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Andrew D. Rivas, J.D.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

As the November elections approach the Catholic Bishops of Texas encourage Catholics to exercise the important privilege and responsibility of citizenship by voting. The Catholic Church does not endorse specific candidates or political parties. However, we do uphold important principles outlined by the US Bishops conference in the document “Faithful Citizenship.” Faithful Citizenship includes the following issues to consider:

- 1. Protecting Human Life.** Our 1998 statement *Living the Gospel of Life* declares, “**Abortion and Euthanasia** have become preeminent threats to human life and dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental good and the condition for all others” (no. 5). **Abortion**, the deliberate killing of a human being before birth, is never morally acceptable and must always be opposed. **Cloning and destruction of human embryos** for research or even for potential cures are always wrong. The purposeful taking of human life by **assisted suicide and euthanasia** is not an act of mercy, but an unjustifiable assault on human life. **Genocide, torture, and the direct and intentional targeting of noncombatants in war or terrorist attacks** are always wrong.
- 2. Promoting Family Life.** The family is the basic cell of human society. The role, responsibilities, and needs of families should be central national priorities. **Marriage** must be defined, recognized, and protected as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman and as the source of the next generation and the protective haven for children. Policies on taxes, work, divorce, immigration, and welfare should help families stay together and should reward responsibility and sacrifice for children. **Wages** should allow workers to support their families, and public assistance should be available to help poor families to live in dignity. Such assistance should be provided in a manner that promotes eventual financial autonomy.
- 3. Pursuing Social Justice.** Economic decisions and institutions should be assessed according to whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person. Social and economic policies should foster the creation of **jobs for all who can work** with decent working conditions and **just wages**. Barriers to equal pay and employment for women and those facing unjust **discrimination must be overcome**. Catholic social teaching supports the **right of workers to choose whether to organize**, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal. It also affirms **economic freedom, initiative, and the right to private property**. Workers, owners, employers, and unions should work together to create decent jobs, build a more just economy, and advance the common good.
- 4. Practicing Global Solidarity.** A more just world will likely be a more peaceful world, a world less vulnerable to terrorism and other violence. The United States has the responsibility to take the lead in addressing the scandal of **poverty and underdevelopment**. Our nation should help to **humanize globalization**, addressing its negative consequences and spreading its benefits, especially among the world’s poor. The United States also has a unique opportunity to use its power in partnership with others to build a more just and peaceful world.

We ask you to use Christian principles to measure the various candidates and what they bring to the service of our government. We also ask that you consider the following rights and duties as a part of properly forming your conscience.

The Right And Duty To Vote. Catholics have the same rights and duties as other citizens, but are called to carry them out in light of the truth of faith and reason as taught by the Catholic Church. For example, they are called to respect human authority and obey those who govern society “for the Lord’s sake” (*1 Peter 2:13-17*).

The Duty To Form and Follow One’s Conscience. We bishops do not intend to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote. Our purpose is to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with God’s truth. We recognize that the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience, and that participation goes well beyond casting a vote in a particular election.

Avoiding Evil. There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called “intrinsically evil” actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia. In our nation, “abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others” (*Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 5). It is a mistake with grave moral consequences to treat the destruction of innocent human life merely as a matter of individual choice. A legal system that violates the basic right to life on the grounds of choice is fundamentally flawed.

Prudential Judgment. Decisions about political life are complex and require the exercise of a well formed conscience aided by prudence. This exercise of conscience begins with outright opposition to laws and other policies that violate human life or weaken its protection. Those who knowingly, willingly, and directly support public policies or legislation that undermine fundamental moral principles cooperate with evil...In making these decisions, it is essential for Catholics to be guided by a well-formed conscience that recognizes that all issues do not carry the same moral weight and that the moral obligation to oppose intrinsically evil acts has a special claim on our consciences and our actions. These decisions should take into account a candidate’s commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue. In the end, this is a decision to be made by each Catholic guided by a conscience formed by Catholic moral teaching.

As you prepare to exercise your freedom to vote, the Bishops encourage you to pray and reflect on these issues and duties presented in Faithful Citizenship. For more information, visit the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops web page on Faithful Citizenship at www.FaithfulCitizenship.org.

In Christ’s Peace,



Andrew Rivas
Executive Director