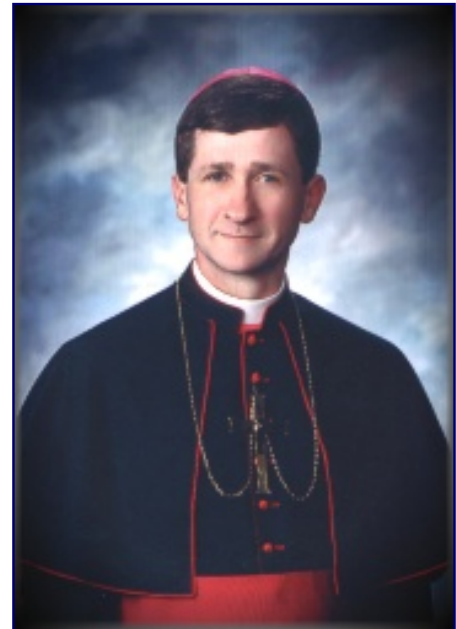


## **Our dual calling: Faith and Citizenship**

Every national election year, the bishops of the United States offer what some have called a "refresher course" on the social gospel. We do this so the people we serve are better prepared to evaluate the various issues and candidates from a moral perspective. Last November, the bishops' conference published a statement called *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*.



The question we bishops want to pose to you is simply stated, "What does it mean to be a Catholic living in the United States in 2004 and the years beyond?" Entitling our document *Faithful Citizenship* draws attention to the "dual calling" all of us have as persons of faith who are also citizens of this country. Not only are we called to be faithful to the Gospel, we are also called to be good citizens who understand that faith forms our citizenship.

As a starting point, we bishops believe that it is important to speak to those Catholic citizens who may have given up on the political process. We know that many Catholics are politically homeless, as they feel that no major political party and only a few candidates consistently display any kind of concern for human life and dignity.

Yet, this is not a time for retreat or discouragement, as more, not less, engagement in political life is needed. Catholics can become more involved in the political process by registering to vote, by running for office, by working for a political party, and by donating time or money to campaigns. Other efforts to apply Catholic principles in the public square can be made by joining diocesan legislative networks or other types of community organizations.

It is important to fully understand that the Catholic community is not a special interest group. We are a diverse community of faith. Catholics who are faithful to the Gospel cannot be pigeonholed into conservative/liberal or left/right categories. Some speak of Catholics as a voting bloc or as a special constituency. However, that is not our role as a Church, since we do not make contributions or offer endorsements. We are called to be civil and clear about issues and candidates, as well as political, not partisan, and principled, not ideological.

Instead, faithful Catholics are called to raise questions about the moral implications of various issues. In doing so, we, as a community of faith, seek to lift the moral and human dimensions of the choices facing voters and candidates to a higher level.

What questions do the bishops believe are key at this moment in time for our people to consider? We list the following ten:

- 1) After September 11, how can we build not only a safer world, but a better world? How can we build a world that is more just, more secure, more peaceful, more respectful of human life and dignity?
- 2) How will we protect the weakest in our midst – innocent unborn children? How will our nation resist what Pope John Paul II calls a “culture of death?” How can we keep our nation from turning to violence to solve some of its most difficult problems: abortion to deal with difficult pregnancies; the death penalty to combat crime; euthanasia and assisted suicide to deal with the burdens of age, illness, and disability; and war to address international disputes?
- 3) How will we address the tragic fact that more than 30,000 children in the world die every day as a result of hunger, international debt, and lack of development? The younger you are, the more likely you are to be poor in the richest nation on earth, the U.S.
- 4) How can our nation help parents raise their children with respect for life, sound moral values, a sense of hope, and an ethic of stewardship and responsibility? How can our society defend the central institution of marriage and better support families in their moral roles and responsibilities? How can parents be offered real choices that will enable them to provide decent housing and obtain quality educations for their children?
- 5) How will we address the growing number of families and individuals without affordable and accessible health care? How can health care better protect human life and respect human dignity?
- 6) How will our society combat continuing prejudice, overcome hostility toward immigrants and refugees, and heal the wounds of racism, religious bigotry, and other forms of discrimination?

7) How will our nation pursue the values of justice and peace in a world where injustice is common, desperate poverty is widespread, and peace is too often overwhelmed by violence?

8) What are the responsibilities and limitations of families, community organizations, markets, and governments? How can these elements of society work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, care for creation, and overcome injustice?

9) When should our nation use, or avoid the use of, military force – for which purpose, under whose authority, and at what human cost?

10) How can we join with other nations to lead the world to greater respect for human life and dignity, religious freedom and democracy, economic justice, and care for God's creation?

The fact that Catholics are concerned about such a wide range of issues puzzles many people. Indeed, we are not “politically correct.” We are conservative in areas of personal morality, but we are hesitant to use violence to settle international disputes or as a means of punishment.

While we believe in personal responsibility and initiative, we are tireless on behalf of the poor and the needy.

By posing these questions from a moral perspective, the bishops want Catholics and others who share our concerns to become well-informed and to have consciences that are well-formed. That means becoming familiar with the candidates and their voting records and various proposals. It means giving careful consideration to party platforms and the priorities of the candidates. Finally, the bishops sincerely hope that the questions we ask will lead to a more serious approach to the 2004 political campaigns. This will result in less cynicism and more participation, as well as less partisanship and more civil dialogue on fundamental issues.

I plan to offer further reflections on our dual calling to faithful citizenship at the final First Friday luncheon, which is scheduled for May 7 at the Cathedral. Mass is at 11:15 and luncheon follows. As always, I welcome your questions and comments as we challenge each other to put both our faith and our citizenship to work, not only in this election year, but throughout the years leading up to the next campaign and election.

**Sincerely yours in Christ,**  
**+Blase J. Cupich**  
**Most Rev. Blase J. Cupich, Bishop of Rapid City**

[Bishop's Calendar](#)

