

# Civic Responsibility

## A Resource for Catholics in Virginia



Representing Virginia's  
Catholic Bishops and  
Their Two Dioceses in  
Public Policy Matters

### Why Does The Church Teach About Public Policy Issues?

The Church's obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith, a part of the mission given to us by Jesus Christ. Faith helps us see more clearly the truth about human life and dignity that we also understand through human reason. As people of both faith and reason, Catholics are called to bring truth to political life and to practice Christ's commandment to "love one another."

### Who Should Participate In Political Life?

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.

### What Does The Church Say About Catholic Social Teaching In The Public Square?—Seven Key Themes

A consistent ethic of life should guide all Catholic engagement in political life. This Catholic ethic neither treats all issues as morally equivalent nor reduces Catholic teaching to one or two issues. It anchors the Catholic commitment to defend human life and other human rights, from conception until natural death, in the fundamental obligation to respect the dignity of every human being as a child of God.

**The following themes of Catholic social teaching provide a moral framework for decisions in public life.**

#### **1** The Right to Life and the Dignity of the Human Person:

Human life is sacred. Direct attacks on innocent human beings are never morally acceptable. Within our society, life is under direct attack from abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, and destruction of human embryos for research. These intrinsic evils must always be opposed. This teaching also compels us as Catholics to oppose genocide, torture, unjust war, and the use of the death penalty, as well as to pursue peace and help overcome poverty, racism, and other conditions that demean human life.

#### **2** Call to Family, Community, and Participation:

The family, based on marriage between a man and a woman, is the fundamental unit of society. This sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children must not be redefined, undermined, or neglected. Supporting families should be a priority for economic and social policies. How our society is organized—in economics and politics, in law and public policy—affects the well-being of individuals and of society.

Every person and association has a right and a duty to participate in shaping society to promote the well-being of individuals and the common good.



### 3 Rights and Responsibilities:

Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible. Each of us has a right to religious



freedom, which enables us to live and act in accord with our God-given dignity, as well as a right to access to those things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

### 4 Option for the Poor and Vulnerable:

While the common good embraces all, those who are in greatest need deserve preferential concern. A moral test for society is how we treat the weakest among us—the unborn, those dealing with disabilities or terminal illness, the poor and marginalized.

### 5 Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers:

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Economic justice calls for decent work at fair, living wages, opportunities for legal status for immigrant workers, and the opportunity for all people to work together for the common

good through their work, ownership, enterprise, investment, participation in unions, and other forms of economic activity.

### 6 Solidarity:

We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Our Catholic commitment to solidarity requires that we pursue justice, eliminate racism, end human trafficking, protect human rights, seek peace, and avoid the use of force except as a necessary last resort.



### 7 Caring for God's Creation:

Care for the earth is a duty of our Catholic faith. We are called to be careful stewards of God's creation and to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for vulnerable human beings now and in the future.

This document consists of quoted excerpts from "The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," which is a two-page summary of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' comprehensive *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* reflection. The two-page summary and the Bishops' full reflection can be found at [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org)

## Join the Virginia Catholic Conference Advocacy Network!

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To join the network, please visit [www.vacatholic.org](http://www.vacatholic.org) and click "Join the Network!" or return the form below to **919 East Main Street, Suite 1140, Richmond, VA 23219.**

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