

Faithful Citizen

As the State & Federal elections draw near, the Social Justice Commission challenges you to ask yourself:

How does my faith influence my vote?

Catholic social teaching is an essential element of our faith. Its roots are in the Hebrew prophets who announced God's special love for the poor and called God's people to a covenant of love and justice. Our faith is built on a commitment to the poor.

A TIME TO ACT

Recently, the U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote a letter about faithful citizenship titled "Pastoral on Civic Responsibility". The letter reminds us that our commitment to social justice is at the core of who we are and what we believe. Our Bishops call us to be a community of conscience and to use the moral wisdom anchored in the Scriptures as we participate in the political process. Our moral framework does not fit easily into categories of left or right, Democrat or Republican. We are challenged to measure every party, politician, platform and policy by how it brings justice to all.

As Catholics, we are called to the following positions:

1. **Human Dignity and Respect for Human Life** – every human being is created in the image of God and redeemed by Christ and therefore is worthy of respect as a member of the human family. This means that you are valued *not for what you do or what you give*, simply ***being human*** gives you dignity. **This includes: People who are undocumented, poor, disabled, different than you, convicted of crimes (the Catholic Church OPPOSES the Death Penalty), elderly, young and from every country in the world!**

The sacredness of human life is a central part of our faith.

2. **Call to Family, Community and Participation** – Catholics believe that each person is not just sacred, but social. Our society must be organized in a way to allow each of us to grow in community. Community means ***meaningful participation in society***, especially in work. No one should be shut out from participating in community institutions or opportunities to work.
3. **Rights and Responsibilities (The Common Good)** --- just as we are born with the inherent right to dignity, we are also born with corresponding duties. This is why ***faithful citizenship*** is so necessary and important. We are called to make decisions that promote the **common good**, providing access for all to decent work and living standards, education, food and shelter and security. We are called to make decisions that aren't just about ourselves – remember Matthew 25: "when I was hungry, you fed me, when I was thirsty, you quenched my thirst..."

We are each baptized as Kings in God's Kingdom.

That means we must each make decisions that will promote the health, dignity and well being of every creature in the Kingdom.

4. **Preferential Option for the Poor** – our Catholic tradition calls us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

Christ turned all of our earthly values **upside down**.

As Catholics, we need to keep promoting that **upside down** way of thinking.

That means that when our government wants to cut taxes, we shouldn't go first to the Human Services Budget and cut spending for low-income housing, health care for poor people, food and nutrition programs for the poor, elderly and disabled. *Perhaps we shouldn't be supporting a tax cut that would allow us to have more money, if it means that someone else will have to suffer or go without essential needs.*

5. **Dignity of Work and Workers' Rights** – the economy must serve people, not the other way around. *Let me say that again, the economy should serve people; people shouldn't be sacrificed for the economy!* Surprised? God's message is that work is more than just a way to make money for a company or a government. Work is a sacred ritual of participation in God's act of creation.

- ✓ **Do you own shares in any company?**
- ✓ **Do you insist as a shareholder that the company pay its workers fairly?**
- ✓ **Do the workers have access to health care, safe working conditions, equality in the workplace?**
- ✓ **Do you shop at stores which buy manufactured goods overseas known for using sweat shop and child labor?**
- ✓ **Do you use your power as a consumer to call for change?**
- ✓ **Do you change your buying habits to encourage the merchant to change their policies?**

6. **Solidarity** – remember Cain and Abel? Am I my brother's keeper? YES!!! We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live in the world, whatever race, national origin, age, gender....we are ONE human family.

Solidarity also means *loving your neighbor* – all of your neighbors, in France and Liberia, Mexico and China, Iraq and Afghanistan, Bellevue and Yakima. We are an interdependent world and we all must act to make sure that each of us held with the love and dignity God gave to us all.

7. **God's Creatures Great and Small** – As Catholics we show respect for our Creator by respecting all that He created! Being good stewards of the earth is part of promoting the dignity of all humans. It also honors our call to promote the common good.

All of us (human and animal) need clean air, water and soil to breathe and survive. It is not ok to protect our own forests and streams but allow our companies to produce goods in poor countries without respecting their forests and air and water.

As participants in the economy, do we make good decisions about which companies we support based on how each company cares for the creation in Indonesia, or China, or Mexico or Washington State?

Please stay tuned from February through May to participate in the many activities the Social Justice Commission has planned to help us learn more about how to become Faithful Citizens. We look forward to deepening our journey together!