

WORLD & NATION

U.S. bishops' voter guidelines call for 'new' politics

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Calling for "a new kind of politics" in the year 2000, the U.S. bishops' Administrative Board is urging Catholic voters to measure each candidate, policy and political platform by "whether they enhance or diminish human life, dignity and human rights."

The call comes in the latest version of what was formerly called the bishops' political responsibility statement. Released Oct. 20, the document for the year 2000 elections is called "Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium."

The 6,000-word document — about half the length of the political responsibility statement of four years ago — was unanimously approved in September by the U.S. Catholic Conference Administrative Board, the 50-member committee of bishops that conducts business between twice-yearly general meetings.

"The next millennium requires a new kind of politics, focused more on moral principles than on the latest polls, more on the needs of the poor and vulnerable than the contributions of the rich and powerful, more of the pursuit of the common good than the demands of special interests," the bishops said.

Although the document outlines Catholic positions on various issues, it does not endorse any specific candidate or party.

"As bishops, we do not seek the formation of a religious voting bloc, nor do we wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates," it says. "We hope that voters will examine the position of candidates on the full range of issues, as well as on

their personal integrity, philosophy and performance."

The Administrative Board said it is "not an easy time for faithful citizenship." It said Catholics must be "more than people who consistently participate in public life, but disciples who view these responsibilities through the eyes of faith and bring their moral convictions to their civic tasks and choices."

"We hope the campaigns and elections of the year 2000 become turning points in our democracy, leading to more participation and less cynicism, more civil dialogue on fundamental issues and less partisan posturing and attack ads," the bishops said.

The document offers 10 questions that Catholics and others should ask of candidates and themselves, from "How will we protect the weakest in our midst — innocent, unborn children?" to "Why does it seem that our nation is turning to violence to solve some of its most difficult problems — to abortion to deal with difficult pregnancies, to the death penalty to combat crime, to euthanasia and assisted suicide to deal with the burdens of age and illness?"

"We believe every candidate, policy, and political platform should be measured by how they touch the human person; whether they enhance or diminish human life, dignity and human rights; and how they advance the common good," the Administrative Board said.

Unlike the political responsibility statements, which listed important issues alphabetically, the new document groups "moral priorities" into four categories — protecting human life, promoting family life, pursuing social justice and practicing global solidarity.

The document said protecting human life involves opposing laws that legitimize abortion, assisted suicide or euthanasia; encouraging effective palliative care for the dying; speaking out against methods of war that target civilians or fail to distinguish between civilians and soldiers; supporting policies that promote peace and sustainable development for the world's poor, including an end to the use of land mines and ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; and abandoning use of the death penalty.

Issues cited by the bishops as promoting family life include the protection of marriage "as God intended it"; just wages; safeguarding parents' right to choose the education best suited to their children, without regard to cost; communications policy that balances "respect for freedom of speech with concern for the common good"; and vigorous enforcement of pornography laws in relation to material on the Internet.

"Tax, workplace, divorce and welfare policies must be designed to help families stay together and to reward responsibility and sacrifice for children," the document says.

Social justice priorities outlined by the bishops include "economic prosperity and justice, welfare reform, health care, housing, agricultural policy, education and discrimination."

"Any plan to reform the nation's health care system must be rooted in values that

respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the unique needs of the poor," the document says. "As part of our efforts to achieve fundamental health care reform, we will support measures to strengthen Medicare and Medicaid and work for incremental measures that extend health care coverage to children, pregnant women, workers, immigrants and other vulnerable populations."

On education, the bishops said it was a matter of justice to "ensure that our nation's young people, especially the poor and vulnerable, are properly prepared to be good citizens, to lead productive lives, and to be socially and morally responsible in the complicated and technologically advanced world of the 21st century."

The board urged parishes, dioceses, schools and other institutions to encourage active participation in the political process through nonpartisan voter registration efforts and candidate forums.



Reuters/CNS

Food police

Australian soldiers, and a man with a stick, try to control a crowd Oct. 18 at a food distribution center in Dili, East Timor. Thousands of refugees line up each day for food as residents whose homes were destroyed in militia violence await rebuilding.

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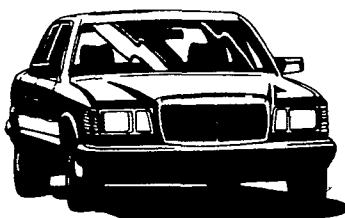
Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580) Vol.
111 No. 3, October 21, 1999

Published weekly except the last
Thursday in December.

Subscription rates: single copy, 75c; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, 716/328-4340. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

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