

A Call to Faithful Citizenship and Respect for Life

The Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania

October is Respect Life Month – a special time each year when we prayerfully reflect on how each person at every stage of life deserves dignity and respect, and when we remind ourselves of the need to protect the most vulnerable among us.

It is also a time when we must pause to give thanks to God for the freedom we enjoy as Americans and as citizens of Pennsylvania to participate in civic life. Recognizing our responsibility to promote the common good, we encourage our Catholic citizens, after they have formed their consciences in accord with right reason and Church teaching, to take the opportunity that our democracy affords them to influence the choices their government bodies will make in the future.

We encourage our Catholic people to read and study the document of our United States Conference of Catholic Bishops *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (available at www.faithfulcitizenship.org). This document provides a good overview of Catholic teaching on important issues affecting public policy in our nation and here in Pennsylvania, reminding us that the core of Catholic moral and social teaching is respect for the life and dignity of every human person.

We wish to reiterate that the intentional destruction of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia, is not just one issue among many. Time and time again, we bishops have taught that the right to life is the most basic and fundamental human right and must always be defended. Intrinsic evils can never be supported. Catholic teaching does not treat all issues as morally equivalent. The protection of human life from conception until natural death is the preeminent obligation of a truly just society.

The Catholic Church teaches a consistent ethic of life which includes important teaching also on issues of war and peace, economic justice, care of the needy and vulnerable, education, stewardship of the Lord's creation, etc. We have a moral obligation to defend human life and dignity, to protect the poor and the vulnerable, and to work for justice and peace. At the same time, however, we must never forget the words of our late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II. He wrote, "Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights – for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture – is false and illusory if *the right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination." (On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful, no. 38)

We encourage the Catholic citizens of Pennsylvania to study carefully the Church's teaching as they prepare for Election Day. We bishops do not endorse any candidate or party. Our role is to teach and form consciences. Above all else, we seek to ensure that the message of the Gospel is heard and upheld. Many of the issues facing our nation and our Commonwealth have important moral and ethical dimensions. We urge our Catholic faithful to be informed and guided by the moral truths of our faith and to exercise faithful citizenship.

May the Holy Spirit guide us with His manifold gifts! May God bless our nation and our Commonwealth with His abundant grace!