



Diocese of Arlington

Diocese of Richmond



Special 2005
Election Issue



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The Commonwealth Clarion

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



This year's election campaign season provides an excellent opportunity for Catholics to apply the teachings of their faith to many issues that have surfaced in speeches, debates, newspaper articles, commercials, campaign literature, and other communications directed at Virginia voters. As "faithful citizens," we have the right to participate in important political decisions and the duty to examine the choices before us through the prism of our faith. If we are to cultivate the common good of our Commonwealth, we must respond to this dual calling of faith and citizenship.

As you prepare to exercise your faithful citizenship this November, I'd like to highlight two voter-education pieces developed by the Virginia Catholic Conference for parish use. The first is a five-part series entitled "Faithful Citizenship in Virginia: Issues for the 2005 Elections." This series, which outlines Church teaching in five general areas and identifies corresponding policies to be considered by the 2006 General Assembly, has been printed in the two diocesan newspapers (the *Catholic Virginian* and the *Arlington Catholic Herald*) and is also being distributed in parishes. The five parts of "Faithful Citizenship in Virginia" are reprinted in this newsletter. The second voter-education piece initiated by the Conference is a chart that displays "support" and "oppose" responses by the gubernatorial candidates to an 11-item questionnaire. The chart will be printed in the *Catholic Virginian* (October 24th edition) and the *Arlington Catholic Herald* (October 27th edition). It is also authorized for dissemination at parishes. To download the questionnaire responses as well as "Faithful Citizenship in Virginia" for your personal use, please visit our website at www.vacatholic.org.

On behalf of the Catholic bishops serving

Virginia, I thank you for your interest in issues that are critical to the well-being of many of our brothers and sisters in the human family, especially as another opportunity for faithful citizenship approaches.

Sincerely,
Jeff Caruso
Executive Director

ELECTION-YEAR ISSUES



Abortion

Catholic social teaching proclaims that human life is sacred from the moment of conception. Because all human beings are created by God, all possess an inherent dignity and therefore have certain basic rights, including the right to life and to those things that make life truly human (e.g., food, shelter, clothing, religious freedom, health care, education, and a safe environment). The right to life is the foundation of all others. Without it, no other rights are possible.

Abortion, then, is a preeminent threat to human dignity, because it directly attacks the most fundamental human good (life itself) and the condition for all others. Abortion is "always a grave act of violence," and laws permitting it are "profoundly unjust" because they fail to recognize equal rights for every child, born and unborn. *Living the Gospel of Life*,

U.S. Catholic Bishops (1998). In addition, just as all children merit legal protection and care as members of our human family, so too do all women facing unexpected and difficult pregnancies. Laws and programs that provide the support they need are an essential element of a just and compassionate society.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and state Catholic conferences support federal constitutional protections for unborn children, federal and state policies that protect life to the greatest extent possible, and initiatives that encourage life-affirming alternatives to abortion. Although federal law currently governs abortion's legality, state laws can save many lives and help many pregnant women. Key abortion-related measures being considered by Virginia lawmakers and candidates include:

- ◆ Legislation requiring that, prior to receiving an abortion, a pregnant woman be given information about an unborn child's ability to experience pain by 20 weeks gestation.
- ◆ Legislation requiring abortion clinics to be licensed by the state and regulated as outpatient surgical hospitals.
- ◆ A prohibition on state funding for non-governmental organizations that provide abortions or abortion counseling.



Death Penalty

Because each person is created in God's image and likeness, human dignity belongs equally to each person, including someone convicted of a heinous crime. While acknowledging the legitimate defense of individuals and society, the Church teaches that the death penalty cannot be justified when a government has other ways to adequately protect its people against an unjust aggressor. The Church also observes that, today, "as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm – without definitively taking away from him the possibil-

ity of redeeming himself – the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity are very rare, if not practically non-existent." *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2267). Applying this teaching during his 1999 visit to the United States, the late Pope John Paul II told those who attended a Mass in St. Louis: "The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life – who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of Life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. I renew the appeal . . . for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary."

“Virginia is second only to Texas in the number of executions (94) performed since 1976.”

Like John Paul II, the U.S. bishops have called for an end to capital punishment in our country. Earlier this year, they amplified their long-held conviction that executions are unnecessary, and hence inappropriate, in our time and place by launching the new “Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty,” designed to provide parishes additional resources as they too strive to “proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of Life in every situation.” The Virginia bishops also addressed the death-penalty issue recently when they asked Governor Mark Warner to commute the death sentence of Robin Lovitt to life in prison. In their letter to the Governor earlier this year, Bishops Paul Loverde and Francis DiLorenzo called the Commonwealth's life-without-parole alternative to executions “unique in its ability to securely protect state residents and at the same time uphold the dignity belonging to every person.” Virginia's death penalty is, they wrote, “the extreme and unnecessary measure of taking life to show that taking life is wrong.” The two bishops also pledged continued diocesan assistance to murder victims' families who endure “immense suffering” and expressed their hope for “healing that cannot come from more loss of life.”

Among the 36 states that permit capital punishment, Virginia is second only to Texas in the number of executions (94) performed since 1976. Despite this alarming trend, lawmakers' reactions are mixed. Some believe that executions are no longer

needed, others favor keeping the death penalty but wish to reduce the possibility of errors in death-penalty cases, while still others even call for the further expansion of capital punishment. Widely varying measures being considered by Virginia lawmakers and candidates include:

- ◆ Legislation to abolish the death penalty.
- ◆ Legislation to impose a moratorium on executions while flaws in the justice system are addressed.
- ◆ Legislation expanding application of the death penalty by eliminating the requirement that only a crime's "triggerman" can receive a death sentence.
- ◆ An increase in state funding for legal services to indigent defendants, who receive death sentences in a higher percentage of cases than non-indigent defendants charged with the same crimes.



Families and Children

The family is the basic "building block" of society. Laws that recognize the unique role of families, help them stay together, and reward responsibility and sacrifice for children enable societies to flourish. Marriage and education are two topics of vital importance when considering the impact public policies have on the family structure.

Across times, cultures, and very different religious beliefs, marriage -- a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of a man and a woman joined in an intimate community of life and love -- is the foundation of the family. Through sacramental marriage, God calls husbands and wives to commit themselves completely to each other for a lifetime, in a way that is always open to bringing children into the world and caring for them. The Church recognizes sacramental marriage as a visible sign of Christ's love for his Church; governments recognize the marriage of a man and a woman as a public institution because of the unique and essential contribution this

relationship makes to the common good of society, especially through the procreation and education of children. Thus, marriage is a personal relationship with singular public significance. However, although marriage is regulated by civil and church laws, it did not originate from the church or the state, but from God. Therefore, neither church nor state can alter the basic meaning and structure of marriage. When governments attempt to make other relationships equivalent to marriage as God created it, the institution of marriage is devalued and weakened. If marriage is viewed publicly as something other than the faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of a man and a woman, it becomes just one of many "alternative lifestyles," rather than an institution that makes a unique contribution to the human community.

A particularly important contribution many families make to the common good of society is the education of children. Parents -- the first and most important educators -- have a fundamental right to choose the education best suited to their children's needs, including private and religious schools. Governments should help provide the resources required for all parents to exercise this basic right without discrimination, and for all children to access the educational opportunities most suitable to their needs.

In Virginia, lawmakers and candidates continue to debate several key initiatives related to marriage and education. Two of these items are:

- ◆ A proposed amendment to the Constitution of Virginia stating that the Commonwealth and its political subdivisions shall only recognize a union between one man and one woman as a marriage, and shall not confer marriage-like status, qualities, rights, or benefits upon relationships of unmarried individuals.
- ◆ Legislation that would permit local school districts to provide bus transportation to nonpublic-school students.

Sources:

Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2003).

On the Sanctity of Marriage, His Eminence Adam Cardinal Maida, Archbishop of Detroit (2004).

Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2003).



Social Justice

All members of the human family (regardless of national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences) have basic human rights, including the right to life and to those things necessary to the proper development of life. Members of society share a common responsibility for guaranteeing the rights of all those who are defenseless and marginalized – born and unborn, young and elderly, native and immigrant, working and on welfare. Indeed, the command to love one's neighbor knows no boundaries and invites each person to have special concern for those who need help the most. In other words, followers of Christ are called to respond to the needs of *all* of their brothers and sisters, *especially* those with the greatest needs. *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, U.S. Catholic Bishops (1998).

These principles of Catholic social teaching (*i.e.*, respect for human life and dignity, solidarity, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable) mean that economic choices and institutions must be judged by whether they protect life and dignity, support the family, and serve the common good. In other words, an essential moral measure of any economy is how the poor and vulnerable are faring. Society has a moral obligation, including governmental action where necessary, to ensure opportunity, meet basic needs, and pursue justice in economic life. *A Catholic Framework for Economic Life*, U.S. Catholic Bishops (1996). Although voluntary groups help many of the poorest in our communities, governments have an obligation to provide adequately funded "safety net" services, and to implement policies and programs that break cycles of poverty and ensure fair treatment for all workers.

In a global economy of growing prosperity for some and pervasive poverty for others, immigrants face particularly daunting challenges. The U.S. Catholic bishops "call upon all people of good will, but Catholics especially, to welcome the newcomers in their neighborhoods and schools, in their places of work and worship, with heartfelt hospitality, openness, and eagerness both to help and to learn from our brothers and sisters, of whatever

race, religion, ethnicity, or background." *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops (2000). Many immigrants who could not obtain employment in their countries of origin have found willing U.S. employers and perform jobs that help fuel our nation's economy. Yet, too many of these workers also lack health care, safe housing, and basic labor protections. In a culture that sometimes values workers only for their productivity, the Church teaches that "regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary." *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, a Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States (2003). This pastoral letter also explains, "The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right."

In Virginia, many immigrants labor to provide the food we eat, yet some face the prospect of being denied basic worker protections. In addition, many more low-income families in our Commonwealth struggle just to afford basic necessities, such as housing, utilities, transportation, and child care. Economic and social policies of particular concern to our Church community that are being examined by the Commonwealth's lawmakers and candidates include:

- ◆ Legislation to establish a "refundable" Virginia Earned Income Tax Credit program that would enable working families whose incomes are too low to pay state taxes to receive a state "refund" for part of the credit amount.
- ◆ Legislation that would increase the minimum wage applicable to Virginia workers in 2006 from \$5.15 per hour to \$6.15 per hour.
- ◆ Legislation that would make undocumented immigrants ineligible for worker's compensation benefits in the event of workplace injury or death.



Stem-Cell Research

"All human beings . . . belong to God who searches them and knows them, who forms them and knits them together with his own hands, who gazes on them when they are tiny shapeless embryos and already sees in them the adults of tomorrow whose days are numbered and whose vocation is even now written in the 'book of life' (cf. Psalm 139: 1, 13-16)." Evangelium Vitae, para. 61 (1995).

This excerpt from John Paul II's "Gospel of Life" encyclical reminds us that when we were embryos, God already had a unique plan for us. We were then, and are now, part of the human family. God calls us to treat all members of this family justly, including "tiny shapeless embryos."

Whether we are adults, adolescents, infants, fetuses, or embryos, we share a common humanity and a fundamental right to life that must be protected. That is why our Church teaches, "The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception; and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life [S]ince the embryo must be treated as a person, it must also be defended in its integrity, tended and cared for, to the extent possible, in the same way as any other human being as far as medical assistance is concerned." *Donum Vitae*, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1987).

Within the last few years, contrary perspectives on the nature and value of human beings at the embryonic stage of development have garnered heightened attention. Some have said that embryonic human beings are nothing more than disposable sources of stem cells. To others, "spare" embryos in frozen storage are expendable for research because they might ultimately be "discarded" anyway. Still others even argue that new human embryos should be cloned and subsequently destroyed to enhance researchers' stem-cell supply. Each of these views reduces human life to a commodity and

places usefulness above inherent dignity. Sadly, history has often demonstrated the grave consequences of exploiting some persons to help others. Even for frozen embryos who may soon be "discarded," the injustice of being deliberately killed for experimental purposes is quite clear; one needs only to consider how troubling such a practice would seem if applied to terminally ill patients, death-row inmates, and others who are judged to be close to death.

Much of the political debate surrounding stem-cell research has focused on the scientific claim that research on stem cells derived by destroying human embryos will lead to the cure of many diseases. Even if this assertion were true, embryo-destructive research would not be morally justified. However, despite over 25 years of research, embryonic stem cells have not helped a single human patient or demonstrated any therapeutic benefit. On the other hand, stem cells from adult tissue and other sources (obtained without harming anyone) have already helped many thousands of patients. In fact, 65 conditions have already been treated successfully in human patients using adult stem cells.

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Despite the clear evidence that adult stem-cell research is a more ethical and sensible investment of public money, many federal and state lawmakers across the country have instead, with the backing of prominent researchers and foundations, insisted that more government funds should be used for embryonic stem-cell research, which several states are already financing with taxpayers' money. In Virginia, a bill introduced earlier this year would have forced the Commonwealth's taxpayers, for the first time in state history, to pay for it as well. Although the original proposal was approved by the Senate Education and Health Committee, it was amended by the full Senate to allow funding only for research using stem cells not obtained by destroying human embryos (e.g., from adult tissue, umbilical-cord blood, and other sources that pose no moral problem). The modified bill then passed the Senate by a unanimous vote and the House by an overwhelming majority. Hence, Virginia now has a beneficial new program that can use our tax dollars only for life-affirming research. During the 2006 General Assembly session, however, the matter is likely to resurface, with lawmakers likely to debate the merits

of widely varying proposals, including:

- ◆ Appropriating taxpayer dollars for research on stem cells obtained by destroying human embryos.
- ◆ Increasing state funding earmarked exclusively for stem-cell research that poses no ethical problems and that has already demonstrated therapeutic benefit (*i.e.*, on stem cells that were not obtained by destroying human embryos).

Other sources:

Stem Cell Research and Human Cloning: Questions and Answers, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2004).

What the Church Teaches: Stem Cell Research, Our Sunday Visitor (2001).



POLITICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

To facilitate the involvement of parishes and other diocesan entities in non-partisan, issue-oriented activities that promote faithful citizenship, the Conference has developed a booklet called "Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Entities in Virginia," which can be found at:

www.vacatholic.org/documents/Political_Activity_Guide.pdf

Adopted as official policy by both dioceses earlier this year, these guidelines are to be consulted whenever events that connect the teachings of our faith, vital policy issues, and civic responsibility are being planned within parishes, schools, and other diocesan organizations. Conference staff is also available to assist with any questions about planning such activities.

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