



CACG Voter Guide: The Common Good in America Today

*“Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36- 40...For the Church, instructed by the Gospel, charity is everything because, as Saint John teaches (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16) and as I recalled in my first *Encyclical Letter*, “God is love” (*Deus Caritas Est*): everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it. Love is God's greatest gift to humanity, it is his promise and our hope.)”*

-Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, #2.

Thus does Pope Benedict XVI root the social teachings of the Catholic Church not only in the Church's understanding of the vocation of humankind, but also in the very nature of God. God is love. Humankind is created in love and created for love, and it is this disposition to love that must shape all of our human relations – personal, political, economic and social – if we are to conform ourselves to Jesus Christ. This love, when expressed in our political life, must define and seek the Common Good, a Common Good that respects and defends the dignity of all, champions the poor and the vulnerable, defends the environment from exploitation, and recognizes, as President John F. Kennedy stated, that “here on earth God's work must truly be our own.”

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good dedicates itself to Pope Benedict's vision with all our heart and mind.

Pope Benedict's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* is only the latest of a long line of papal social encyclicals that date back to Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, issued in 1891. “[I]t has come to pass that working men have been surrendered, isolated and helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition,” wrote Leo. This concern for justice also found in expression in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. “At the very time when the development of economic life could mitigate social inequalities (provided that it be guided and coordinated in a reasonable and human way), it is often made to embitter them; or, in some places, it even results in a decline of the social status of the underprivileged and in contempt for the poor,” states *Gaudium et Spes*.

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good dedicates itself to this long tradition of Catholic social teaching as the foundation for all we say and do.

In our country, a long series of social and political achievements give testimony to the thirst for justice and human dignity that are at the core of the Church's social teaching. From the creation of Social Security and unemployment insurance during the New Deal, to the establishment of Medicare and Medicaid to provide health care to the elderly and the poor, our government has taken steps in the direction of greater social justice. The growth of organized labor in the first half of the twentieth century not only protected the rights of workers,

but helped raise the living standards of the entire society. The passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act guaranteed that no Americans be denied their rights as citizens to equitable treatment before the law. Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good celebrates these national achievements and devotes itself to defending them.

Sadly, in America today, our nation's political, social and economic debate has been assaulted in recent years by a different understanding of the human vocation, one in which there is no room for Christ and no room for Christian love. This different understanding, exemplified by the Tea Party, is rooted in explicitly anti-Christian teachings, it celebrates a hyper-individualism that specifically denies the possibility of a Common Good, and is dedicated to a form of social Darwinism in which the poor and vulnerable are despised and only the achievements and wealth of the strong merit political protection. In order to protect exorbitant tax cuts for the super-rich, some advocate terminating social programs that promote the poor and middle class, both at home and abroad, often in ways that are profoundly anti-life. Many have sought to deny the basic rights of workers to organize and collectively bargain. In the strongest possible terms, we denounce this new ideology as un-Christian, un-Catholic, and, indeed, as a perversion of America's own best traditions.

The election of 2012 will be a choice between competing visions for America's future. No candidate and no party completely adhere to the vision of Pope Benedict XVI. Ours is a pluralistic society in which many do not share our Catholic values. It is our hope that the essential beauty of Pope Benedict's vision, and the humane values of Catholic social teaching, will appeal to all men and women of goodwill. We bring that vision and those values into the public square because they animate us in all we do, privately and publicly. We invite our fellow Catholics to consider carefully how candidates do, and do not, embrace that vision and those values and to make prudential judgments about which candidates are best able to achieve political results that reflect Christian love. We offer this voter guide to help inform our fellow Catholics about their specifically political vocation as Catholic Christians in the United States.

Let us say at the outset: We do not in any way wish to claim for ourselves the right to speak for the Catholic Church, nor for all Catholics. Instead, we offer this voter guide to show how we apply the teachings of our Church to the problems of our day. We here seek to take up the call issued by the U.S. bishops in their document "Faithful Citizenship" to form our consciences, guided by the Church's teaching, examining the issues we face, and reaching informed, conscientious decisions about the issues we hold dear, as Catholics and as Americans.

THE COMMON GOOD

"To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of "all of us", made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society....The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them."
- Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, # 7

Part of the American national character has been described aptly as a rugged individualism, born of our experience as a frontier nation, first for the pilgrims and early colonists and later as the nation expanded across

the continent. But, alongside that individualism there has always been another strain in the national character, a concern for each other, a desire to “promote the general Welfare,” as the Constitution puts it, and, in more biblical terms, a belief that we are our brother’s keeper. Today, America faces many challenges but solutions that deny the possibility of discerning the Common Good, or which undervalue the importance of the Common Good, are deficient. If the economy falters, we all suffer. If the gap between the very rich and the very poor continues to grow, the stability of our entire society is threatened. If we extend rights and opportunities to some but neglect others, our sense of common national purpose is fractured. If we prosecute wars, but the only ones paying for them are our brave men and women in uniform, our sense of social solidarity is diminished. And, if the rights of minorities and immigrants are trampled upon, the rights of all are endangered.

As we consider specific political issues in this voter guide, we do so through the lens of the Common Good. In keeping with traditional Catholic social teaching, the Common Good involves the good of all, it leaves no one behind. The Common Good demands justice for each and for all and respects the dignity of every human person. The Common Good speaks to “the better angels of our nature,” and spurns those sins of selfishness and pride that afflict the human heart and frustrate our common endeavors as one people, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

THE ECONOMY

“The moral measure of this budget debate is not which party wins or which powerful interests prevail, but rather how those who are jobless, hungry, homeless or poor are treated. Their voices are too often missing in these debates, but they have the most compelling moral claim on our consciences and our common resources.”

-USCCB Letter to Members of Congress, July 26, 2011

The key economic issue facing the country today is the unconscionably high rate of unemployment. The fact that millions of our fellow citizens are without work not only harms the long-term fiscal health of the federal government by reducing revenues and increasing the cost of unemployment insurance, unemployment also exacts an enormous human toll on our society. When people lose their jobs, they often lose their family’s health insurance also. Parents who cannot provide for their children are beset not only by bills but by depression. College age students, unable to afford tuition, must postpone college, deferring their dreams and facing uncertain job prospects. Seniors who live on fixed incomes must often choose between heating their homes or buying their groceries.

This depressing economic picture, however, does not extend to all Americans. Large corporations continue to rack up record profits. Hedge fund managers, able to manipulate the tax code, pay a lower tax rate than their secretaries or the people who mow their lawn. In 1980, the wealthiest one percent of Americans garnered ten percent of the national income but today that same top one percent receives twenty-one percent of national income.

In this great rich country of ours, it is a scandal that instead of focusing on jobs, the political class seems focused on budget cuts that will only further constrict economic growth and result in layoffs of those who provide vital services such as police, fire and EMT personnel and teachers. It is appalling that cuts in social programs that help the poor are being cut while the super-rich are not asked to contribute in the least to closing the deficit. It is criminal that Congress entertains the idea of cutting Medicare, or raising the retirement age, but refuses to close tax loopholes that benefit the wealthiest Americans and the largest, most profitable corporations.

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We at Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good have been especially disheartened to find some of our fellow Catholics defending the Tea Party approach to governance. They invoke subsidiarity to justify cuts on the federal budget without proposing state and local programs in their stead. They defend an idolatrous worship of the unregulated market, contrary to the lessons of history and the instructions from our bishops. We understand that Catholics can disagree on prudential issues, but we believe it is impossible to reconcile the Tea Party agenda with Catholic social teaching theoretically or practically.

We support the stance our bishops have advocated repeatedly during the past year of budget negotiations. We believe the moral measure of any budget must be the measure supplied by Jesus Himself: “Whatever you do for these the least of my brethren, you do for me.” (Mt 25)

PRO-LIFE ISSUES

“To our fellow Catholics, we ask you to do even more for life. Reach out to women who are pregnant and in need of help, to families struggling with financial or emotional difficulties. Stand by those who wish to choose life with the witness of solidarity, hope, and service. Catholic families should be living symbols of our conviction that life is always, always a gift from God.”

-USCCB Statement “Light and Shadows” on the 25th Anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*

The inviolable dignity of each and every human person, especially those who are vulnerable, is a foundational concern for Catholics. That dignity becomes meaningless unless human life is protected, both in our laws and in our culture. Indeed, as Americans, we believe, as our Declaration of Independence states, that the very purpose of government is to secure “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” We at Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good stand four-square in defense of any and all threats to human life.

Today, human life is threatened by abortion, war, euthanasia, and poverty. We believe that these threats are related. A culture that considers abortion an acceptable response to a difficult and unwanted pregnancy is a culture that is unprepared to defend the rights of the elderly and the infirm to medical care. A government that ignores the cries of the poor is a government that will fail to consider the horrific human cost of war. A society that does not take steps to support women facing crisis pregnancies is a society that will fail to support children who are born into poverty.

We at Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good understand that many of our fellow Americans do not recognize the dignity of unborn life. Consequently, they believe that legal efforts to protect the unborn represent an illegitimate form of coercion, limiting the rights of women who find themselves in very difficult circumstances. We believe that our political culture must address the needs of both mother and child, and we support programs that provide economic and other forms of assistance to women facing an unwanted pregnancy as well as the right of each and every child to be born. Creating a “culture of life” as Blessed Pope John Paul II called us to do, will require Christian witness and we embrace that call.

We believe that only by defending all threats to human life will Catholics be able to credibly make the case for a “culture of life.” A person whom we persuade to respect the rights of immigrants is a person more likely to understand our concern for the unborn. Those who share our commitment to the unborn must be challenged to embrace programs that provide affordable health care to the elderly. Those who rightly mourn the loss of life in war must come to extend their concern to those who live in poverty.

WORKERS' RIGHTS

“In order to achieve social justice in the various parts of the world, in the various countries, and in the relationships between them, there is a need for ever new movements of solidarity of the workers and with the workers. This solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by the social degrading of the subject of work, by exploitation of the workers, and by the growing areas of poverty and even hunger. The Church is firmly committed to this cause, for she considers it her mission, her service, a proof of her fidelity to Christ, so that she can truly be the ‘Church of the poor’.”

-Blessed Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, #8

One of the most morally shocking contemporary political developments has been the assault on workers' rights in several states. Faced with budget shortfalls, some state legislatures and governors have not only sought to restrict wage increases, benefits and pensions, but have stripped workers of the right to organize and collectively bargain with their employers. To be clear, the Catholic Church has explicitly affirmed the rights of workers to organize themselves into unions and to collective bargaining since 1891.

Unions are exemplary expressions of two of the core principles of Catholic social teaching: subsidiarity and solidarity. Subsidiarity specifically commends the establishment of intermediate social groups between the individual and the state. Solidarity, with which subsidiarity must always be paired, is an obvious function of organized labor, uniting workers with each other. And, historically, unions have served the Common Good by helping to raise wages for all workers, not just those who belong to unions, advocating an end to child labor and other exploitative practices, securing time for family and social engagement by enacting the forty-hour work week, and by securing better access to health care and other benefits. The history of the United States would be far bleaker had it not been for the enlightened leadership of the labor movement.

In a free society, the most powerful are always those with wealth. Traditionally, government has stepped in to meet those important social goods that the wealthy, in pursuit of profit only, leave unmet. The unregulated market is unparalleled in its ability to further the exchange of goods and services but it cannot achieve justice as the Church understands it. Indeed, it fails to recognize that labor is not a commodity, but an integral part of human dignity.

At Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, we stand with the working men and women of this country. We call for legislation that makes it easier, not harder, to form unions. We call for workers' rights to be respected. We call for an end to the “race to the bottom” mentality that sees jobs fleeing to non-union states where employers can pay lower wages. Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore supported the first labor unions in this country and the Catholic Church has followed his example ever since. We pledge ourselves to uphold that proud tradition of support for organized labor.

HEALTH CARE

“Health is a precious good for the person and the community to be promoted, preserved and protected, dedicating the necessary means, resources and energy in order that more and more people may benefit from it. Unfortunately the fact that still today many of the world’s populations have no access to the resources they need to satisfy their basic needs, particularly with regard to health care, is still a problem. It is necessary to work

with greater commitment at all levels to ensure that the right to health care is rendered effective by furthering access to basic health care.”- Pope Benedict XVI, Message to 25th International Conference for Health Care Workers, 2010.

Like his predecessors, Pope Benedict has proclaimed health care to be an “inalienable right” of the human person, demanded by his dignity, essential to the achievement of the Common Good in any society.

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good proudly supported the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) which finally guarantees universal access to health care coverage. No longer will Americans be left to the mercy of insurance companies. No longer will Americans have to choose between paying for food and paying for medicines. We wish that the ACA had gone further and ensured such access to our immigrant brothers and sisters, but we are confident that a country that extends this basic human right to its own citizens is a country more likely to extend that right to its newcomers as well. And, we applaud President Obama for issuing an executive order guaranteeing that no taxpayer dollars will ever be used to fund abortions.

The ACA is now under attack and we at CACG are prepared to defend it. And, most frighteningly, the same people who wish to roll back the ACA also seek to gut Medicare, turning it into a voucher program that would leave the elderly to the mercy of the insurance companies. We also oppose all cuts in Medicaid that would limit the access of the poor and the vulnerable to affordable care. The social safety net not only protects the health and welfare of individuals, it protects the health and welfare of society itself. We believe that the ACA, Medicare and Medicaid give concrete expression to the biblical belief that we are our brothers’ keeper.

Many are concerned about the rising cost of health care, and we share that concern. But, in this great and wealthy country, surely we can afford to take care of the health of our fellow citizens, especially the elderly who have toiled long and hard to provide younger generations with the opportunities that continue to make America great. We are also deeply worried that efforts to erode Medicare are the first step in a utilitarian effort to curtail health care for the elderly. We are concerned about this danger both as a group dedicated to social justice and a group dedicated to human dignity. We hope that our fellow Catholics who support cutting Medicare will think again, and realize how such cuts make euthanasia and other assaults of the dignity of the elderly all the more likely to succeed. All Catholics, of whatever political stripe, must stand together to defend the right of the elderly, the poor, and the vulnerable to health care.

We remain focused on the need for clear conscience protections as the ACA is implemented. As Catholics, we celebrate our long and proud history of providing health care to all our fellow citizens, with a special focus on the needs of the poor and the vulnerable. The Catholic Church’s network of hospitals and other patient care facilities are among the best in the country. They are a vital part of the Church’s ministry and, just so, should be free from government interference that would require these institutions to violate the moral teachings of the Church.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

“The important thing for us is to approach these political issues — not as Democrats or Republicans, liberals or conservatives — but as Catholics. And as Catholics, we should be alarmed by the human toll of our failure to

fix our broken immigration system.”

- Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez, Speech to Knights of Columbus Convention, 2011.

The greatest political failure of the past decade has been the inability of our political leaders in Washington to find a way to pass comprehensive immigration reform. There are a host of complicated reasons to explain why the economy has weakened, some of which have nothing to do with the government. The vagaries of foreign wars have ever been inscrutable. But, the failure to reform our immigration laws is attributable solely to a lack of political will.

In 2005, President George W. Bush pushed for immigration reform. In 2010, President Barack Obama pushed for the more modest DREAM Act, which would have granted citizenship to those who serve in our armed forces or attend at least two years of college. Both efforts failed. We call upon candidates of all political parties to support the passage of comprehensive immigration reform.

The rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are described as “unalienable” in our Declaration of Independence. They come from God and cannot be taken away by any government. While we recognize the right, indeed the duty, of all countries to protect their borders, for decades America has encouraged illegal immigration to provide a low wage work force. This has exploited workers who come here without documents, penalized their families, and undercut efforts here in America to increase wages.

As Catholics, we are thoroughly familiar with the cancer of nativism in American history. It was ugly and bigoted in the nineteenth century when it was directed at Irish and German immigrants. It was ugly and bigoted when directed at Italian and Slavic immigrants at the beginning of the twentieth century. And it is ugly and bigoted today when it targets Hispanics. We believe the true history of America is a history of continual social and cultural renewal because of immigration. Immigration has made America a better, more lively, more diverse, more successful nation. We believe that immigrants today should receive the same pathways to citizenship that previous generations of immigrants enjoyed.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

“War never again. Never again war.”

- Pope Paul VI, Address to the United Nations, October 4, 1965

It is difficult, all these years later, to capture the power of Pope Paul VI’s words when he became the first Pope to address the United Nations. For Catholics, the Second Vatican Council was in session. On the world stage, the first nuclear arms treaty – the Test Ban Treaty – had been signed and while Cold War tensions remained, the awareness of the futility of war was dawning in many circles. The international body Pope Paul VI addressed included many nations newly freed from the chains of colonialism. Then there was the event itself. The Pope himself, whose predecessors had considered themselves “prisoners of the Vatican,” representing the only institution that is older than the nations, flying halfway across the globe to deliver his impassioned call to an end to war. At the time, it took one’s breath away.

Of course, in the years since 1965, there have been many wars. There has been ethnic cleansing in the heart of

Europe. There was genocide in Rwanda. Corruption and a global economy that consider transnational profits more vital than human lives and human flourishing, both keep the poor of the world mired in their poverty. In our own country, demagogues regularly denounce the pittance our nation spends on international development. New diseases, and old, continue to kill literally millions of innocents. America, provoked by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, embarked on two wars that have done little to defeat terrorism and, instead, have only mired our country in one war that was never winnable and another than was never necessary.

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good believes that statesmen should heed what is known as Just War Theory, not least because that theory insists that war must always be a last resort. We take understandable pride in the religious, and specifically Catholic, roots of Just War Theory but we believe its principles are accessible to all and would keep our nation, and other nations, from the kind of militaristic forays that wreak such suffering and havoc. We also honor those Christians who, in conscience, give witness to the ancient Christian belief in pacifism.

We commend efforts that promote peace and well-being throughout the world. Foreign aid, which represents such a miniscule amount of the federal budget, is again under attack despite the evident good it does in many nations where the freedom from want has not been conquered. We fully support the efforts of our friends in organized labor to promote better working conditions for those who labor in sweatshops for substandard wages. We hope America will pay closer attention to the socio-economic needs of our neighbors in Latin America, where America's thirst for drugs and abundance of weaponry for export wreak havoc on still fragile democracies. And, we commend President Obama for his skillful handling of the revolution in Libya, supporting indigenous efforts to reclaim their country, with the active support of America's NATO allies, and without the U.S. military becoming the face of U.S. interest and concern in that beleaguered nation.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

"This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits."

- Vatican Council II, Decree on Religious Liberty, #2

Recently, Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good stood side-by-side with our bishops, with the Catholic Health Association, with our Catholic colleges and universities, to insist that our religious institutions not be coerced to pay for insurance coverage of procedures and medicines to which they object on religious grounds. After much debate, the Obama administration took steps to accommodate the conscience rights of our Catholic institutions. Some argue that the accommodation does not go far enough and others think it is sufficient. At CACG, we welcome the president's accommodation and hope that whatever remaining policy difficulties can be worked out in good faith negotiations among all stakeholders.

The debate over the religious liberty of our Catholic institutions was narrowly seen by many as a "Catholic issue" because of the Church's teaching on contraception. However, that perception was incorrect. The employer mandate was a Catholic issue not because of this, but because our Church has so many employees working at its hospitals, its charities and its colleges and universities. To progressive Catholics, these

institutions are as vital to our religious faith as our churches. This is why we at CACG insisted that no arbitrary distinction be drawn between our houses of worship and our public ministries to the poor and sick.

CACG respects that many Americans understand contraception as a basic requirement of health care. Furthermore, we note that most of the mandated preventive services are entirely non-controversial but will go a long way toward rectifying the unpardonable neglect women's health care has received for decades from insurance companies. This increase in preventive care for women is a large step forward, is entirely consistent with the Common Good, and it would not be possible except for the passage of the Affordable Care Act.

We remain committed to preserving our religious liberty, both as Catholics and as Americans. In this great diverse country of ours, there should be plenty of room in the public square for religious organizations and institutions. We are very much concerned about anti-immigrant laws that seek to coerce Catholic schools and hospitals to ascertain the legal status of their students and clients. We deplore any effort by any political party to turn the issue of religious liberty into a partisan wedge issue. America's foundational commitment to religious liberty has, for more than two hundred years, helped unite Americans, not divide them. We at CACG oppose efforts to restrict religious liberty, but we also oppose efforts to demean it by turning it into a partisan issue.

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