighting child poverty;
- Ensuring a basic income that is sufficient for the basics of food and housing;
- Facilitating access to drinking water for communities that are lacking;
- Finding permanent solutions to the problems experienced by indigenous communities.

**What do the political parties say about these issues?  
What positions are the candidates taking?**

### **3. The person and the family**

#### ➤ **Promoting the integrity of the person and family includes:**

- Promoting a better balance between familial and professional responsibilities;
- Ensuring pay equity between men and women;
- Guaranteeing sufficient basic income for an adequate quality of life;
- Providing access to quality hospital care for all;
- Supporting the reunification of immigrant and refugee families;
- Facilitating the recognition of the skills of immigrants;
- Taking actions against human trafficking;
- Protecting people from addictions to drugs and gambling.

What do the political parties say about these issues?  
What positions are the candidates taking?

#### **4. Canada in the world: providing leadership for justice and peace**

➤ **Believing in justice and peace includes:**

- Striving to reach the Millennium Development Goals established by the United Nations;
- Choosing policies that promote dialogue leading to peace rather than confrontation among nations;
- Working to eliminate nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons, and encouraging strict worldwide controls on the sales of small arms and personal weapons;
- Honouring international treaties on human rights;
- Protecting the dignity of immigrants and refugees when handling their files;
- Protecting the rights of seasonal workers from abroad;
- Combating business and industry practices that have little regard for workers' rights and dignity.

What do the political parties say about these issues?  
What positions are the candidates taking?

#### **5. A healthy country in a healthy environment**<sup>3</sup>

- Protecting the environment means, among other things:
- Implementing responsible stewardship practices for the environment;
  - Honouring international agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
  - Reducing our dependence on fossil fuels;
  - Taking steps to control urban pollution;
  - Introducing forms of transportation that are less harmful to the health of citizens and the environment;
  - Encouraging companies to invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency;

- Developing natural resources without harming the quality of life in communities;
- Protecting water as an essential resource;
- Bequeathing a sustainable and healthy environment to future generations.

What do the political parties say about these issues?  
What positions are the candidates taking?

#### **Voting means using your judgment**

Exercising the right to vote means making enlightened and well-thought-out judgments about the choices available. There are times, however, when these choices may prove very difficult. The Church reminds us that "in this context, it must be noted also that a well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law in which the fundamental content of faith and morals is replaced by the introduction of proposals differing from this content or opposing it."<sup>4</sup>

It is a sign of a healthy community when informed and responsible citizens engage in an ongoing dialogue on major social issues with their political leaders. This is precisely the kind of community we should strive to support and develop.<sup>5</sup> No less is expected of us, since we are all called to be truly responsible for one another.

25 March 2011

#### **Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**

The Most Reverend Brendan M. O'Brien, Chairman  
The Most Reverend François Lapierre, P.M.É.  
The Most Reverend David Motiuk  
The Most Reverend Valéry Vienneau

1 Second Vatican Council,  
The Church in the Modern World, no. 76.3.

2 Second Vatican Council,  
The Church in the Modern World, n. 74.1.

3 Second Vatican Council,  
The Church in the Modern World, n. 74.1. 2

4 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,  
Doctrinal Note: On Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life, no. 4. See also the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2242.

5 For key social and political issues of importance to the Bishops of Canada, see the web site of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops at [www.cccb.ca](http://www.cccb.ca).