

‘A better future: towards a culture of life, care and hope for all’

A Pastoral Reflection by the Catholic Bishops in Northern Ireland on 5 May elections to the Legislative Assembly

In this pastoral reflection, we consider what some key principles of Catholic Social teaching offer by way of direction and priorities in the search for the common good in Northern Ireland at this particular time. In doing so, The reflection we offer, therefore, is offered as part of our pastoral responsibility within the community of the Church, and as an expression of the cherished freedom that all enjoy in a democratic society. The main points of our reflection are as follows:

- Voting for those who will govern our society is a moral act. Each vote cast, or not cast, potentially influences the values that will shape future law and policy
- We appeal for a new and more constructive political culture, one based on a shared commitment to the common good and the priorities of citizens rather than on traditional constitutional issues
- We call on all parties to address, in the next Programme for Government, the disturbing levels of childhood poverty and the systemic issues of social need ... One practical appeal is for funding to schools so that no pupil begins the day without a nutritional breakfast
- The social and moral teaching of the Church is clear, that it is never morally acceptable to support any policy that undermines the sacred inviolability of the right to life of an innocent person in any circumstances
- As Pope Francis has recently said, there are “no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family”
- We call on all politicians to respect the positive contribution to peace and good relations made by all school sectors and to ensure that all school sectors are treated equally in terms of funding and policy

Please read the full text of our pastoral reflection on

www.archdioceseofarmagh.com

Ten questions based on Catholic Social Teaching for Catholics to ask candidates standing in the Assembly elections

In encouraging all citizens to fulfill their moral duty to vote in the forthcoming Assembly elections, we ask all who do so to inform their conscience in advance about the important moral, social and economic issues that are at stake. In expressing our good wishes to all who are standing for election, and acknowledging the spirit of public service that motivates the noble calling of politics, we assure every candidate of our prayers and encourage potential voters in a respectful and constructive manner to ask the following questions of any candidate to whom they are considering giving their vote:

1. What will you do to address the unacceptable levels of childhood poverty in Northern Ireland and the widening gap between rich and poor?
2. What will you do to uphold the right to life of unborn children and adults with severe life-limiting disabilities, as well as children conceived through sexual crime, if the next Assembly seeks to introduce legislation that removes the fundamental right to life from them?
3. Do you support abortion, the direct and intentional taking of an innocent human life in any circumstances?
4. What will you do to protect and support family and marriage and in particular the natural institution of marriage between one man and one woman as the fundamental building block of society?
5. Will you support the right of religious organisations to provide services in a manner consistent with their religious ethos and beliefs?
6. Will you support the right of parents to have Catholic schools as part of a diverse system of educational provision, based on parental choice?
7. What will you do to highlight the persecution of Christians and other persecuted groups across the world?
8. What will you do to address human trafficking in Northern Ireland and to help improve services for refugees, asylum seekers and the homeless?
9. What will you do to help achieve those UN Sustainable Development goals that are ethically consistent and ensure proper care and respect for the natural environment?
10. What will you do to create a more constructive and inclusive political culture in the next Assembly, one that gives hope to all in our society for a better future?