



# Responsible for life and the future of Slovenia

*The Caritas Slovenia, the Justice and Peace Commission at the Slovene Bishops' Conference and the Council of lay Catholics of Slovenia have expressed their views on the basic values in the Slovenian society - the values which are indispensable for a complete and responsible development of the Slovenian nation and state.*

## Introduction

Like other citizens Slovene Catholics have an obligation to promote the prosperity and well-being of the whole nation, to help in the establishment of efficient social systems in the state, and to promote social justice in the society we live in. However, we are not responsible for the present-day situation only- we are also responsible for the future of our nation and state.

Our country has been undergoing enormous economic growth, political recognition and cultural independence to the proportion never witnessed before. However, despite many positive indicators our country is still faced with various phenomena which do not concern Slovene Catholics alone. The most important ones include:

- A surprisingly small number of young people decide to marry and start a family of their own. For this reason international studies rank Slovenia last in the European Union regarding the marriage rate. This result implies that our society has to reconsider its general attitude to marriage. (1)
- Despite a slight increase in the birth rate in the last year the Slovene population cannot recover efficiently enough since 1,200 too few children are born each year. According to experts Slovenia “lacked” 272,000 children at the end of 2006. This »demographic drought« will definitely result in various economic and social consequences. We will not be able to solve the problem even by carefully-planned immigration of foreigners. Unfortunately, bigger problems will appear i.e. the problems of unemployment, stability of public finances, integration, intercultural and international dialogue, cohabitation, coexistence, etc. (2)
- The attitude to unborn life is a controversial issue in our society. According to the report published by the *Institute of Public Health of the Republic of Slovenia* 312,000 abortions were performed between 1981 and 2004, which ranks Slovenia above European average in this study (3). Here we should consider not only the demographic but also the psychological and moral



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consequences that such actions have for an individual as well as for the society as a whole.

- Alcoholism is a major issue in the Slovene society. According to Caritas there are over 170,000 alcoholics and their families in Slovenia. This implies that many members of our nation suffer from major personal problems, which also has various consequences for our economy as well as our society.
- Another major problem worth considering is a high suicide rate. Over 500 individuals commit suicide a year, which, tragically, ranks Slovenia 5th in the world. This shows that Slovene people have often a dubious attitude towards their own existence. (4)
- Poverty is yet another problem our country is faced with. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EUC-SILC) the poverty risk rate was? 11, 7 per cent in 2005. This percentage, which represents absolute (and not relative) poverty, implies that in 2005 11,7 % of the Slovene population lived below the poverty line, the poorest ones being: families in which none of the members are employed (37 %), especially families with dependants (i.e. children) (59 %); these are followed by one-member households (43 %), single-parent families (22 %) and couples with three or more dependants (i.e. children) (15 %); all the inactive persons, especially the unemployed (33 %), self-employed individuals (18 %), elderly women (25 %) and tenants (22 %). Despite the fact that the poverty risk rate in Slovenia is among the smallest ones in the European Union, the percentage calculated implies that many Slovene people (i.e. about 200,000) are in financial distress - these include especially the unemployed (young people, the elderly and invalids), pensioners on low pensions as well as men and women (especially those from single-parent families). (5)

Slovene Catholics are deeply concerned about the phenomena in question. We are convinced that such and many other phenomena are caused by our attitude towards the basic values. For this reason we feel obliged to strengthen the basic values in our personal life as well as in the society as a whole. These values include: life, family, financial safety and individual health.

We believe that this responsibility forms the basis of our personal and social decisions, which can manifest itself in numerous ways. We can promote justice and the common good in the workplace and within various movements and groups in our local area i.e. groups of individuals who promote the basic values, respect for the dignity and rights of each human being, respect towards family life, the education and schooling of the young people, a more equitable distribution of wealth in the state, solidarity with the weakest members of our society and, also, true individual freedom and the freedom of different associations. We can exercise our civic responsibility especially at election time by voting for individuals who will (either as representatives of the law-making body in the National Assembly or as members of the government) be making decisions and taking various measures



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which will influence our personal lives as well as the existence of the society as a whole.

In a democratic political system each individual citizen should be encouraged to exercise and promote the common good and social justice. It is for this reason that we would like to encourage Slovene Catholics and other citizens to:

- raise their awareness of the major social issues,
- raise their concerns with the political candidates,
- encourage civic political debates,
- to accept responsibility and run for political office at elections,
- express their political will by participating in the electoral process, especially by voting.

### I. Political discernment

The Gospel does not promote a specific political programme of social and political action for the Catholics. Nor does the Church »set forth specific political solutions to temporal questions that God has left to the free and responsible judgment of each person.« (6). It is the politicians' obligation to establish a just society; this is not the domain of the Church (7). However, each Catholics must consider political issues and exercise prudential judgment and political discernment (i.e. they have to be able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate political programmes). Within a democratic community there exists a range of legitimate political approaches which do not necessarily pursue the same goals or promote the same values. Although Catholic moral principles are clear and well-defined, they can be advanced in many different ways in the political arena - for this reason there exists a range of legitimate political beliefs, viewpoints, convictions and directions in society and, also, within a particular Catholic community. This implies that each of us has to consider which candidate is really determined to promote the most important and crucial values our future depends on. Society has to be based on values strengthening respect for human dignity from conception to natural death.

### II. Some Key Principles of Catholic Moral and Social Teaching

The key principles of Catholic moral and social teaching advocate the values our future depends on. Based on these values we can responsibly decide which political programmes and individuals deserve our trust and support in the election.

#### 1. Respect for the Life and Dignity of the Human Person

People of faith believe that life comes from God, that human life from conception to end is a gift beyond measure. Each human being, created in the image of God, has incalculable worth and inherent dignity. Since life is the most precious gift that can be given, it is our Christian duty to love it and keep it from harm.

Catholics believe in the freedom and responsibility to choose; however, we are first obliged to promote the respect of human life at all stages, from conception to



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death. Choosing life means protecting people in all circumstances, especially the most vulnerable, the most fragile. Choosing life especially protecting the unborn baby- the human embryo- since this is already a true human being with its own human life, a being who is willing to develop and reach its personal fulfilment and independence. For this reason the unborn baby has to be treated as a member of the human family.

Choosing life means providing support for pregnant women, mothers and fathers from single-parent families, the elderly, the ill, the impoverished, the suffering and individuals with special needs. This posture promotes peace, reduces violence and resolves conflicts within the society. Choosing life especially means respecting the life and dignity of those who are dying and accompanying them to the very end; this also means offering support to their relatives.

Due to a high percentage of alcoholics, suicides, drug addicts, the victims of car accidents and those injured in them, and also due to the increase of different types of violence in our society, we are entitled to expect that the candidates for political offices will put forward a political programme which could help us prevent and heal these injuries of our society.

### 2. Support for the Marriage and Family

Marriage is a loving union between a man and a woman always accepting the possibility of a new life. Its purpose is the love between the spouses and the procreation and education of children. For this reason marriage is a natural institution that predates all social, legal and religious systems; its existence extends beyond the limits of human memory. The fulfilment of the fundamental objectives of marriage thus always contributes to the common good. The society, which is concerned about its future, has always affirmed the fundamental purposes of marriage which can be recognised through human reason and experience. Catholics believe that the gift of love between husband and wife is an indisputable evidence of the greatness and sanctity of marriage. For this reason marriage needs the moral, legal and financial support and protection of society. Special care should be devoted to putting in place practices that would help parents successfully balance marital and family as well as work responsibilities. We should also provide safe and affordable housing for families in financial distress. We should also promote effective preparation of the young people for marriage and family life - this should already be encouraged during their schooling.

### 3. Preferential Option for the Poor

For Christians concern for the impoverished is not only a political option but also a Gospel imperative. Jesus had a special love for the weak and the vulnerable; he identified himself with them and proclaimed the good news to them. The elderly seem to be an especially vulnerable group of people in our society since there are too few senior citizens' homes for them and they often have to wait for several years before they are accepted there; often, these homes do not suit all the needs of the elderly people and they are not appropriately incorporated into the larger community. We should especially support the workers (especially those on the



lowest income) who rightfully demand a decent salary for their work and a share in the company profit.

The late Pope John II. emphasized that the moral measure of a society is how the most vulnerable are faring. (8). For this reason Catholics are called to exercise charity and act against injustice by giving preference especially to those who are most at risk, the poor, the unemployed, the immigrants and the oppressed. How these issues shape public policy goals and priorities reflects the charity of society, political parties and politicians.

### 4. Common Good

The common good is »the sum total of social conditions which allow people, especially groups or individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and easily« (9). These social conditions comprise the following: efficient educational system, health care and social security, equal opportunities in employment, relationships based on social justice, effective judiciary, a well-developed and competitive economy, an atmosphere of freedom and plurality. The common good allows human dignity to be respected and fundamental needs to be met - this can be achieved when everyone contributes to the building of a just society in which the development of each individual is promoted. Human beings are created as members of a family, with roots in a larger (i.e. national and political) community - the state. People are social beings who cannot survive without human relationships. Our commitment to the common good is expressed in a solidarity towards each other i.e. in the good of all and of each individual because we are really responsible for all.

### 5. Promotion of a healthy and clean environment

The universe is a gift from God, a gift to all the members of the human race. Protection of nature is a challenge our country is faced with since each citizen has the right to live in a healthy and safe environment. It is not enough to protect animals and plants by the appropriate legal means, but, also, the economy and technological achievements need to be devoted to the cause. We should give preference to permanent development, the protection of water resources and climate change which will, in the long run, especially affect the poorest among us. Each of us is obliged to promote life in a clean environment since this reflects our love for the universe.

## III. Taking Responsibility at Election Time

*At election time political parties and candidates may promise many things. However, all the things promised or offered to us are not equally important. The basic values discussed above are definitely indispensable. We can choose the appropriate people on the basis of how a particular candidate responds to the following questions.*

1. What is the position of the candidate and their political party on protecting the dignity of each individual, especially the dignity of people with special



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needs, the ill, the elderly, the unemployed, the impoverished as well as social outcasts and the oppressed? How will they try to protect the basic human rights?

2. Will the candidate (and their political party) respect and protect the right to life of all human beings from conception to natural death (abortion, euthanasia)?
3. What policies do they propose to encourage the measures needed for a social order which will encourage women to give birth to new citizens? How will they support especially women who are faced with unexpected or unwanted pregnancies, both during the pregnancy and also after the birth?
4. What means will they take to maintain the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman which forms the very foundation of society and which represents the best possible environment for the procreation and education of children?
5. What are their policies to increase the birth rate? What measures do they propose to facilitate the procedures of international adoption by infertile couples?
6. How do they promote effective preparation of young people for marriage and family life (via syllabi, premarital preparation courses and via offering support to married couples)?
7. What means will they take to try to reduce the divorce rate and alleviate the negative impact of divorce on the divorced couples and their children?
8. What measures do they propose to support parents and families in raising their children and in fulfilling their responsibilities towards the elderly relatives?
9. How will they address the crisis of the lack of affordable and safe housing for young families?
10. What measures do they propose to defend the rights of women and men in the home and in the workplace? What policies do they propose to reduce violent behaviour, especially violence to women and children?
11. What commitments have they made to decrease the growing gap between the rich and the poor people in Slovenia?
12. What policies do they propose to establish an effective system of social security for the unemployed and for the workers on the lowest income? Will they encourage the employment of the young and the incorporation of the elderly into pension schemes suiting their own needs?



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13. What means will they take to promote the social responsibility of companies and other legal entities?
14. How will they try to promote respect for Sunday as the day off - the day intended for family life, recreation and spiritual growth?
15. What are their commitments to ensuring accessibility to health care and long-term home care for all Slovene citizens and immigrants, particularly the poor and the elderly?
16. What policies do they propose to establish an effective system of social security for individuals with special needs (i.e. the invalids, the mentally-disabled, etc.)?
17. What means will they take to ensure that genetic and reproductive technology respect, protect and promote human life and dignity?
18. What measures do they propose to reduce the suicide rate and various addictions (i.e. alcoholism, drug addiction, etc.)?
19. What policies do they propose to ensure safer road traffic?
20. What measures do they propose to defend the parents' right to choose the school for their children, especially if they decide to fund a private schools run by the Catholic Church and other associations in the domain of civil law?
21. Are they willing to recognise the mission and the role of the Church in social welfare, the education system and health care?
22. What commitments have they made to promote Slovene cultural heritage and the sense of national identity which incorporate national as well as religious (i.e. Christian) dimensions?
23. What restrictive provisions will they accept to limit gambling and alleviate the negative impact of such, currently-existing activities?
24. What means will they take to encourage intercultural and inter-religious dialogue? How will they improve the integration of immigrants into Slovene cultural environment?
25. What commitments have they made to promote reconciliation in our society which still has not managed to agree on certain events from its past?
26. What policies do they propose to promote a healthy and clean environment? What means will they take to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases?
27. How will they increase development assistance of the Republic of Slovenia to developing to at least 0,33 per cent of Slovenia gross national product in



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2015? Do they encourage distribution of aid via various parishes established by Slovene missionaries?

### Conclusion

Elections are the opportunity for the citizens to make choices about their future. For Catholics attending the election and voting for appropriate candidates is an important moral responsibility since, by making prudent choices, we can contribute to the common good of all society. Catholics cannot vote without making clear judgements and reflecting on the political choices and the values before them.

This involves three elements:

- a) basic knowledge and acceptance of the principles of Catholic teaching regarding the human being and his life in society;
- b) sufficient familiarity with the platforms of the candidates; and
- c) a careful consideration of how the candidates will best respect and reflect the basic values that Catholics consider indispensable for the future of the whole nation.

By participating in the social dialogue leading to discernment and by voting responsibly, Catholics can nourish our faith and fulfil our responsibilities.

However, our political participation does not end with the announcement of the electoral results. This is merely the beginning. Catholics are called to develop healthy communities. An important sign of a healthy community is when informed and responsible citizens engage their political representatives in ongoing public dialogue on pressing societal problems and, also, show familiarity with the viewpoints and public activity of these candidates. Nothing less can be expected of Catholics since we are called to be truly responsible for the existence and future of Slovenia.

In the end we would like to thank everyone who is involved in running for or serving in political office, whether they belong to a particular religious community or not. Their service and promotion of the values discussed above are generous contributions to the common good of our society.

### Signed:

The Justice and Peace Commission of the Slovenian Bishops' Conference  
Caritas Slovenia  
The Council of Slovenian Lay Catholics



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