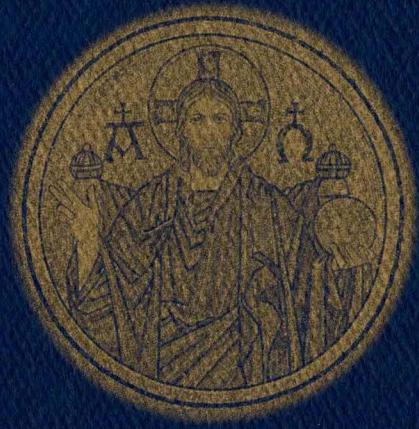
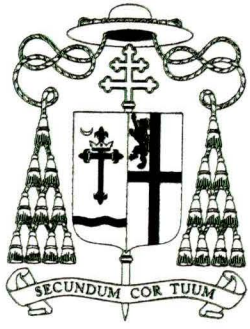


PASTORAL LETTER

On Our Civic Responsibility for the Common Good

A Pastoral Letter to Christ's Faithful
of
The Archdiocese of St. Louis

The Most Reverend Raymond L. Burke
Archbishop of St. Louis



On Our Civic Responsibility for the Common Good

ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

To Christ's Faithful of the Archdiocese of St. Louis:

On Our Civic Responsibility for the Common Good

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

INTRODUCTION

1. IN THE SUMMER OF 1982, I spent two months in Bavaria for the study of the German language, as part of my graduate studies in Canon Law. I offered Mass daily in the parish church, and got to know and respect very much the layman who cared for the sacristy of the church. Often, we visited after Mass and discussed spiritual matters.

2. One day, the sacristan opened his heart about the evils of Naziism. He was in his late teen years at the time of the rise of the Third Reich. The question which haunted him was how the people of his nation, how he, could have permitted such horrible evils to happen at all or to go on for so long. Some months ago, our conversation came to mind when another native of Germany, who grew up during the Third Reich, commented to me on the accusation, made against a number of the

Catholic Bishops of Germany of the time, of not having done enough to teach against the evils of Naziism.

3. These conversations, filled with much emotion, often return to my mind and lead me to reflect upon the responsibility which belongs to every citizen of a nation to safeguard and promote the common good. I think how much weightier the individual responsibility for the common good is in a democratic republic like our own nation, in which we elect the officials of our government. As a Bishop, I think of the tremendous responsibility, which is mine, to teach clearly the moral law to all the faithful, so that, in turn, we all have a clear understanding of our civic responsibility for the common good.

4. As your Archbishop, I write to you now regarding the fulfillment of our civic responsibility for the common good, especially by exercising our right and fulfilling our duty to vote, in order to choose those representatives who will best serve the common good in government.

I AM "MY BROTHER'S KEEPER"

5. **IN REFLECTING UPON** the sacristan's question, I call to mind the story of Cain and Abel from the *Book of Genesis* (*Gn* 4:1-16). After Cain had killed his brother Abel, our Lord came to him and inquired concerning the whereabouts of Abel. Cain replied: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (*Gn* 4:9).

6. Christ has supplied the definitive answer to Cain's question in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (*Lk* 10:25-37) and ultimately, on Calvary, by giving Himself up to death for the salvation of the world (*Jn* 3:14-15; and 12:31-33). Yes, we are our "brother's keeper." We are responsible for the good of all our brothers and sisters in our nation and in the world, without boundaries. The Good Samaritan gave every

possible care to the foreigner, a citizen of an enemy people, whom robbers had left along the roadside to die. His fellow countrymen, indeed religious leaders, saw him and "passed by on the other side" of the road, avoiding him and failing to help him. As followers of Christ, Who is The Good Samaritan, we can never excuse ourselves from responsibility when there is something to be done to save the life of a brother or sister in great need. We are called to be "Christians Without Borders," without boundaries to our love of neighbor.

7. The sacristan in Bavaria, conscious that he is his "brother's keeper," heard the Lord's question about the brutal killing of so many of his brothers and sisters. I ask myself what answer I will give our Lord when He asks me about my many innocent and defenseless brothers and sisters in the womb whose lives have been and are being snuffed out. How will I answer our Lord when He asks me about my brothers and sisters who have grown weak under the burden of advanced years, grave illness or special needs, whose so-called "mercy killing" has been made legal in some places and is proposed to be made legal everywhere in our nation? How will I answer our Lord when He asks me about what I, as Bishop, have done to teach the inviolability of human life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death?

8. Concerning the moral responsibility of voting, I, as the successor to the Apostles in your midst, write to present the Church's teaching regarding our civic responsibility to promote the common good, above all by promoting the respect for the inviolable dignity of all human life. Through a clear understanding of the Church's teaching, we should all be better prepared to exercise our responsibility, in accord with the Word of Christ, handed down to us faithfully in the Church. Our civic responsibility for the common good is great, especially in a society which fails to afford legal protection to the weakest and most defenseless. My responsibility, therefore, is likewise great to teach the moral law, in order to assist us in fulfilling our civic responsibility for the good of all.

BOND OF DIVINE CHARITY

9. OUR CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY to protect the common good is informed, first and foremost, by our life in Christ. We come to life in Christ through Baptism. From the moment of our baptism, the Holy Spirit begins to dwell within our soul. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we truly live each day in Christ. Through the Sacrament of Confirmation, God strengthens and increases the life of the Holy Spirit within us, in order that we may carry out more faithfully Christ's mission in the world, the mission of divine charity, of love of neighbor without boundaries. Through the Sacrament of Penance, God the Father receives the confession of our sins and forgives us, giving us grace to live more faithfully in Christ. Most wonderfully of all, God heals and strengthens us for the challenges of our daily life in Christ, our daily carrying out of Christ's mission, through our participation in the Holy Eucharist, in which He gives us the Heavenly Medicine and Food which is the true Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, His Incarnate Son.

10. Christ's life within us unites us in the bond of divine charity with all who have been sanctified by His grace, and directs us to love every human being as He has loved us (cf. *Jn* 13:34-35; and 15:12-17). We best understand this truth through our participation in the Holy Eucharist and our worship of the Blessed Sacrament reserved for our spiritual benefit after the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

11. Christ poured out His life on Calvary and never ceases to pour out His life for all, especially in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. He is The Good Samaritan. He is The Good Shepherd. He is the Divine Judge Who, at the Final Judgment, will pronounce this judgment upon us: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt* 25:40). One with Him, most perfectly in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, we are also one with Him in His care for the world, especially for our brothers and sisters who depend upon us, who are in need. The teaching of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council expresses eloquently Christ's care for the

world, His solidarity with all people of every time and place, and our real participation in that care and solidarity:

> The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men, of men who, united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men. That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes,* December 7, 1965, n. 1).

As followers of Christ, it is our joyful obligation to make of ourselves, by God's grace, instruments of divine charity, of God's love for all men and women, without boundaries.

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

12. THROUGH THE OUTPOURING of the Holy Spirit into our lives, we have become citizens of Heaven, heirs to the eternal life which Christ has won for us by His Passion, Death and Resurrection. Citizens of Heaven, we remain citizens of earth and of the particular nation in which we live. In fact, our heavenly citizenship requires our imitation of Christ Who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Mk* 10:45).

13. As citizens of both Heaven and earth, we are bound by the moral law to act with respect for the rights of others and to promote the common good. The Second

Vatican Ecumenical Council makes clear the responsibilities which are ours as citizens of the City of God and the city of man:

> The Council exhorts Christians, as citizens of both cities, to perform their duties faithfully in the spirit of the Gospel. It is a mistake to think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities; this is to forget that by our faith we are bound all the more to fulfill these responsibilities according to the vocation of each one. But it is no less mistaken to think that we may immerse ourselves in earthly activities as if these latter were utterly foreign to religion, and religion were nothing more than the fulfillment of acts of worship and the observance of a few moral obligations. One of the graver errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and the practice of their daily lives. As far back as the Old Testament the prophets vehemently denounced this scandal, and in the New Testament Christ Himself with greater force threatened it with severe punishment. Let there, then, be no such pernicious opposition between professional and social activity on the one hand and religious life on the other. The Christian who shirks his temporal duties shirks his duties towards his neighbor, neglects God Himself, and endangers his eternal salvation (*Gaudium et spes,* n. 43a).

Our heavenly citizenship adds the grace of Christ to the duty of our earthly citizenship, which is to preserve, safeguard and foster the common good. As citizens of Heaven, we have the grace of the divine charity of The Good Samaritan to inspire and strengthen us in loving all, without boundaries.

14. The secularism of our culture, with its tendency to an exaggerated individualism, can easily cause confusion regarding the relationship of our duties as Christians and citizens, as citizens of Heaven and citizens of earth. We can easily begin to view our Christian duty as a private matter without legitimate reference to our civic duty. The Word of Christ, however, calls us to the constant conversion of

our lives, by which we overcome any selfish individualism and live truly in Christ for love of God and our neighbor, also in fulfilling our civic responsibility.

CONSCIENCE, OUR GUIDE IN DIVINE CHARITY

15. GOD WHO HAS MADE US in His own image and likeness, making us His co-workers in the care of the world (*Gn* 1:26-30), and Who has redeemed us by the Precious Blood of His only-begotten Son (*Acts* 20:28), has inscribed within our hearts His law which gives life and overcomes death (*Dt* 30:11-20). Conscience is the voice of God within us, assisting us to choose good and to avoid evil, in accord with God's law. Our conscience helps us to choose what is true and not to fall prey to self-deception, the deception of others and Satan's deception, all of which would lead us to betray the truth about ourselves and our world. It is our conscience which leads us to choose a particular action, which judges the goodness or evil of the action as we carry it out, and helps us to assess the goodness or evil of the action, once it has been done (*Catechism of the Catholic Church,* nn. 1777-1778).

16. Because of the sacred nature of conscience, we must enjoy the right to act in accord with what our conscience dictates. We must be free to make a personal decision to do what is good and to avoid what is evil. The right to act in accord with our conscience, however, presupposes that our conscience is informed with the truth which God has inscribed in our heart and revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. We are obliged to inform our conscience with the knowledge of God's law, both the natural law inscribed in our hearts and the law revealed in God's Word taught with authority by the Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church,* nn. 1783-1785).

17. To the degree that our conscience is not informed by the divine truth, to that degree our conscience is liable to an erroneous judgment. There are times when we make a wrong moral judgment because of ignorance of the truth. Sometimes, we

are responsible for the ignorance because we have failed to seek out the truth or have dulled our conscience through repeated sin. Sometimes, we are not responsible for our ignorance. In any case, it is always our responsibility to inform our conscience with the truth, especially with the help of our teachers in the faith, the Holy Father, the Bishops in communion with the Holy Father, and our priests, co-workers with the Bishops (*Catechism of the Catholic Church,* nn. 1790-1794). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarizes well for us the means of forming a good conscience:

> In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path; we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church (n. 1785).

As Archbishop, I write to you now, in order to assist you in reflecting upon the Word of God and to know the authoritative teaching of the Church regarding the complex moral questions which our nation faces and which we all face in electing the leaders of our nation. I write now to assist you in informing your conscience as fully as possible, regarding your responsibilities as a citizen. I do not claim to be wise and can offer no wisdom of my own. What I give you is the wisdom of the Church, the wisdom of Christ.

COMMON GOOD AND HUMAN LIFE

18. WE ARE MORALLY BOUND in conscience to choose leaders at all levels of government, who will best serve the common good, "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (*Gaudium et spes,* n. 26a). "[T]he sum total of social

conditions" embraces a wide spectrum of concerns which the Catholic voter must have before his or her eyes, for example, safeguarding the right to life and the sanctity of marriage and the family; securing domestic and international peace; promoting education and public safety; assisting those suffering from poverty; providing sufficient and safe food, healthcare and adequate housing; eliminating racism and other forms of injustice; and fostering justice in the work place.

19. The "fulfillment" which the common good helps us to attain is not self-fulfillment in the popular sense. It is, rather, the fulfillment of God's plan and destiny for us and our world. It is the fulfillment of our high calling as sons and daughters of God in God the Son, co-workers with God in His care of the world and of our brothers and sisters.

20. In considering "the sum total of social conditions," there is, however, a certain order of priority, which must be followed. Conditions upon which other conditions depend must receive our first consideration. The first consideration must be given to the protection of human life itself, without which it makes no sense to consider other social conditions. "The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a *constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation*" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church,* n. 2273).

21. The safeguarding of human life is understandably foundational to all other precepts of the natural law. The Church's teaching, from her very first years, has underlined the particular gravity of taking the life of another, made in the image and likeness of God, except in the case of self-defense, that is, the legitimate defense of self or others (cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae,* "On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life," March 25, 1995, nn. 52-55).

22. Within the considerations for the protection of human life, the protection of the life of the innocent and defenseless, and of the weak and the burdened must have primacy of place. There can never be justification for directly and deliberately

taking the life of those who indeed are "the least" (*Mt* 25:45). Such an act is always evil in itself, intrinsically evil. Society, rather, is called to treasure its members who are weakest, in the eyes of the world.

23. For that reason, our Holy Father reminds us that "[a]mong all the crimes which can be committed against life, procured abortion has characteristics making it particularly serious and deplorable" (*Evangelium vitae,* n. 58a). In treating the evil of procured abortion, our Holy Father concludes:

> No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church (*Evangelium vitae,* n. 62d).

24. The Church's teaching on the intrinsic evil of procured abortion forbids the destruction of human beings from the moment of fertilization through every stage of their development. It is intrinsically evil to destroy human embryos, even for some intended good. Our Holy Father, referring to the Church's perennial teaching on the respect for human life, reminds us:

> This evaluation of the morality of abortion is to be applied also to the recent forms of *intervention on human embryos* which, although carried out for purposes legitimate in themselves, inevitably involve the killing of those embryos. This is the case with *experimentation on embryos,* which is becoming increasingly widespread in the field of biomedical research and is legally permitted in some countries.... [I]t must nonetheless be stated that the use of human embryos or fetuses as an object of experimentation constitutes a crime against their dignity as human beings who have a right to the same respect owed to a child once born, just as to every person (*Evangelium vitae,* n. 63a).

The Holy Father further reminds us that the solemn duty to protect human life extends also to "living human embryos and fetuses sometimes specifically

'produced' for this purpose by *in vitro* fertilization either to be used as 'biological material' or as *providers of organs or tissue for transplants* in the treatment of certain diseases" (*Evangelium vitae,* n. 63b).

25. Another intrinsic moral evil which seemingly is growing in acceptability in our society is euthanasia, "an action or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church,* n. 2277). Our thoroughly secularized society fails to understand the redemptive meaning of human suffering, while, at the same time, it views a human life burdened by advanced years, serious illness or specials needs as unworthy and too burdensome to sustain. The secularist response contradicts totally the response of Christ—and the response of the Church throughout the Christian centuries—Who treasures, above all, our brothers and sisters in most need and Who is the sign of God's merciful love to them.

26. It is important to distinguish euthanasia from: 1) the legitimate decision "to forego...medical procedures which no longer correspond to the real situation of the patient, either because they are by now disproportionate to any expected results or because they impose an excessive burden on the patient and his family"; and 2) the legitimate decision to use "various types of painkillers and sedatives for relieving the patient's pain when this involves risk of shortening life" (*Evangelium vitae,* n. 65b-c). Euthanasia, however, as our Holy Father has confirmed, is a grave violation of the natural and divine law, "since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person" (*Evangelium vitae,* n. 65d).

27. Another moral concern of our time touches both upon the inviolability of human life and upon the sanctity of marriage and the family, in which human life has its beginning and receives its first and most important education. The attempt to generate human life "without any connection with sexuality through 'twin fission,' cloning, or parthenogenesis" is a grave violation of the moral law (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and

on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day," *Donum vitae,* February 22, 1987, I, n. 6). Human cloning, for any reason, is "in opposition to the dignity both of human procreation and of the conjugal union" (*Donum vitae,* I, n. 6), inasmuch as it reduces procreation to a species of manufacture, and treats human life as a product of human artifice. So-called "reproductive cloning" is immoral on these grounds, as is what is euphemistically referred to as "therapeutic cloning." The latter also involves the actual destruction of cloned human beings.

28. Another moral concern touching upon marriage and the family, which is of particular urgency in our time, is the movement to recognize legally as a marriage a relationship between two persons of the same sex. Such legal recognition of a same-sex relationship undermines the truth about marriage, revealed in the natural law and the Holy Scriptures, namely that it is an exclusive and lifelong union of one man and one woman, which of its very nature cooperates with God in the creation of new human life (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons," July 31, 2003, nn. 2-4). Likewise, the legal recognition of a homosexual relationship as marriage redounds to the grave harm of the individuals involved, for it sanctions and even encourages gravely immoral acts.

29. Among the many "social conditions" which the Catholic must take into account in voting, the above serious moral issues must be given the first consideration. The Catholic voter must seek, above every other consideration, to protect the common good by opposing these practices which attack its very foundations. Thus, in weighing all of the social conditions which pertain to the common good, we must safeguard, before all else, the good of human life and the good of marriage and the family.

30. Some Catholics have suggested that a candidate's position on the death penalty and war are as important as his or her position on procured abortion and

same-sex "marriage." This, however, is not true. Procured abortion and homosexual acts are intrinsically evil, and, as such, can never be justified in any circumstance. Although war and capital punishment can rarely be justified, they are not intrinsically evil; neither practice includes the direct intention of killing innocent human beings. In some circumstances, self-defense and defense of the nation are not only rights, but responsibilities. Neither individuals nor governments can be denied the right of lawful defense in appropriate circumstances (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* nn. 2265 and 2309). While we must all work to eradicate the circumstances which could justify either practice, we must stop the killing of innocent unborn children and the practice of euthanasia, and safeguard marriage and the family now. One cannot justify a vote for a candidate who promotes intrinsically evil acts which erode the very foundation of the common good, such as abortion and same-sex "marriage," by appealing to that same candidate's opposition to war or capital punishment.

31. Some Catholics, too, have suggested that a candidate's position on other issues involving human rights are as important as his or her position on the right to life. Our Holy Father Pope John Paul II has reminded us that, in order to defend all human rights, we must first defend the right to life:

> The inviolability of the person which is a reflection of the absolute inviolability of God, finds its primary and fundamental expression in the *inviolability of human life.* 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" (Pope John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici,* "On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the Modern World," December 30, 1988, n. 38b).

In all of our considerations of candidates and their positions, the safeguarding of the inviolability of human life, in all stages of development, must be kept before our eyes.

VOTING AND THE COMMON GOOD

32. CONSIDERING ALL of the necessary social conditions to provide for the common good, among which the concerns regarding human life, and marriage and the family must have the first place, what guidance does the Church's teaching offer for the prudential decision of the Catholic in voting? What help does the Church's teaching offer to the Catholic voter who must consider the positions of each candidate for office to see which candidate, in his or her prudent judgment, will best promote the common good?

33. First of all, the Church teaches that we have an obligation, in justice, to vote, because the welfare of the community depends upon the persons elected and appointed to office. Secondly, we are morally obliged to vote for a worthy candidate. Depending on the importance of the office which the candidate seeks, careful consideration must be given to the principles and positions for which he or she stands. The *Baltimore Catechism* gives a good summary of the Church's teaching regarding the duty to vote, in its response to Question 246, "How does a citizen show a sincere interest in his country's welfare?":

> (a) Citizens should exercise the right to vote. This is a moral obligation when the common good of the state or the good of religion, especially in serious matters, can be promoted.
>
> (b) Citizens should vote for the candidates who in their judgment are best qualified to discharge the duties of public office. Mere personal gain or

> friendship does not justify one's voting for a candidate. It would be sinful to cast a ballot for one who, in the judgment of the voters, would do grave public harm (Rev. Francis J. Connell, C.Ss.R., ed., *The New Confraternity Edition: Revised Baltimore Catechism and Mass*, No. 3, New York: Benziger Brothers, 1949, p. 145).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in more summary fashion, reminds us: "Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one's country" (n. 2240).

34. If all candidates uphold the moral law in its integrity, especially with regard to the intrinsically evil acts considered above (nn. 21-29), then it is a question of voting for the candidate on the basis of his or her character, ability to lead, record and practical plans for attaining goods proposed. As Archbishop, I have no special competence in judging these more practical and technical questions about a candidate. After a study of the issues and with the help of civic discussion, a voter is prepared to make the prudential judgment about the most worthy candidate for each position.

35. If one candidate alone upholds the moral law in its integrity, then the decision to vote for him or her is clear. But, what does a Catholic do, if no candidate upholds the moral law in its integrity, that is, if all candidates hold some position which is in opposition to the moral law, as is so often the case in today's society? When all candidates for a particular office fail, in some regard, to support the moral law and thus foster the common good in its entirety, some Catholics simply decide not to vote at all. The decision not to vote at all, however, fails to take responsibility for any advancement of the common good, even if limited by some false positions taken by a candidate.

VOTING AS MATERIAL AND FORMAL COOPERATION IN ANOTHER'S SIN

36. BEYOND THE CATHOLIC VOTER'S RESPONSIBILITY to vote for a worthy candidate, some particular cases can involve other very serious moral considerations. Candidates and their parties, at times, advocate social policies and programs which are themselves gravely immoral or they endorse laws which permit intrinsically evil actions which are gravely unjust. The question arises, then: Is a choice to vote for a candidate who actively promotes grave injustices always sinful?

37. Certainly, it is never right to vote for a candidate in order to promote the immoral practices he or she endorses and supports. In such a case, the voter, who assists the candidate in fulfilling his or her agenda by getting into office, intends the same evil endorsed and promoted by the candidate. According to Catholic moral teaching, assisting another to achieve evil in this fashion is called formal cooperation, which is never morally permissible.

38. The Church, however, also recognizes that it is sometimes impossible to avoid all cooperation with evil, as may well be true in selecting a candidate for public office. In certain circumstances, it is morally permissible for a Catholic to vote for a candidate who supports some immoral practices while opposing other immoral practices. Catholic moral teaching refers to actions of this sort as material cooperation, which is morally permissible when certain conditions are met. With respect to the question of voting, these conditions include the following: 1) there is no viable candidate who supports the moral law in its full integrity; 2) the voter opposes the immoral practices espoused by the candidate, and votes for the candidate only because of his or her promotion of morally good practices; and 3) the voter avoids giving scandal by telling anyone, who may know for whom he or she has voted, that he or she did so to advance the morally good practices the candidate supports, while remaining opposed to the immoral practices the candidate endorses and promotes.

39. But, there is no element of the common good, no morally good practice, that a candidate may promote and to which a voter may be dedicated, which could justify voting for a candidate who also endorses and supports the deliberate killing of the innocent, abortion, embryonic stem-cell research, euthanasia, human cloning or the recognition of a same-sex relationship as legal marriage. These elements are so fundamental to the common good that they cannot be subordinated to any other cause, no matter how good.

40. When considering the deliberate killing of the innocent human being, it is helpful to remember the Golden Rule which applies in every moral decision: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1789). In terms of the Golden Rule, we must ask ourselves whether it is fair to our unborn brothers and sisters to help put someone in office who will not lift a finger to save their lives because we favor that candidate's position on healthcare reform, education, the death penalty or some other issue. If we were in their stage of human development, would we want them to make such a decision regarding us? The question is not peculiarly Catholic but derives from the natural moral law.

CANDIDATES WHO SUPPORT IMPERFECT LEGISLATION

41. **A CATHOLIC MAY VOTE** for a candidate who, while he supports an evil action, also supports the limitation of the evil involved, if there is no better candidate. For example, a candidate may support procured abortion in a limited number of cases but be opposed to it otherwise. In such a case, the Catholic who recognizes the immorality of all procured abortions may rightly vote for this candidate over another, more unsuitable candidate in an effort to limit the circumstances in which procured abortions would be considered legal. Here the intention of the Catholic voter, unable to find a viable candidate who would stop the evil of procured

abortion by making it illegal, is to reduce the number of abortions by limiting the circumstances in which it is legal. This is not a question of choosing the lesser evil, but of limiting all the evil one is able to limit at the time.

42. In *Evangelium vitae,* our Holy Father provides an example regarding the voting of a Catholic legislator, which may be helpful, by analogy, in understanding the action of a Catholic voter. He writes about the legislator who votes for legislation which limits the moral evil of procured abortion, even though it does not eliminate it totally. The Holy Father observes:

> [W]hen it is not possible to overturn or completely abrogate a pro-abortion law, an elected official, whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well known, could licitly support proposals aimed at *limiting the harm* done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality. This does not in fact represent an illicit cooperation with an unjust law, but rather a legitimate and proper attempt to limit its evil aspects (*Evangelium vitae,* n. 73c).

Thus, a Catholic who is clear in his or her opposition to the moral evil of procured abortion could vote for a candidate who supports the limitation of the legality of procured abortion, even though the candidate does not oppose all use of procured abortion, if the other candidate(s) do not support the limitation of the evil of procured abortion. Of course, the end in view for the Catholic must always be the total conformity of the civil law with the moral law, that is, ultimately the total elimination of the evil of procured abortion.

43. In such cases, would it be better not to vote at all? While I respect very much the sentiments of those who are so discouraged with the failure of our public leaders to promote the common good that they have decided not to vote at all, I must point out that the Catholic who chooses not to vote at all, when there is a viable candidate who will advance the common good, although not perfectly, fails to fulfill his or her moral duty, at least, in the limitation of a grave evil in society.

44. Clearly, the moral questions surrounding voting are complex for Catholics, especially in our totally secularized society. The teaching of the Church regarding our civic responsibility for the common good must be our guide in making prudent decisions. Only by prayer and good counsel will a Catholic voter be able to make a prudent decision regarding what best serves the common good.

CONCLUSION

45. **GOD OUR FATHER,** through the inner voice of our conscience, asks us each day about our brothers and sisters whose lives are being taken through abortion, embryonic stem-cell research and euthanasia. Through our conscience, he asks us, too, about our protection of the sanctity of marriage and the family, in accord with His divine law. We are our "brother's keeper." Our vocation and mission in life, a true share in the vocation and mission of Christ our Savior, is to love our neighbor without boundaries. In our democratic republic, one of the important ways in which we fulfill our civic responsibility for the common good is by electing government leaders who respect and uphold the moral law.

46. We, like the sacristan in Bavaria, must ask ourselves how it is possible that we have permitted a grave injustice to be perpetrated against an entire class of human beings by not legally protecting their lives. How is it possible that the grave evil of procured abortion has been legal in our nation for over 31 years, resulting in the deaths of over 40 million unborn children? How is it possible that so-called "mercy killing" is legal in some places in our nation? We must ask ourselves how it is possible that our nation may make the destruction of human embryos legal. We must ask ourselves how it is possible for our government to redefine the God-given gift of marriage, in opposition to the moral law. We must ask ourselves how it is possible for our nation to consider the legalization of human cloning which violates the dignity of human life and the sanctity of the marital union.

47. As Catholics, informed by the perennial moral teaching of the Church, we bear an especially heavy burden of responsibility for the attacks on human life and the family in our society. If all Catholics in our nation, both Catholic voters and Catholic government leaders, had joined those Catholics and others who upheld and continue to uphold the moral law, the grave evils which plague our society would be lessened and eventually eliminated. We cannot remain silent. We have a most serious obligation to bring the moral law to bear upon our life in society, so that the good of all will be served.

48. Recently, a devout Catholic, referring to a discussion over the current moral crises which our nation faces, which he had with friends at a social gathering, commented to me: "It is difficult to be a Catholic today." He had experienced ridicule for his positions regarding the common good and a most distasteful attack on the moral authority of the Church and her pastors. Yet, he acknowledged that he, as a sincere Catholic, had no other alternative than to defend the teachings of Christ as held and handed down by the Church. Let us all pray for the wisdom and courage to give a full account of the moral law, taught to us by the Church, to our fellow citizens, and to defend the moral law for the sake of the good of all our brothers and sisters, especially our "least" brothers and sisters, with whom our Lord identifies Himself.

49. In these difficult times for our nation, let us turn to the Mother of God, Our Lady of Guadalupe who visited our beloved continent in 1531. Her extraordinary appearances to Saint Juan Diego had, by her own declaration, one sole good in view. She asked that a sanctuary be built in her honor, in order that she might show to all the loving mercy of God toward them. Through her apparitions, through her maternal love and intercession, the pagan practice of human sacrifice was ended and a mutual respect between Native Americans and Europeans was fostered, flowering into the mestiza culture, making two races and peoples one. Let us beg God, through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, that He establish

in our hearts a renewed respect for all human life and help us to end the killing of the innocent and defenseless. Through the prayers of the Mother of God, may our voting promote respect for all human life, safeguard the sanctity of marriage and the family, and foster the good of all.

Through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, may God bless you and your homes, and may He bless our nation, safeguarding the good of all its citizens.

Given at St. Louis on the first day of October, the Memorial of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church, in the Year of the Lord 2004.

+Raymond L. Burke

(Most Rev.) Raymond L. Burke
Archbishop of St. Louis

Rev. Monsignor Richard F. Stika, V.G.
Chancellor