

Election Year Statement from the Catholic Bishops of Minnesota



Catholics are called to be faithful citizens and to infuse public life with the values necessary to protect human dignity, combat injustice, and promote the common good. Because of this duty, it is necessary that we, your pastors, reflect with you on the state of our public life and the choices Minnesotans face as we go to the polls in a year in which all state legislative and executive officers are up for election.

Right relationships

The task of politics is to foster justice and the common good. Despite our many differences, pursuing justice is a cornerstone political value shared by almost all Americans. In Catholic social doctrine, working for justice requires establishing right relationships between persons, where each is given his or her due. Justice requires that all parties embrace certain responsibilities toward each other.

Paraphrasing Pope St. Paul VI, if we want peace, we must work for justice.

There are different types of justice. Commutative justice requires justice in commercial exchange. Distributive justice requires, among other things, that each person and family have access to the material resources they need not just to survive, but also to flourish. Economic justice means building an economic order on right relationships that foster both distributive and commutative justice. Social justice requires creating those conditions for all social actors, including schools, faith communities, and the government, to fulfill their social responsibilities.

Criminal justice should be built on criminals taking responsibility for the injustice perpetrated on victims, and society working through the penal system to rehabilitate and then restore offenders to the community. Other types of justice include racial justice, environmental justice, and legal justice.

When there is injustice in society, that is, when society fails to establish right relationships, the state can step in to help right what is wrong and to repair, in some measure, what is broken. That is a task of prudence, which is why it is important to carefully choose our elected leaders who, often at great sacrifice, take on the responsibility of making those decisions. They should be wise and virtuous. And voters, informed by Catholic social doctrine, should consider how candidates will work for the various types of justice across a spectrum of issues, including education, public safety, tax policy, migration, creation stewardship, and healthcare.

This year, in a special way, we call on Catholics to consider how a candidate will work for prenatal justice as a pre-eminent consideration in his or her voting calculus. Prenatal justice is not simply being anti-abortion, though that is the foundation of the pro-life witness. Prenatal justice means establishing right relationships between the mother and the unborn child in her womb, between society and the unborn child, and between society and the mother and father of the unborn child. As life begins in the womb, so must justice. As we discuss below, there are responsibilities entailed by each set of relationships and good public policies that follow.

Fostering prenatal justice

The recent Dobbs decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, declaring that there is no right to an abortion protected by the U.S. Constitution, has returned the matter of abortion to the political process for deliberation.

Will states allow the continued killing of innocent human life? What are our responsibilities to the child and the mother? How do we foster right relationships between them and the broader society for the common good? These are questions elected officials must answer as they work to foster prenatal justice.

It would be a dereliction of duty for us as bishops to pretend as though the abortion question was not a focus of Minnesota's election discourse this year, especially as Dobbs has changed the abortion landscape in this nation. And as Pope Francis teaches, we cannot stay silent when nearly a million unborn lives are being cast aside in our country year after year through abortion.[1]

Right now in Minnesota, the situation is troubling: in spite of the fact that scientific inquiry has definitively determined that human life begins at conception[2], a woman can procure an abortion for almost any reason at any stage of pregnancy up till birth. To put this in perspective, in 2021 there were 222 abortions involving babies older than 20 weeks. Almost half of all abortions are paid for with taxpayer funds. Our laws allow an 11-year-old girl to get an abortion without even one parent knowing. There is no requirement in force that a licensed physician perform an abortion. And abortion proponents, including elected officials, are working proactively to shut down pregnancy resource centers.

Fostering right relationships requires that we determine what we, as a society, owe the unborn child in the womb. At minimum, that is the right an innocent human being has to life, as well as the protection of the law from being killed. It also requires welcoming the child into the world.

Part of that welcome is establishing right relationships between mother, father, and child. We must encourage marriage and family stability, and clarify that abortion is not about bodily autonomy and freedom, but about the life of another human being for whom the father and mother are responsible.[3]

It follows that if we are intent on protecting innocent children from abortion, and ensuring that parents meet their obligations, then, as a society, we must step in to ensure that mothers and fathers are supported when necessary due to economic hardship.[4] This means, among other things, policies that fund: nutritional supports for expectant mothers; adequate healthcare coverage during and after pregnancy for both mother and child; childcare assistance; housing supports; early learning assistance programs; and parenting education. Enacting paid family and caregiver leave laws would help people retain work and care for their newborns. Reconsidering whether our adoption policies are unreasonably burdened by excessive costs or barriers to participation is an imperative. We also need to continue to support pregnancy resource centers through programs such as the Positive Alternatives grants that help them walk with women in need during crisis pregnancies.

