

We are called to help candidates keep their promises:

The 2006 election cycle is nearly over. Soon the signs will come down, the advertising will disappear from the airways, the letters to the editors will refocus on potholes, and our newly elected will prepare for the daunting responsibility they have been given

For now the political ads continue to play, and unfortunately the mix of partial truth and truth reinforces the belief that, "It doesn't matter who we elect. So, why should I vote?"

I vote because I truly believe that it does matter who we elect and I believe that my vote counts, as does yours.

But who do we vote for when no candidate represents all of our beliefs?

The US Catholic Conference of Bishops have developed priorities to guide voters based on the themes of Catholic Social Teaching. The top three priorities are:

- 1) Protecting Human Life
- 2) Promoting Family Life
- 3) Pursuing Social Justice

Protecting Human Life: As Catholics we are called to respect all life from conception to natural death. The phrase seems time worn, and abused. But protecting human life remains the core of our Catholic beliefs. Without life, no other issue has significance. We don't need good schools for children who are never born. We don't need good health care for those we euthanize. We don't need secure prisons for those we execute. Where are our candidates on these issues? We need to ask, and we should demand answers. If candidates are elusive, we do as Bishop Thomas stated in a recent article, "We do well to pay attention when candidates receive endorsements from individuals or groups who hold positions inimical to Catholic social teaching on human life, e.g. Planned Parenthood, NARAL, the Hemlock Society, etc."

Promoting Family Life: Families are the core of society, and the church. Therefore it is essential to the health of our society for marriage to be strengthened and supported. Marriage is to be "protected as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman."¹ In addition policies related to health care, education, wages, housing, and taxes must be designed to support families.

Pursuing Social Justice: Matthew 25 reminds us that unless we care for "those the least among us," we are not living our faith. Catholics are called to have a special concern for the poor and vulnerable in our society.

Our call goes beyond providing for basic needs, because the poor do not have equal access to quality education, quality health care, and other services such as equal representation in our courts. We have to change systems that intentionally or unintentionally prolong these inequalities. For example, I recently watched our justice system commit a lady I know to four years in prison for two minor probation violations. While on probation, she achieved a four point in college, while working full time, and raising a family. She did not drink, do drugs, or re-offend, not even a traffic ticket. The stated reason was the court, "could not get

her attention.” What got my attention, besides the injustice of the sentence, was the \$20,000 per year it will cost to incarcerate her. Will this lesson she is to learn cost low income children an education? Will the \$20,000 per year reduce the amount available for mental health care, or children’s health insurance?

Candidates should have a comprehensive vision of how to offer a hand up to those the least among us. They should support efforts that build self esteem, and provide tools needed to lift families from poverty. The drug courts in Bozeman under the direction of Judge Mike Salvani, do this very thing, and do it very well.

So often we vote for candidates based on party affiliation, a single issue, or television commercials. As Catholics, our call to public responsibility goes beyond that. We need to become informed and stay involved. Our vote tells the candidates we believe their promises. Then as informed and educated voters, we must do our best to hold the winners accountable for the promises they made.

1 Administrative Committee of the USCCB, 2003, P20