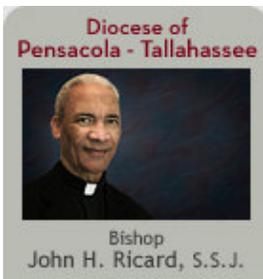


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February 26, 2009



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## Examine the moral dimensions of the issues before you vote

Statement of Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ, and the Council of Priests of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee regarding Faithful Citizenship.

Published: 10.23.08

In light of the approaching election to the presidency, the disquieting events which are shaping the nation’s economic landscape and the important ballot issues which are facing Florida voters, it is imperative that we examine the moral dimensions of these issues in light of our faith.

We look to our Christian faith to provide that moral compass to help us navigate through these unsettling waters. We begin by stating that we are pastors, not politicians, and that our focus is on the Christian Gospel, not a political party. Jesus teaches that we should seek first the kingdom of God and all things will be provided (Mt 6:33-34). By this he meant that we should view any enterprise, be it political or economic, within the context of Gospel values. The Gospel principles of respect for human life and human dignity, justice, peace, fairness, concern for one’s neighbor and for the all of God’s creation should shape our moral choices. These choices are reflective of the kingdom of God and every effort is to be made to bring them about. Once rightly ordered moral choices are made, God promises that all other things which make life worth living will be provided. So we judge every political choice and candidate based on how they reflect those values.

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The fundamental value on which all others rest is the protection and promotion of human life and human dignity. Human life must be respected in all stages of development, from the moment of conception to natural death. We judge this to be absolute: Nothing should be done in any way that would bring harm or attempt to destroy the child in the womb or hasten the death of a person who is sick, elderly or disabled through physician-assisted suicide. Likewise, we hold that embryonic stem-cell research destroys life at its inception. We likewise believe that given the ability to keep society safe, the state need not execute another human person despite their heinous crimes. A life sentence without any possibility of parole reflects more clearly in today's world the will of the Creator who alone has the power over life and death. We also believe that human life demands that the dignity of the human person should be promoted and that all that makes life worthwhile and meaningful should be provided, such as gainful employment, affordable health care and decent housing. Human life without that which enhances human dignity diminishes. We likewise decry all forms of discrimination. We advocate responsible immigration reform that does not criminalize those who are seeking better conditions for themselves and their families.

We live in an increasingly dangerous world. The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers, not just peacekeepers. Peacemaking requires that we create the environment that brings about peace by eliminating conditions of poverty and injustice, which are the root causes of war and civil conflict. War and its awful consequences bring about misery and unimagined human suffering and death, and take away all that makes life worth living. Therefore, we ought to judge each candidate and political platform in the light of how clearly they advocate justice and peace.

In Florida, we face an initiative on the ballot that affirms the definition of marriage as a union of one man and one woman. This understanding of marriage has prevailed in our tradition since the beginning and is at the heart of our human society's self-understanding. We believe that marriage understood in this way mirrors the intent of the Creator: "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27). We believe that this initiative affirms

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the intent of this amendment and urge its passage.

As followers of Jesus, we are called by our nation to be faithful citizens. Everyone who is eligible to vote should exercise that right and is obligated to do so. Everyone who votes should see voting as not just a political decision, but as a moral responsibility exercised for the hope that our vote offers to our families, communities and nation. May we demonstrate our commitment to the common good by voting in a thoughtful, informative and responsible manner!

Most Rev. John H. Ricard, SSJ, Bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee

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