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Catholic political group: Reject selfishness as reason for vote

Joshua J. McElwee | Feb. 29, 2012 NCR Today

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, a progressive lay-led political advocacy group, released a voter guide this morning that calls for Catholic voters this election cycle to ?spurn...those sins of selfishness and pride that afflict the human heart and frustrate our common endeavors as one people.?

Named ?The Common Good in America Today,? the guide takes on the lens of the Catholic notion of the common good to address seven different topic areas Catholic voters might consider in the November elections, including the economy, pro-life issues, healthcare, and religious liberty.

Opening with a quotation from Pope Benedict?s encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*, the guide states that while it recognizes that ?no candidate and no party completely adhere to the vision of Pope Benedict XVI,? its aim is to ?take up the call? issued by the U.S. bishops in their own voting guide, named Faithful Citizenship.

The bishops? 2011 version of that document, which has traditionally been released by the bishops the year before a presidential election, was released last fall. Unlike previous years, the bishops decided that instead of writing a new version for the 2012 election that they would re-release their 2007 letter with a new introduction.

Speaking to *NCR* by phone Wednesday, one of the board members of Catholics in Alliance said the group decided to issue its guide to complement the bishops?, and to shine the light of Catholic social teaching on some of the most discussed topics of the day.

?We?re?trying to focus on the issues that seem to be getting the most attention in contemporary American politics,? said Stephen Schneck, who is also the director of Catholic University?s Institute for Policy Research & Catholic Studies.

At the same time, said Schneck, Catholics in Alliance also wanted ?to bring attention to facets of this discussion that have been ignored? in the current political debates.

Addressing a question about how the U.S. bishops? current focus on the controversial mandate requiring coverage of contraceptive services in health care plans might overshadow other issues of importance, Schneck said that the church should look for pragmatic ways to address the mandate and concerns it has generated about religious liberty in the country.

?We?re convinced that, however important religious liberty is, the way in which the church properly should be addressing all of the issues in contemporary American politics is pragmatically,? said Schneck.

?[The bishops] need to be talking about the desperate problem of immigrants and the need for immigration reform. They need to be talking about the environment, they need to be talking about the poor. And frankly, they need to be talking about religious liberty,? he continued.

?But we can?t just have one channel. We need to be able to talk about all of these things, and we can only do

it?if we are able to engage thoughtfully and pragmatically.?

In terms of addressing economic inequality, Catholics in Alliance?s guide calls particular attention to the Tea Party, writing that the political goals expressed by members of the group leave ?no room for Christ and no room for Christian love.?

Groups like the Tea Party, the guide states, ?have a different understanding of the human vocation,? which ?celebrates a hyper-individualism that specifically denies the possibility of a Common Good, and is dedicated to a form of social Darwinism in which the poor and vulnerable are despised and only the achievements and wealth of the strong merit political protection.?

Among the other issues the guide addresses are immigration, workers? rights, and foreign affairs.

In terms of immigration, the guide writes that ?the greatest political failure of the past decade has been the inability of our political leaders in Washington to find a way to pass comprehensive immigration reform.?

Mentioning the 2010 failure of the DREAM act, which would have granted citizenship to immigrants who have attended college or served in the military, the guide states that ?immigration has made America a better, more lively, more diverse, more successful nation.?

?We believe that immigrants today should receive the same pathways to citizenship that previous generations of immigrants enjoyed,? it continues.

In the area dedicated to foreign affairs, the guide quotes Pope Paul VI?s 1965 address to the United Nations -- when the pope declared ?War never again. Never again war.? -- before writing that the group ?believes that statesmen should heed what is known as Just War Theory, not least because that theory insists that war must always be a last resort.?

Mentioning the roots of the theory, the guide states that ?we believe its principles are accessible to all and would keep our nation, and other nations, from the kind of militaristic forays that wreak?suffering and havoc.?

For the entire voter guide, **click here** [1].

[Joshua J. McElwee is an *NCR* staff writer. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org.]

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