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BISHOPS' STATEMENT

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Statement of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts on the Election of 2004

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in their statement entitled "Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility" (Sept 13, 2003) said this: "One of our greatest blessings in the United States is our right and responsibility to participate in civic life." As members of the Bishops' Conference and as the bishops of this state, we strongly endorse this view and we commend the entire document of "Faithful Citizenship" to the Catholic community of Massachusetts. The civic responsibility of the right to vote creates a moral obligation to exercise this right as citizens. It also creates an obligation to participate in the electoral process with a well-formed conscience.

The Catholic moral and social tradition values the democratic political system. The Church seeks neither to act in the style of a political party nor to create a voting bloc. The role of the Church, while relevant to the political order, has its own distinctive contributions to make. The primary contribution is to make the content of our social and moral teaching available as a guide and resource for the formation of conscience of citizens. A second moral contribution we make to the society is to sponsor institutions for education, health and social service throughout our society.

We focus here on our teaching role as bishops; we address primarily the Catholic community, but we hope our views are useful to the wider public debate about issues, policies, platforms and parties. At the heart of Catholic social and moral teaching stands the dignity of every human person. The political, economic and legal order of society is tested by how human dignity is protected and promoted. A unique test of this responsibility is how the needs of the poor and vulnerable members of society are addressed. Human dignity is best protected while basic human rights and essential human needs are at the center of our political debates and decision making. The document "Faithful Citizenship" has an extended commentary on the issues which engage human dignity at the local, national and global levels of society. We endorse that broader agenda and select key elements from their statement for our four dioceses.

The Right to Life: This is the basic human right upon which all our rights are contingent. While the right to life must be protected and promoted throughout the spectrum of life, it is uniquely life in its beginning and its final stages, which confronts our society with its greatest challenge. As we have stated before, we must assert the basic moral conviction that every human life is sacred from conception to natural death. We must, therefore, oppose on both moral and legal grounds, abortion, assisted suicide and euthanasia. We also continue to oppose the death penalty as unnecessary in today's society. We appeal to all people of good will to reflect upon the centrality of these issues and to oppose these assaults on human life.

The Option for the Poor: A just society must attend to the welfare and needs of every citizen; this is what the common good requires. But in addition there should be a weighted, preferential attention to the most vulnerable numbers of our society. The social and economic needs of the poor constitute a moral demand on our conscience. While policies to meet these needs can and should be debated, the basic obligation for the society should not be obscured.

Marriage and the Family: The family is the basic unit of our social system; it sustains the welfare of its members and it is uniquely tied to the well being of children, physically, socially and morally. Social policy in our society should be designed to reinforce the economic, educational, and security needs of families. At the heart of the welfare of families stands the institution of marriage. As we have asserted often in the last year, we are deeply convinced that marriage should be protected by law and public policy as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman. Our understanding of the common good and natural law, which we share with others in society, together with our religious convictions, lead us to this conclusion. We believe it can be sustained as a moral argument based on right reason, which should undergird civil law in our state and our nation.

Healthcare and Housing: Both of these goods are rooted in fundamental rights of the human person. Denial of a basic level of healthcare and housing directly attacks the basic dignity of human life. Neither of these policy concerns is well protected in our society; hence they should be part of any well-conceived domestic policy nationally and in our state. These are not optional goods, but basic human needs.

The United States in the World: We live in a dangerous time and some of the dangers are unprecedented. U.S. policy must be directed to the security of this nation and its people. But it cannot be limited to this essential objective. Two moral qualifications are necessary: even in defense of life and nation, moral restraint on our objectives and our methods is obligatory. The U.S. role in the world is unique in terms of power, and its sense of obligation must extend beyond our own security and welfare.

Elections are about choices and choice involves moral judgment. Parties, policies and candidates should be measured conscientiously. To vote is to choose; to choose is to measure policies and people by moral vision.



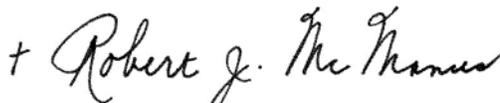
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