

Bishops ask: Apply Common Good test

“We encourage Catholics to look beyond their own individual needs and apply a different test at the ballot box – the test of the common good.

“Catholic tradition holds that the common good is underpinned by the promotion and protection of human dignity.

“Implicit in seeking the common good is the desire to serve the poor, the marginalised, the sick and the forgotten in our society.

“At a time when some argue that religious faith should be removed from politics altogether, we urge Catholics to take their democratic freedoms seriously and become involved in the political process.

“For some, this will also mean making informed ethical choices at the ballot box. For others, it might mean standing for election. We acknowledge and encourage the many Catholic people who are already engaged in political life at various levels.”

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference,
“A Vote for Us All,” August 2007
www.acbc.catholic.org.au

Federal Election 2007

Vote for the Common Good



Information prepared and published by:
ADELAIDE CATHOLIC JUSTICE & PEACE COMMISSION
— a Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide, appointed by the Archbishop of Adelaide, Most Rev. Philip Wilson, DD, JCL.

Published with the assistance of the Knights of the Southern Cross (SA) Inc.

Authorised by: Ms Angela Hazebroek, (Chair)
Adelaide Catholic Justice & Peace Commission
39 Wakefield St, Adelaide. SA. 5000.
Tel. (08) 8210 8172 www.adelaide.catholic.org.au

The Church and Politics

Living in a democracy brings a challenge to all citizens to be active in political life.

In the lead up to another Federal Election, we offer this statement which encourages electors to ask: ‘How will my vote promote the Common Good?’

How will my vote promote the Common Good?

The Church is not in the business of telling people how they should vote. It does not endorse any political party or candidate.

Each of us must decide for ourselves which political options will best promote the Common Good.

Rather, as a contribution to the democratic process, it draws upon a rich religious tradition to help electors judge policies by how they promote human dignity, human rights, and the good of all.

It hopes to encourage people to take their democratic freedoms seriously, and to consider their vote in the light not only of their personal interests, but of wider concerns as well.

This leaflet has been prepared to assist you to assess the merits of the candidates and policies at the coming Federal election.

It presents some basic principles drawn from the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church, and suggests a framework reflecting some of these wider concerns.

Based on this framework, we ask about candidates and the policies they put forward:

- ***How do they promote the Common Good?***
- ***How do they respect human life and promote the dignity and rights of all people?***
- ***How do they protect the poor and the vulnerable?***
- ***How do they care for the environment and respect future generations?***

Key Principles from Catholic Social Teaching

Purpose of Government

The purpose of government is the promotion of the Common Good.

The Australian Bishops explain it this way: *“Individuals and groups within society have an obligation to pursue not only their own interests but the good of all.*

The governing and administrative bodies of a society are obliged to safeguard and promote the common good, as well as the good of the society’s component parts. The alternative is for the society to become fractured and to splinter into antagonistic segments.”

(Australian Catholic Bishops, *Common Wealth for the Common Good*, 1992.)

We therefore ask: *How do policies promote the Common Good?*

Human Life and Dignity

“Respect for life and the fostering of the inherent dignity of the person underpins what it is to be human.

All human life is to be respected, particularly the most vulnerable, including the unborn, the sick and elderly, people with disability, and communities ravaged by poverty, abuse, famine or war.”
(Australian Catholic Bishops, *“A Vote for Us All,”* August 2007)

The most vulnerable are our greatest responsibility

We therefore ask: *How do policies respect human life and promote the dignity of all people?*

Standing with the poor

Christians are required by the Gospel to make a deliberate choice to be on the side of the poor.

This involves a willingness to stand side by side with those in poverty and other victims of injustice, to see the world through their eyes, to be willing to learn from them, and to treat them as equals and not as objects of one’s pity.
(Australian Catholic Bishops, *A New Beginning*, 1996)

“Christ’s compassion was directed primarily to the poor, the sick and the downtrodden, and any society is judged by how the weakest and poorest of its members are treated.

The most vulnerable are our greatest responsibility.”
(Australian Catholic Bishops, *Having Faith in Our Democracy*, 2004)

We therefore ask: *How do policies protect the poor and vulnerable?*

Caring for the Earth

“The ecological crisis is a moral issue ... Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation.” (Pope John Paul II, *Message for World Day of Peace*, 1990)

“Care for the environment is intimately linked to the well-being of Australia. The effects of climatic extremes and natural disasters are seen across the continent.

Policies which deal equitably and effectively with land salination, the degradation of rivers, fair distribution of water, global warming and prudent management of fragile ecosystems are part of caring for God’s created world.”
(Australian Catholic Bishops, *Having Faith in Our Democracy*, 2004)

We therefore ask: *How do policies care for the environment and respect future generations?*

Some Questions for the Campaign ...

Australia’s Role as a Global Citizen

- What will you do to honour our nation’s pledge to meet the Millennium Development Goals, and to increase Australia’s overseas aid from its current low level to the agreed target of 0.7% of GNI by 2015?
- How will you alter current policies on refugees and asylum seekers to ensure respect for the human rights of all who come to our country seeking protection?

Indigenous Australians

- What will you do to address the 17-year gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians?
- How will you work with Aboriginal communities to address the root causes of social problems through provision of guaranteed, adequate, and long-term resources for health, education, housing and economic development?
- What will you do to address past injustices and to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians?

Environment and Energy Policy

- What positive measures will you take in the life of the next Parliament to support the development of sustainable sources of energy and to replace our dependence on fossil fuels?
- What will you do to restore environmental flows to the major rivers of the Murray-Darling Basin and develop alternative sources of water for urban and rural communities?
- Will you support Australia ratifying the Kyoto protocol and other multilateral agreements to address global climate change?

Education

- How will you promote and support the healthy development of babies and young children, through measures including:
 - provision of adequate paid maternity leave,
 - a focus on early intervention programs, and
 - ensuring access for all to affordable, high-quality childcare?
- What levels of Commonwealth funding will you provide to support education in all its dimensions to achieve the best learning outcomes and well-being for all Australians?