



The Challenge Of Faithful Citizenship

The 10th and final question from the American Bishops' letter to us entitled *The Challenge of Faithful Citizenship, A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, truly embodies the title of the letter itself, especially the word "challenge." The question is as follows:

- #10 How can we join with other nations to lead the world to greater respect for human life and dignity, religious freedom and democracy, economic justice, and care for God's creation?**

How does one even begin to discuss this responsibility? It seems that two very important words are contained in this question — join and lead. To join means to, among other things, "come together, so as to be connected or unified." To lead means "to guide by indicating the way." Are these two words not what Christianity is all about? We are called as Catholics in these very troubling times to be the beacon for others to follow.

However, the question asks specifically how we as Americans can join with other nations to come together, so as to be connected or unified, and to guide by indicating the way. In some sense this is even more difficult given that nations, all nations, always act out of their own self-interest. Is there a fundamental conflict between a nation's self-interest and the common good of all? Does the strong strain of individualism and competitiveness in the American culture militate against the common good? Is it always necessary to have winners and losers?

Just what is the common good? According to Pope Paul VI in *Mater et Magistra*, the common good is the "sum total of conditions of social living, whereby persons are enabled more fully and readily to achieve their own perfection." It extends to every person on the face of the earth.

As we approach our presidential election, may we as Catholic Americans examine this question very carefully. In the words of Fr. Jim Hug, SJ, President of Center of Concern, **"We have a responsibility to weigh the candidates' positions on all the life issues — from abortion and euthanasia to capital punishment, poverty eradication, human rights, and war, terrorism and security policies. We have a responsibility to vote for the candidates who will, on balance, within the limits of our best judgment, move our nation further in the direction of serving life both here in the U.S. and in every nation and every family around the world."**

--St. Bede Justice & Peace Ministry

For the complete text of the Bishops' statement, go to www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship