

Bishops offer voting guidelines

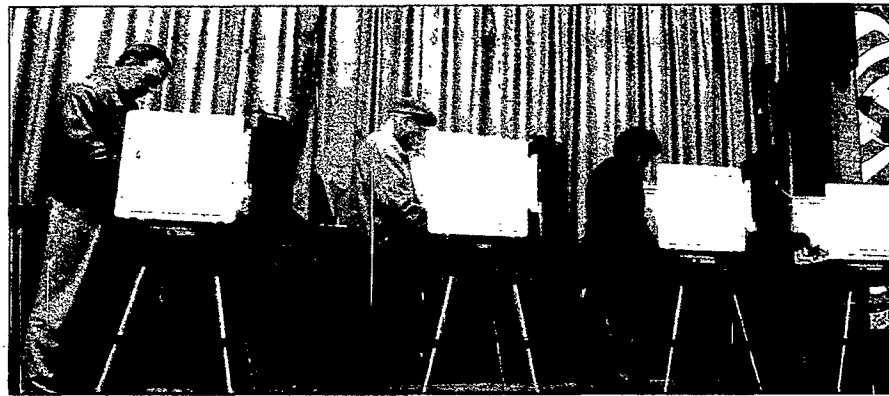
WASHINGTON (CNS) — As a new presidential election year begins, politicians of all ideological stripes have their eyes firmly fixed on the big prize.

But what do the U.S. Catholic bishops see as the necessary focus for the 2004 elections?

"As Catholics, the election and the policy choices that follow it call us to recommit ourselves to carry the values of the Gospel and church teaching into the public square," the bishops' Administrative Committee said in "Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility." The document is designed to offer a blueprint for electoral decisions based on Catholic social teaching.

The bishops hope the ideas in "Faithful Citizenship" will make new inroads at the parish level, reaching more Catholics in the pews through resource kits, workshops for priests and deacons and more local sponsorship of nonpartisan candidate forums and voter registration drives.

The resource kits' aim is to provide American Catholics with "a basic education about Catholic social teaching" so that voters may draw on those teachings in making decisions about particular candidates and policy positions, said Joan Rosenhauer, coordinator of the faithful citizen-



CNS file photo

U.S. voters cast their ballots in a 2002 election. The U.S. bishops have released "Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility," which is a blueprint for electoral decisions based on Catholic social teaching.

ship program for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"Faithful Citizenship" reviews the basic themes of Catholic social teaching — life and dignity of the human person; call to family, community and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable; dignity of work and the rights of workers; solidarity; and caring for God's creation — then looks at some specific policy decisions facing the United States today.

The bishops condemn abortion, euthanasia, cloning, the death penalty and the intentional targeting of civil-

ians in war or terrorist attacks. They call for the protection of marriage as a lifelong commitment of a man and a woman, a living wage, affordable health care and increased child tax credits that are fully refundable.

The document urges more generous U.S. policies toward immigrants and refugees; action to reverse the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons; "consistent political and financial support" for the United Nations and other international bodies; and efforts to "humanize globalization" and address its negative consequences.

POLITICS

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their moral beliefs about marriage might have cut him some slack on the topic if he also hadn't tried a theological explanation.

"From a religious point of view, if God had thought homosexuality is a sin, he would not have created gay people," Dean said.

He acknowledged he's new at discussing religious beliefs. Otherwise maybe he'd have thought about how he'd apply that same test to murder or bank robbery. Would God not consider those to be sins because he created the people who commit them?

Meanwhile, the other major Democratic candidates also are trying to show their religious sides in various forums.

Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry and Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich were raised Catholic. Retired Gen. Wesley Clark became a Catholic after being raised as a Baptist, but usually attends a Presbyterian church.

The other leading Democrats include North Carolina Sen. John Edwards, a Methodist, and the Rev. Al Sharpton, a Pentecostal minister.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Web site www.beliefnet.com keeps a running summary of the candidates' comments about God, faith and religious rights.

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