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### Statement on Political Responsibility: Revitalizing American Democracy

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-Text- "We hope American Catholics, as both believers and citizens, will use the resources of our faith and the opportunities of this democracy to help shape a society more respectful of the life, dignity and rights of the human person, especially the poor and the vulnerable, the U.S. Catholic Conference Administrative Board says in its new statement on political responsibility, released Oct. 17. The USCC board has issued similar statements prior to each U.S. presidential election since 1976. In this statement for 1992, the board expresses its concern about "increasing public cynicism" among Americans who, in growing numbers, are failing to exercise their right to vote. In urging Catholics to be politically responsible, the statement emphasizes that its call "is neither a partisan nor a sectarian appeal," but an entreaty "to reinvigorate the democratic process as a place for debate about what kind of society we want to be, what values and priorities should guide our nation." Every proposal, policy or political platform should be measured by how it touches the human person, the statement insists. It concludes by listing in alphabetical order a broad range of topics "on which the U.S. bishops have expressed themselves" and which are recalled "to emphasize their special relevance in a period of national debate and decision." The statement follows.

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Elections are a time for debate and decisions on the leaders and values that will guide our nation. For the last four presidential elections, the Administrative Board of our bishops' conference through this statement on political responsibility has sought to encourage broad participation in the electoral process, outline the role of the church in public life and raise the moral and human dimensions of key issues for discussion in the coming campaigns.

#### Politics: Decline and Renewal

We continue this tradition with new urgency and concern because we fear the political life of our nation may be losing the interest and participation of many Americans. In the 1988 elections, barely half of those eligible exercised their right to vote. In 1990, only a third voted, the lowest turnout since World War II. Ironically, when people in other parts of the world are embracing democratic values and

struggling to participate in public life, many Americans seem increasingly disinterested or disenchanted with politics. This alienation is a dangerous trend, threatening to undermine the heart of our democratic traditions.

As a number of political commentators have pointed out, the causes of this decline of political life are multiple and complex. Some problems are structural, such as unnecessary barriers to voter registration and the like, but others are more behavioral. Candidates and political professionals too often seem to engage more in tactical combat than civil debate, seeking to reduce support for an opponent rather than to gather support for their own cause and avoiding issues of substance. As campaigns focus more and more on symbols and sound bites, citizens seem to focus less and less on candidates and issues. As political polling and advertising have become more sophisticated, political participation has declined. The news media sometimes seem more interested in tactics and "horse races" than in issues and character. And citizens seem too often preoccupied by narrow self-interest, indifferent to public life or unconvinced that politics makes any difference. The result is elections without full public participation, campaigns without substance and winners without clear mandates.

We share these concerns not to cast blame, but to advance and strengthen democratic values. Public service is both a vocation and a public trust. We gratefully acknowledge the sacrifice, hard work and commitment of those who serve our nation and communities. We regret and deplore increasing public cynicism, which too often dismisses the role of government and ridicules public officials in sometimes understandable but often misguided frustration with all politics. We need more, not less, public participation - not only in electoral politics, but also in broader issue advocacy, legislative networks and community organizations which give necessary vitality and substance to public life.

As we prepare for the 1992 elections, we need to examine our political behavior and take steps to build public confidence and participation in the political process. We ask candidates to trust the American people enough to share their values and vision with us without resorting to empty rhetoric or polarizing tactics. We urge the news media to cover campaigns in ways that tell us more than who's ahead or whose commercials are more clever; to offer, instead, thorough coverage of the positions and qualifications of the candidates and the major issues facing the nation.

And, most important, as citizens we need to examine our responsibilities: to register and vote; to analyze issues and assess candidates' positions and qualifications; and to join with others in advocating for important values. Together, we can reinvigorate our electoral processes and help make them genuine opportunities for informed debate and choices about the future.

## Rediscovery of the Common Good

The key to a renewal of public life is reorienting politics to reflect better the search for the common good: reconciling diverse interests for the well-being of the whole human family. If politics ignores this fundamental task, it can easily become little more than an arena for partisan posturing, the search for power for its own sake or an interest-group conflict. In his most recent encyclical,(1) Pope John Paul II warmly praised democratic values, but warned against a "crisis within democracies," which "seem at times to have lost the ability to make decisions aimed at the common good."

In an age of powerful political action committees and justifiable public concern about campaign financing, Pope John Paul II issues a warning which we should take to heart: "Certain demands which arise within society are sometimes not examined in accordance with criteria of justice and morality, but rather on the basis of the electoral or financial power of the groups promoting them. With time, such distortions of political conduct create distrust and apathy, with a subsequent decline in the political participation and civic spirit of the general population, which feels abused and disillusioned." The pope deplores the "growing inability to situate particular interests within the framework of a coherent vision of the common good," which "demands a correct understanding of the dignity and the rights of the person." He calls on us to "give democracy an authentic and solid foundation through the explicit recognition of (human) rights."

## Challenges for 1992

The continuing challenge to truly root our democracy in the pursuit of human rights and seek the common good in the midst of many competing interests is not an abstract ideal for us, but an urgent task for this election year. We do not lack for important issues to address. The United States is blessed with extraordinary freedom, resources and strength. We have accomplished much together in our economic, social and political life. But our nation faces vital choices in the aftermath of war and as a consequence of recession. We confront important decisions on how to respond to urgent national problems and dramatic global change. Some of these challenges are far-reaching and fundamental.

How can our nation respond to the haunting needs of vulnerable children in our midst? We live in a society that accepts the death of 1.6 million unborn children a year through legalized abortion. We live in a rich nation where one out of four preschool children grows up in poverty. We live in a world where almost 40,000 children die every day from hunger and the diseases associated with malnutrition. The lives and dignity of vulnerable children - born and unborn - are central issues for 1992.

Other critical questions need to be addressed in the coming campaign:

-How can our nation bring together the strength of a powerful market economy and just public policies to confront continuing hunger and homelessness, joblessness and declining real income for many families, the pervasiveness of poverty and hostility toward immigrants and refugees?

-How can our society best combat continuing prejudice and discrimination, heal the open wounds of racism and sexism, and provide full opportunity for African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, women, immigrants and other victims of discrimination?

-How can our society support families in their irreplaceable moral role and social duties, offering real choices and help in finding and affording decent education, housing and health care?

-How can our nation respond creatively to the dramatic international changes and pursue the values of justice and peace in a world still too often marked by violent conflict, denial of human rights and global poverty?

-How can we find fair ways to invest in our human needs, deal with our global responsibilities and meet our fiscal and moral obligations to future generations without mortgaging the economic future of our country?

-Why does it seem our nation is turning to violence to solve some of our most difficult problems - to abortion to deal with problem pregnancies, to the death penalty to combat crime, to euthanasia to deal with the burdens of age and illness, to military force to confront international injustice? Are there not better and more effective alternatives that demonstrate greater respect for human life?

We raise these questions not to exhaust the possibilities, but to suggest key concerns for the campaign ahead. We believe every proposal, policy or political platform should be measured by how it touches the human person; whether it enhances or diminishes human life, human dignity and human rights; and how it advances the common good.

It is the traditional virtues of citizenship which will renew American democracy. In bringing the virtues and values we seek to uphold in our personal lives into the public arena, we strengthen public life and build a better society. The common good is shaped by the moral convictions and active commitment of each of us.

A Religious Call to Political Responsibility

While it is increasingly acknowledged that major public issues have clear moral dimensions and religious values have significant public consequences, there is often confusion and controversy over the participation of religious groups in public life.

The religious community has important responsibilities in political life. We believe our nation is enriched and our traditions of pluralism enhanced when religious groups join with others in the debate over the policies and vision that ought to guide our nation. Our constitution protects the right of religious bodies to speak out without governmental interference, endorsement or sanction. Religious groups should expect neither favoritism nor discrimination in their public roles. The national debate is not enhanced by ignoring or ruling out the contributions of citizens because their convictions are grounded in religious belief.

We join the public debate to share our experience in serving the poor and vulnerable and to add our values to the national dialogue over our nation's future. What we seek is not a religious interest group, but a community of conscience within the larger society, testing public life on these central values. Our starting point and objectives are neither partisan nor ideological, but are focused on the fundamental dignity of the human person, which cuts across the political categories of our day.

The Catholic community is remarkably diverse. We are Democrats, Republicans and independents. We come from differing ideological and political persuasions. But we are all called to a common commitment to ensure that political life serves the common good and the human person. Our call to political responsibility is neither a partisan nor a sectarian appeal, but a call to reinvigorate the democratic process as a place for debate about what kind of society we want to be, what values and priorities should guide our nation. Our non-partisan voter registration and education efforts seek to promote genuine citizenship and a more active and informed participation in the political process.

This kind of political responsibility does not involve religious leaders telling people how to vote or religious tests for candidates. These would be, in our view, pastorally inappropriate, theologically unsound and politically unwise. Rather, we seek to lift up the moral and human dimensions of public issues for our own community and for the broader society. We encourage people to use their voices and votes to enrich the democratic life of our nation and to act on their values in the political arena. We hope American Catholics, as both believers and citizens, will use the resources of our faith and the opportunities of this democracy to help shape a society more respectful of the life, dignity and rights of the human person, especially the poor and vulnerable.

In the sections which follow we outline traditional Catholic teaching on the church in the public order and some very important issues addressed by our conference.

## II. THE CHURCH AND THE POLITICAL ORDER

It is appropriate in this context to offer our own reflections on the role of the church in the political order. Christians believe that Jesus' commandment to love one's neighbor should extend beyond individual relationships to infuse and transform all human relations from the family to the entire human community. Jesus came to "bring glad tidings to the poor ... to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind ... and to let the oppressed go free" (Lk. 4:18). He called us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick and afflicted, and comfort the victims of injustice (cf. Mt. 25:35-41). His example and words require individual acts of charity and concern from each of us. Yet they also require understanding and action on a broader scale in pursuit of peace and in opposition to poverty, hunger and injustice. Such action necessarily involves the institutions and structures of society, the economy and politics.

The church, the people of God, is itself an expression of this love and is required by the Gospel and its long tradition to promote and defend human rights and human dignity.<sup>(2)</sup> In his encyclical "Redemptor Hominis," Pope John Paul II declares that the church "must be aware of the threats to (humanity) and of all that seems to oppose the endeavor 'to make human life ever more human' and make every element of life correspond to humanity's true dignity - in a word, (the church) must be aware of all that is opposed to that process."<sup>(3)</sup> This view of the church's ministry and mission requires it to relate positively to the political order, since social injustice and the denial of human rights can often be remedied only through governmental action. In today's world, concern for social justice and human development necessarily requires persons and organizations to participate in the political process in accordance with their own responsibilities and roles.

Christian responsibility in the area of human rights includes two complementary pastoral actions: the affirmation and promotion of human rights and the denunciation and condemnation of violations of these rights. In addition, it is the church's role as a community of faith to call attention to the moral and religious dimension of secular issues, to keep alive the values of the Gospel as a norm for social and political life, and to point out the demands of the Christian faith for a just transformation of society. Such a ministry on the part of every individual as well as the organizational church inevitably involves political consequences and touches upon public affairs.

The Responsibility of All Members of the Church

The church's responsibility in this area falls on all its members. As citizens, we are all called to become informed, active and responsible participants in the political process. It is the laity who are primarily responsible for activity in political affairs, for it is they who have the major responsibility for renewal of the temporal order. In the words of the Second Vatican Council:

"The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God.... They live in the ordinary circumstance of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven.

"They are called there by God so that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the Gospel, they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven."(4)

The hierarchy also has a distinct and weighty responsibility in this area. As teachers and pastors, they must provide norms for the formation of conscience of the faithful, support efforts to gain greater peace and justice, and provide guidance and even leadership on occasions when human rights are in jeopardy. Drawing on their own experience and exercising their distinctive roles within the Christian community, bishops, clergy, religious and laity should join together in common witness and effective action to bring about Pope John Paul II's vision of a well-ordered society based on truth, justice, charity and freedom.(5)

### The Distinct Role of the Church

The church's role in the political order includes the following:

- Education regarding the teachings of the church and the responsibilities of the faithful.
- Analysis of issues for their social and moral dimensions.
- Measuring public policy against Gospel values.
- Participating with other concerned parties in debate over public policy; and
- Speaking out with courage, skill and concern on public issues involving human rights, social justice and the life of the church in society.

Unfortunately, our efforts in this area are sometimes misunderstood. The church's participation in public affairs is not a threat to the political process or to genuine

pluralism, but an affirmation of their importance. The church recognizes the legitimate autonomy of government and the right of all, including the church itself, to be heard in the formulation of public policy. As Vatican II declared:

"By preaching the truth of the Gospel and shedding light on all areas of human activity through her teaching and the example of the faithful, she (the church) shows respect for the political freedom and responsibility of citizens and fosters these values....

"She also has the right to pass moral judgments, even on matters touching the political order, whenever basic personal rights or the salvation of souls make such judgments necessary."(6)

A proper understanding of the role of the church will not confuse its mission with that of government but, rather, see its ministry as advocating the critical values of human rights and social justice.

It is the role of Christian communities to analyze the situation in their own country, to reflect upon the meaning of the Gospel, and to draw norms of judgment and plans of action from the teaching of the church and their own experience.(7) As Pope John Paul II pointed out in his recent encyclical, "The social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and motivation for action.... Today, more than ever, the church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency."(8)

The application of Gospel values to real situations is an essential work of the Christian community. Christians believe the Gospel is the measure of human realities. However, specific political proposals do not in themselves constitute the Gospel. Christians and Christian organizations must certainly participate in public debate over alternative policies and legislative proposals, yet it is critical that the nature of their participation not be misunderstood.

We bishops specifically do not seek the formation of a religious voting bloc; nor do we wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates. We do, however, have a right and a responsibility as teachers to analyze the moral dimensions of the major issues of our day. We urge citizens to avoid choosing candidates simply on the basis of narrow self-interest. We hope that voters will examine the positions of candidates on the full range of issues as well as their personal integrity, philosophy and performance. We are convinced that a consistent ethic of life should be the moral framework from which we address all issues in the political arena. In this consistent ethic, we address a spectrum of issues, seeking to

protect human life and promote human dignity from the inception of life to its final moment.

As bishops, we seek to promote a greater understanding of the important link between faith and politics and to express our belief that our nation is enriched when its citizens and social groups approach public affairs from positions grounded in moral conviction and religious belief. Our view was expressed very well by Pope John Paul II when he said: "Christians know from the church's luminous teachings that without any need to follow a one-sided or partisan political formula, they ought to contribute to forming a more worthy society, one more respectful of the rights of man, based on the principles of justice and peace."(9)

As religious leaders and pastors, our intention is to reflect our concern that politics receives its rightful importance and attention and that it becomes an effective forum for the achievement of the common good. For, in the words of John Paul II, "An important challenge for the Christian is that of political life. In the state citizens have a right and duty to share in the political life. For a nation can ensure the common good of all and the dreams and aspirations of its different members only to the extent that all citizens in full liberty and with complete responsibility make their contributions willingly and selflessly for the good of all."(10)

### III. PRINCIPLES AND ISSUES

Without reference to political candidates, parties or platforms, we wish to offer a listing of some principles and issues which we believe are important in the national debate during 1992. These brief summaries are not intended to indicate in any depth the details of our positions on these matters. For a fuller discussion of our point of view we refer the reader to the documents listed in the summaries that appear below.

#### A Tradition of Concern

These concerns are rooted in a tradition of social teaching which has taken on increasing importance and urgency over the last century. In a statement on the 100th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical "Rerum Novarum," our conference outlined six basic principles which are at the heart of these issues:

##### 1. The life and dignity of the human person

In the Catholic social vision, the human person is central, the clearest reflection of God among us. Each person possesses a basic dignity that comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment, not from race or gender, age or economic

status. The test of every institution or policy is whether it enhances or threatens human life and human dignity. We believe people are more important than things.

## 2. Human rights and responsibilities

Our dignity is protected when human rights are respected - the right to life and to those things which make life truly human: religious liberty, decent work, housing, health care, education, and the right to raise and provide for a family with dignity.

## 3. The call to family and community

The human person is not only sacred, but social. We realize our dignity and achieve our rights in relationship with others in our families and communities. No community is more central than the family - the basic cell of society.

## 4. The dignity of work and the rights of workers

Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a vocation, participation in creation. Workers have basic rights - to decent work, to just wages, to form and join unions, among others. The economy exists for the human person, not the other way around.

## 5. The option for the poor

The poor and vulnerable have a special place in Catholic teaching. The Scriptures tell us we will be judged by our response to the "least of these." We need to put the needs of the poor first.

## 6. Solidarity

As Pope John Paul II reminds us, we are one human family despite differences of nationality or race; the poor are not a burden, but our sisters and brothers. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in the 1990s. ("A Century of Social Teaching," 1990.)

The issues which follow are not the concerns of Catholics alone; in every case we are joined with others in advocating these concerns. They represent a broad range of topics on which the bishops of the United States have already expressed themselves and are recalled here to emphasize their special relevance in a period of national debate and decision.

### A. Abortion

The right to life is the most basic human right, and it demands the protection of law. Abortion is the deliberate destruction of an unborn human being and therefore violates

this right. Abortion has become the fundamental human rights issue of our day. We do not accept the concept that anyone has the right to choose an abortion or that abortion is a legitimate method of family planning. We reject the 1973 Supreme Court decisions on abortion, which refuse appropriate legal protection to unborn children. We support the passage of a constitutional amendment to restore the basic constitutional protection of the right to life for the unborn child, and we support appropriate federal and state laws to support this right. We reject the public funding of abortion. We support public funding policies that encourage childbirth over abortion, and we urge society to provide programs that assist pregnant women and children, especially those who are poor. (Documentation on the Right to Life and Abortion, 1974, 1976, 1981; Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Reaffirmation, 1985; Resolution on Abortion, 1989.)

## B. Arms Control and Disarmament

The end of the Cold War offers new opportunities to diminish and ultimately end the military competition between East and West, to undertake renewed efforts to restrict the proliferation of arms, especially weapons of mass destruction, and to redirect resources from excessive military spending toward programs that meet basic human needs of the poor at home and abroad. The U.S. Catholic Conference supports specific initiatives to restrain the quantitative and qualitative developments of the arms race, including verifiable arms control agreements that would make deep cuts in strategic nuclear weapons; reduce conventional forces to lower levels; ban chemical weapons; Emit testing as a step toward a comprehensive test ban; and further restrict proliferation of these weapons. The USCC welcomes the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and conventional arms agreements as well as other important efforts to reduce nuclear arsenals; it believes additional steps toward nuclear and conventional disarmament are necessary.

The USCC supports budget priorities which move beyond Cold War assumptions, including opposition of funding for weapons programs - e.g., the MX missile and efforts to deploy the Strategic Defense Initiative - that are of dubious strategic value and whose costs in the face of severe budget constraints impair our ability to meet other needs, particularly the basic needs of the poor at home and abroad. ("The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," 1983; A Report on the "Challenge of Peace" and Policy Developments 1983-1988, 1988.)

## C. Capital Punishment

In view of our commitment to the value and dignity of human life, we oppose the use of capital punishment. We believe that a return to the use of the death penalty is leading to, indeed can only lead to, further erosion of respect for life in our society.

We do not question society's right to punish the offender, but we believe that there are better approaches to protecting our people from violent crimes than resorting to executions. In its application, the death penalty has been discriminatory toward the poor, the indigent and racial minorities. Our society should reject the death penalty and seek methods of dealing with violent crime which are more consistent with the Gospel vision of respect for life and Christ's message of healing love. ("Community and Crime," 1978; U.S. Bishops' Statement on Capital Punishment, 1980.)

#### D. Discrimination and Racism

Discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity or age continues to exist in our nation. Signs of increased racial hostility poison our society. Such discrimination constitutes a grave injustice and an affront to human dignity. It must be aggressively resisted by every individual and rooted out of every social institution and structure.

Discrimination in job opportunities or income levels on the basis of race, sex or other arbitrary standards can never be justified. It is a scandal that such discrimination continues in the United States today. Where the effects of past discrimination persist, society has the obligation to take positive steps to overcome the legacy of injustice.

Racism is a particularly serious form of discrimination. Despite significant strides in eliminating racial prejudices in our country, there remains an urgent need for continued reconciliation in this area and continued commitment to move forward to overcome more subtle but still destructive forms of discrimination and intolerance. Racism is not merely one sin among many. It is a radical evil dividing the human family. The struggle against it demands an equally radical transformation in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structures of our society. ("Brothers and Sisters to Us: A Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day," 1979; "The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment," 1983; "Economic Justice for All," 1986.)

#### E. The Economy

Our pastoral letter "Economic Justice for All" presents basic moral principles that should guide economic life. Among them:

- Every economic decision and institution should be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person. The economy must be at the service of all people, especially the poor.

- Human dignity can be realized and protected only in community

- Human rights are the minimum conditions for life in community. All people have a right to life, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, education and employment.

Society as a whole, acting through private and government institutions, has the moral responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights.

The most urgent priority for domestic economic policy is to create jobs with adequate pay and decent working conditions. High levels of unemployment and underemployment are morally unacceptable in a nation with our economic capacity. The minimum wage should be raised to help workers and their families live decent lives. We reaffirm the church's traditional teaching in support of the right of all workers to organize and bargain collectively and to exercise these rights without reprisals.

The fact that so many people are poor in a nation as wealthy as ours is a social and moral scandal that must not be ignored. The disproportionate impact of poverty on children, women, and members of racial and ethnic minorities must be addressed through just policies on employment, taxes, welfare and family life. Wage discrimination against women and other economic consequences of sexism must be overcome. Vigorous efforts are needed to overcome barriers to equal employment and pay for women and minorities. Dealing with poverty is not a luxury to which our nation can attend when it finds the time and resources. Rather, it is a moral imperative of the highest priority.

In view of the increasing importance of U.S. international economic relations, especially relations with the developing countries, it is essential that all aspects of international economic policy - trade, aid, finance, investment - reflect basic moral principles and promote the global common good. America's role in the international economy must be re-evaluated and concern for the poor made a policy priority. We have a moral obligation to take the lead in helping to reduce poverty in the developing countries, including steps to reduce the human cost and economic burdens of the enormous external debt of many poor countries. We support new efforts to emphasize human development over military assistance in the priorities of U.S. foreign aid programs. ("Economic Justice for All," 1986; "Relieving Third World Debt," 1989.)

#### F. Education

All persons of whatever race, sex, condition or age, by virtue of their dignity as human beings, have an inalienable right to education. We advocate:

- Sufficient public and private funding to make a quality education available for all citizens and residents of the United States of America.

- The definition and implementation of a form of moral education integrated into the total public school curriculum.

-Governmental and voluntary action to reduce inequalities of educational opportunity by improving the opportunities available to economically disadvantaged persons.

-Orderly compliance with legal requirements for racially integrated schools and additional voluntary efforts to increase racial and ethnic integration in public and non-public schools.

-Equitable tax support for the education of pupils in public and nonpublic schools to implement the vital principle of parental freedom of choice in the education of their children.

-Salaries and benefits of teachers and administrators that reflect the principles of economic justice.

-The principle that non-public school students and professional staff have the right and opportunity for equitable participation in all government programs to improve education, especially those which address the needs of the economic and socially disadvantaged. ("To Teach as Jesus Did," 1972; "Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory," 1979; "Value and Virtue: Moral Education in the Public School," 1987; "Economic Justice for All," 1986; "In Support of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools," 1990.)

#### G. Euthanasia

The USCC affirms public policies that respect the life and dignity of those who are dying, policies such as legal safeguards against direct killing by action or omission, policies that enable mentally or physically disabled patients to receive the same basic care accorded others and funding policies that help to ease burdens on families whose members are in need of long-term care. We reject any law or social policy that sanctions suicide or assisted suicide or any deliberate and direct hastening of death for seriously ill patients. (Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Handicapped People, 1978; Guidelines for Legislation on Life-Sustaining Treatment, 1984; Statement on Uniform Rights of the Terminally Ill Act, 1986; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Euthanasia, 1980; NCCB Administrative Committee Statement on Euthanasia, 1991.)

#### H. Family Life

The well-being of society is intimately linked to the health and vitality of family life. The family is the most basic unit of social organization and is essential in humanizing and personalizing society. This nation's institutions, laws and policies must support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family. All programs, policies and

services should adopt a family perspective through which they are evaluated in light of their impact on the life and stability of the family. The conference supports efforts to assist families in the exercise of their fundamental roles such as family and medical leave laws, inclusive and broad-based child care efforts, and pro-family tax, welfare, health and housing policies. ("A Family Perspective in Church and Society," 1988; Plan of Pastoral Action for Family Ministry, 1978.)

## I. Food, Agriculture and the Environment

The presence of so many hungry people in our midst is morally intolerable. U.S. food and agriculture policy should:

- Enable farmers to produce good quality food at prices consumers can afford and that provide farmers with fair income.
- Increase the opportunities for the widespread distribution and ownership of farmland.
- Renew a viable family farming system.
- Ensure fair compensation, decent working conditions and legal protections for farm workers.
- Negotiate fair international trade practices.
- Establish food security as the ultimate goal of food and agricultural policy - ensuring that every human being has access to enough food to maintain a decent human standard of living.

Domestically, nutrition programs should help meet the needs of hungry and malnourished individuals, especially low-income pregnant women, children, and unemployed and elderly people. U.S. food aid sent overseas should be given to the poorest countries and neediest people without regard to political considerations, in order to combat global hunger and malnutrition, and in order to contribute to economic and human development. International agricultural policy should emphasize equitable distribution of benefits and broader participation in land ownership, and should help other nations move toward food self-reliance. Our respect for creation is a demonstration of our reverence for God and respect for life itself. This is especially true of air, water and land - resources intimately connected to food production. All of society, of course, must accept the responsibility to care for the earth and its natural resources. We are challenged to develop a new ecological ethic that will help shape a future that is both just and sustainable. ("Economic Justice for All," 1986; "Food Policy in a Hungry World," 1989.)

## J. Health

Adequate health care is a basic human right. Access to appropriate health care must be guaranteed for all people without regard to economic, social or legal status. Special efforts should be made to remove barriers to prompt personalized and comprehensive care for the poor.

Government also has a responsibility to remove or alleviate environmental, social and economic conditions that cause much ill health and suffering for its citizens. Greater emphasis is required on programs of health promotion and disease prevention.

We support the adoption of comprehensive national health care reform to ensure access to high quality health care for all. Until a comprehensive and universal program can be enacted, we urge the following:

- Requiring employers to provide a minimum health insurance benefit to employees.
- Strengthening existing programs for the poor, the elderly and disabled people.
- Expanding Medicaid coverage to all people with poverty-level incomes; and
- Special aid to hospitals that provide disproportionate amounts of charity care to the poor. ("Health and Health Care," 1981.)

The growing crisis of AIDS within our society requires policies which emphasize continuing research, routine voluntary testing, compassionate care, responsible education, effective support for persons with AIDS and their families, and respect for the dignity and rights of persons with AIDS. ("Called to Compassion and Responsibility: A Response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis," 1989.)

## K. Housing

The church has traditionally viewed housing not as a commodity, but as a basic human right. Housing is being seriously neglected as a priority of national concern, governmental action and federal investment. Shelters cannot substitute for real housing for low-income families and poor individuals. The major goals for national housing policy should include the following:

- Preservation: Effective policies to help preserve, maintain and improve decent, low-cost housing.

- Production: Creative, cost-effective and flexible programs that will increase the supply of quality housing.
- Participation: Encouraging involvement and empowerment of the homeless, tenants, neighborhood residents and housing consumers.
- Partnership: Ongoing support for creative partnerships among community groups, churches, private developers, government and financial institutions to build and preserve affordable housing.
- Affordability: Efforts to help families obtain decent housing at costs that do not require neglect of other basic necessities.
- Opportunity: Stronger efforts to combat discrimination in housing. ("Homelessness and Housing: A Human Tragedy, a Moral Challenge," 1988.)

## L. Human Rights

Human dignity requires the defense and promotion of human rights at home and around the world. The fundamental human rights necessary for human dignity and the common good include civil, political, social and economic rights. Religious freedom, a cornerstone for human rights, is a priority concern for us given the extent of its suppression or disregard in many parts of the world.

With respect to international human rights, there is a pressing need for the United States to pursue a double task: (1) to strengthen and expand international mechanisms by which human rights can be protected and promoted; and (2) to give greater weight to the human rights dimensions of U.S. foreign policy. Therefore, we support U.S. ratification of the international covenants on civil and political rights, and on economic, social and cultural rights, and other sound mechanisms to implement the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights. Further, the United States has a responsibility to use its power and influence consistently and creatively in the effective service of human rights throughout the world. ("Ratification of the Human Rights Treaties," November 1979; "Religious Freedom as a Human Right," February 1982; A Statement on Religious Freedom, 1987.)

## M. Immigration

Catholic tradition defends basic human rights, including the right to work. The U.S. bishops support increasing the number of immigrants admitted to the United States and providing temporary safe haven for those in need. New immigration law includes both aspects and embodies many of the U.S. bishops' immigration principles. First,

family reunification must be maintained. Second, fair treatment should be accorded to all nations and their emigrants. Third, temporary labor programs should be eliminated and permanent workers should receive full rights. Fourth, more just immigration law can serve to diminish illegal immigration. Fifth, the endangerment of any nation's valuable human resources must be avoided, especially for developing countries. Unresolved issues include the fate of undocumented aliens who did not qualify under the ongoing legalization program and indiscriminate firings and discrimination in hiring decisions resulting from employer sanctions. The USCC will continue to advocate the repeal of employers sanctions. (Statement on Principles for Legal Immigration Policy, Sept. 13, 1988.)

#### N. Mass Media

The telecommunications industry has undergone a complete transformation with the advent of new technologies and changing governmental policies and regulations. Ratings battles and marketplace economics have replaced legitimate public-interest standards. We are concerned that these changes are adversely affecting the free flow of information required in a democratic society and increasing the gap between the information rich and information poor in our society and the world. Since deregulation, there has been a definitive decline in the amount of time and resources broadcasters have devoted to issues of community importance. We urge legislative initiatives in the Congress which restore the public accountability of broadcasters, who are trustees of the limited public resource of the airwaves.

Three principles must be maintained: (1) broadcasters must operate truly in the public interest; (2) citizens must be able to participate effectively in licensing decisions; and (3) fairness and diversity must be assured in ownership, employment and public access.

Specifically, we support passage of legislation to require broadcasters to cover controversial issues and to provide balance in such discussions (the Federal Communications Commission policy known as the Fairness Doctrine); to prohibit the rapid buying and selling of broadcast stations (which amounts to speculating in a public resource); and to require the Federal Communications Commission to hold broadcast licensees strictly accountable under the public interest standard.

We support requirements for broadcasters to air more educational and informational children's programs and curtail commercialization during children's television programming. We also strongly advocate measures which will lead to the improvement of moral standards in the public media and an increase in values-based programming.

We support adoption of the rules regulating the cable industry to preserve fair economic competition, adequate protection to consumers and a diversity of program sources. We advocate the creation of a minimum cost for basic cable so that it will be accessible to all segments of the population. We also support the concept of universal and affordable telephone service for all Americans and the provision of so-called lifelines or subsidized telephone rates for the poor.

We support reasonable and constitutionally acceptable regulations to limit the distribution of indecent pornographic or sexually explicit materials through the electronic media, including the telephone, so that they are not accessible to minors. We oppose advertisements of public service announcements concerning contraceptives, since such presentations infringe on the right of parents to teach their children about responsible sexuality. (Statements and Testimony by the USCC Department of Communication Before the Congress and the Federal Communications Commission.)

## 0. Refugees

The Catholic community operates the largest refugee resettlement system in the United States. As the number of refugees doubled during the past decade, refugee resettlement - of those with family ties to our land, those forced to flee their homes or who cannot return home - remains one important component of the U.S. response to this vast crisis. We must also offer resettlement to refugees of genuine humanitarian concern who do not have family ties. Special attention must be paid to unaccompanied refugee children, single women, persons with disabilities and religious minorities. U.S. policy should seek to ensure the preservation of temporary refuge for all refugees and the provision of international refugee assistance at levels that ensure the dignity and human rights of all uprooted peoples. The world community needs to increase its protection of and assistance to the estimated 20 million persons internally displaced within their homelands because of civil strife, repression or natural disasters. (Pastoral Statement on Migrants and Refugees, 1986.)

## P. Regional Concerns

The USCC is concerned about human rights and regional conflicts throughout the world, but four areas are of particular concern, in part due to the involvement of the church, the substantial influence of U.S. policy and their importance for international order: Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Central America and Africa.

Eastern and Central Europe. The advent of a new era in Eastern and Central Europe has created radically new opportunities and challenges, both for the nations of that region and for a new, more just international order. We must recognize the fragile

nature of the present moment. U.S. policy should continue to promote human rights and press for necessary political and economic changes where authoritarian regimes or their structures remain in place. Elsewhere, we support a major undertaking by the United States to assist the emerging democracies of the region in their monumental task of constructing a new political, economic, social and moral order. This should include support for peaceful, democratic and negotiated efforts for peoples to realize their legitimate aspirations for self-determination in ways compatible with greater stability and justice in the region. ("The New Moment in Eastern and Central Europe," March 1990; "A Word of Solidarity, a Call for Justice: A Statement on Religious Freedom in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union," November 1988.)

Middle East. We are deeply concerned about what continuing conflict and violence in the Middle East mean for the people who live there, for all the world and for people of faith everywhere. The present situation is untenable. The method of progress must be dialogue; it is the tested alternative to violence. We support active diplomatic engagement by the United States to stimulate initiatives for peace in the region. The USCC has advocated policies focused on the search for peace and justice in the region, on security and survival for Israel, and self-determination and human rights for Palestinians. This requires serious negotiations working toward a settlement that could achieve three objectives:

- Recognition of Israel's right to exist within secure borders.

- Recognition of Palestinian rights, the right to self-determination, including their option for an independent homeland.

- Fulfillment of U.N. resolutions 242 and 338.

In a region that has long known war, death and suffering, the case of Lebanon in the last 15 years still stands out as particularly horrifying. We strongly support a lasting end to the violence, effective reform and reconciliation, and the final withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon as well as significant economic assistance for Lebanon's recovery. ("Toward Peace in the Middle East", 1989.)

Central America: For over a decade, the conflicts in Central America, especially in El Salvador and Nicaragua, have largely dominated our Latin American concern. With the change of governments in Nicaragua and Panama and the signs of progress toward peace in El Salvador, our focus has turned increasingly to concern for economic justice (reconstruction and development aid, debt relief, etc.) and to efforts to strengthen democratic political institutions, and to address the issues of the drug trade and continuing poverty.

Political violence is still significant, however, in El Salvador and Guatemala, and we continue to press for all parties to respect human rights, to provide effective sanctions for those who violate human rights and to achieve a just, negotiated settlement of decades-long conflicts. We oppose U.S. military aid to Guatemala and continue to call for any military aid to El Salvador to be limited, strictly conditioned and regularly reviewed for human rights compliance and progress on negotiations to end the war. U.S. policy must also address the broader forces at work in much of Latin America - poverty, debt, lack of development and the drug trade - which diminish respect for the lives, dignity and rights of so many people. (USCC Statement on Central America, 1987; USCC Testimony on Central America, 1989.)

Africa: The African continent has been plagued with armed conflict, often of long-term duration, that has resulted in millions of displaced persons, tens of thousands maimed both physically and mentally, and untold devastation of human life and physical resources. We welcome the political and economic changes that are taking place within Africa. The movement for democracy and the pursuit of peace are now part of the overall African process for change, though serious conflict continues in some areas. The U.S. bishops remain concerned that too many African countries engage in arms races they can ill afford, often with the encouragement of the more powerful nations. More steps are necessary to curb the arms trade, not only in Africa but throughout the world. ("Economic Justice for All," 1986.)

With the bishops of South Africa we have welcomed the number of significant positive steps that have taken place within South Africa. But the church in South Africa points out that the majority of their people are still affected by the application and consequences of apartheid and are denied the right to vote. Many communities remain wracked by violence. We continue to urge the U.S. government and all interested parties to use every useful political, economic and diplomatic means to ensure that South Africa makes a full, rapid and peaceful transition from apartheid to a just and democratic society where every South African's dignity and rights are respected regardless of race. (Statement on South Africa, 1985; "Divestment, Disinvestment and South Africa," 1986.)

#### Q. Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is a nationwide problem of immense proportions; our conference advocates effective, compassionate policies to turn the tide of addiction in this country, including public policy and funding to ensure access to adequate, affordable and appropriate treatment and services for all those in need, especially pregnant women. The USCC also supports drug enforcement efforts which provide for fair and swift punishment for crimes associated with drugs and the violence which too often accompanies them, without resort to the use of the death penalty; supports regulation

and control of handguns and automatic weapons, and opposes efforts to legalize addictive drugs as both ineffective and unacceptable, sending the wrong message to society and individuals.

Our conference supports the bishops of Latin America on the primary importance of economic development programs over often ineffective and counterproductive military approaches in fighting the scourge of drug production which destroys the social fabric of both producing and consuming countries. ("New Slavery, New Freedom: A Pastoral Message on Substance Abuse," 1990.)

This is not an exclusive listing of the issues that concern us. As Pope John Paul II has said, "The church cannot remain insensible to whatever serves true human welfare any more than she can remain indifferent to whatever threatens it."<sup>(11)</sup> Thus, we are advocates on many other social justice concerns such as welfare reform, the civil and political rights of the elderly and persons with disabling conditions, the reform of our criminal justice system, and the protection of the land and the environment.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, we believe that the church has a proper role and responsibility in public affairs flowing from its Gospel mandate and its respect for the dignity of the human person. We hope these reflections will contribute to a renewed political vitality in our land, both in terms of citizen participation in the electoral process and the integrity and accountability of those who seek and hold public office.

We urge all citizens to use their franchise by registering to vote and going to the polls. We encourage them to demand information from the campaigns themselves as well as from the media coverage of those campaigns and to take stands on the candidates and the issues. If the campaign year is to engage the values of the American people, the campaigners and voters alike must share the responsibility for making it happen. All are urged to become involved in the campaign or party of their choice, to learn about the issues and to inform their conscience.

We pray that Christians will provide courageous leadership in promoting a spirit of responsible political involvement. May they follow the example of Jesus in giving special concern for the poor and may all their actions be guided by a deep love of God and neighbor and a true spirit of citizenship.

#### Footnotes

1 "Centesimus Annus," 47.

2 1974 Synod of Bishops, "Human Rights and Reconciliation."

3 "Redemptor Hominis," 14.

4 "Lumen Gentium," 31.

5 "Familiaris Consortio."

6 "Gaudium et Spes," 76.

7 "A Call to Action" 4.

8 "Centesimus Annus," 57.

9 Pope John Paul II, Address to Laity in Toledo, Spain, *Origins* 12:23, pp. 371ff.

10 Homily in Nairobi, Kenya, May 7, 1980, *Origins*, 10:2, pp. 26ff.

11 "Redemptor Hominis," 13.

#### MARGIN NOTES:

The new political responsibility statement appearing on these pages was approved by the U.S. Catholic Conference Administrative Board at its Sept. 10-12 meeting in Washington and made public Oct. 17. The board consists of the conference's officers and committee chairmen and others elected by the nation's bishops to represent them between general meetings.

Following a pattern set in previous statements, the board highlighted 17 current policy issues of "special relevance" in the 1992 national political debate. It summarized the moral and public policy positions taken by the U.S. bishops on each issue.

During the Sept. 10-12 meeting in Washington, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Administrative Committee also issued a statement on euthanasia that appeared in the current volume of *Origins*, pp. 257f, and the USCC Administrative Board issued a statement on the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia that appeared on pp. 258f.

In the statement on euthanasia, the Administrative Committee called "on Catholics and on all persons of good will to reject proposals to legalize euthanasia." They said: "We urge families to discuss issues surrounding the care of terminally ill loved ones in light of sound moral principles and the demands of human dignity, so that patients need not feel helpless or abandoned in the face of complex decisions about their

future. And we urge health-care professionals, legislators and all involved in this debate to seek solutions to the problems of terminally ill patients and their families that respect the inherent worth of all human beings, especially those most in need of our love and assistance."

In the statement on changes in the Soviet Union and the civil war in Yugoslavia, the Administrative Board pointed to the Soviet region, saying: "We emphasize these moral and spiritual inspirations behind recent events: a respect for human dignity, a sense of solidarity, a concern for non-violence and the power of religious beliefs. We do so because we are convinced that they represent the forces that we in the West should support and promote as the people of the emerging Union of Sovereign States and the newly free Baltic States join their Central and East European neighbors in the arduous task of building new societies.

"The people of the United States can support these moral and spiritual forces by intensifying and expanding private and governmental efforts to assist these nations in ways appropriate to this extraordinary moment."

The board said also: "As Catholic bishops, we reiterate our commitment to assist our brother and sister Catholics to revitalize their churches, and we encourage Catholics in this country to continue to support this effort. Such outside aid will be indispensable as the churches emerge from decades of strict controls and, with other religious faiths, contribute to rebuilding the moral underpinnings of a new social order."

Turning to Yugoslavia, the board stated: "The violence in Yugoslavia, however, shows that while the crisis of the Cold War is over, new threats to world peace are emerging. We hope that in response the United States will join other nations in taking ever more determined steps to help create and consolidate effective mechanisms for conflict resolution and other international structures that would relativize and diminish the importance of military force in national and international affairs.

"Five decades after the end of World War II, we are only beginning to rise to the challenge of building a postwar peace worthy of the name. During these many years, we have prayed and hoped that those individuals and nations suffering under communist rule would reemerge in an era of freedom. Now as that once-distant hope becomes a reality, we have a new responsibility to offer these brave but still vulnerable people the concrete support and solidarity necessary for them to build new societies based on truth, justice, freedom and peace."

From the 3,400-word political responsibility statement issued in 1976, which addressed only eight specific issues, "the quadrennial document has evolved into a statement nearly three times as long, covering more than twice as many issues," Jerry

Filteau wrote in a Catholic News Service analysis of the new political responsibility statement by the U.S. Catholic Conference Administrative Board appearing on these pages. He said, "this year's statement has far more new or revised language than any other since the first. It gives substantial new emphasis, for example, to euthanasia, environmental issues, U.S. policy toward Eastern Europe and the new opportunities for arms control in a post-Cold War world.

"It also adds substance abuse and a new global refugee crisis to the list of political priorities."

Filteau said that the Administrative Board this year expanded its abortion commentary in several ways, calling abortion "the fundamental human rights issue of our day" and adding language that rejects abortion as a "method of family planning." The board called for legislation and programs to support childbirth instead of abortion.

Filteau wrote: "On arms control and disarmament there have been two constants since 1976: calls by the bishops to reverse the arms race and to use the money saved to meet the needs of the poor. Previous statements urged arms reduction agreements within the Cold War context that prevailed at the time. This year's commentary focuses on the 'new opportunities' for substantive arms reductions offered by the end of the Cold War. It calls for bans on chemical weapons and nuclear testing, 'deep cuts' in strategic nuclear weapons, reductions in conventional forces and other steps toward nuclear and conventional disarmament."

"Discrimination and Racism" is a new heading in the 1991 statement, replacing the "Civil Rights" heading used in 1984 and 1987. "Behind the change in the heading is a stronger focus on the need for Americans to combat racial hostility and racist attitudes in every area of life," said Filteau.

In the area of the economy, this year's statement adds to the already extensive 1987 treatment of economic issues by urging protection of workers' rights to bargain collectively and strike without reprisals, urging policies to reverse the disproportionate impact of poverty on children, women and racial and ethnic minorities, and calling for steps to help reduce Third World debt and to emphasize human development over military aid in U.S. foreign aid, said Filteau.

The education section in this year's statement has several additions, including a call to develop and implement a program of "moral education" in public schools, Filteau noted. And, he said, "euthanasia is addressed in the 1991 statement for the first time - a response to campaigns since 1987 to legalize euthanasia in some states. The bishops flatly condemn 'any law or social policy that sanctions suicide or assisted suicide.'"

Family life has been stressed in the political responsibility statements since 1979. But new in 1991, said Filteau, is "language specifically urging 'family and medical leave laws, inclusive and broad-based child care efforts, and pro-family tax, welfare, health and housing policies.'"

He observed that this year's food and agriculture section has been expanded to include a section on environmental responsibility as part of "our reverence for God and respect for life itself."

And there are changes in the division of national health insurance. "Beginning in 1979 the political responsibility statements have urged 'a national health insurance program,'" said Filteau. "That language was changed this year to call for 'comprehensive national health-care reform.'" And, "this year's health-care section added a paragraph on public policy on AIDS."

Filteau said that "the section on housing, listed as a priority concern in all statements since 1976, was almost completely revised this year to argue for a more comprehensive approach and more urgent attention. Where previous statements simply urged 'greater commitment' to affordable housing, the new one says this has become a 'seriously neglected' national issue."

And "this year's expanded human rights section spells out that fundamental rights include 'civil, political, social and economic rights.' It notes that religious freedom is 'a priority concern' in many parts of the world."

Included in the 1991 statement is "a separate section on refugees, a topic treated only briefly under immigration in 1987," said Filteau. "It says the number of refugees in the world has doubled in the past decade, creating a 'vast crisis' to which the United States and other nations must respond.

And the regional concerns section was "completely rewritten in 1991," Filteau wrote. "It spells out positions of the bishops, on four areas of particular concern - Eastern and Central Europe, the Middle East, Central America and Africa."

The 1991 statement includes a new section on public policy concerning substance abuse, Filteau noted. "It summarizes policy positions adopted by the U.S. bishops in their 1990 pastoral message on the topic, 'New Slavery, New Freedom.'"