



# BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND & WALES

## Pastrol Message from the Catholic Bishops in Wales

The elections for National Assembly for Wales on 5 May 2011

To be read or distributed at the end of Masses on Saturday/Sunday 30th April/ 1st May 2011

On 5 May, residents of Wales will vote to elect a new National Assembly for Wales.

The Welsh Catholic Bishops strongly recommend that Catholics exercise their duty as citizens by voting in this election. The policy choices made by the new Welsh Assembly Government will have an important impact on the quality of life of Welsh citizens in a period of severe financial retrenchment and of many moral and ethical challenges. It is therefore imperative that Welsh Catholics carefully consider these matters and make a reasoned choice as to which candidates they vote for and how they will vote in the election.

The Bishops cannot tell people how to vote. Nevertheless, we would like to draw attention to a number of aspects of Catholic Social Teaching relevant to contemporary developments in our society.

**Marriage and the Family:** The Catholic Church, in continuity with the teaching of the Gospel and 2000 years of Christian practice, teaches that marriage is the public and life-long commitment between a man and a woman to remain together. We regard marriage as a Sacrament in that it brings married couples to the heart of the love of God which they reflect to each other. While we recognize the heroic efforts of many single parents to bring up children in very difficult circumstances, we affirm that the gift of children and their education in a stable permanent family is at the heart of Church teaching.

**Education and Faith Schools:** The Catholic Church holds that parents are ultimately responsible for the education of their children and, further, that they have a right to have them educated in an ethos which respects their religious beliefs. It is this which underlies the commitment of the Church to provide Catholic schools often at considerable financial cost to the Catholic community. In Wales, these schools provide an education that is academically excellent and which prepare young Catholics to take their place as responsible citizens in our society. They also provide an education for many children from poorer sections of society and thus promote social cohesion. We ask Catholic voters to question whether candidates and parties support the right to maintain Catholic schools and legislation to increase the funding of all schools.

**Health and Social Welfare Issues:** At the centre of Catholic Social Teaching is the notion of the absolute dignity of the human person, made in the image and likeness of God and destined to share the divine life for all eternity, and the sanctity of human life, understood not as the 'property' of the human being but as a gift from God. It is this understanding of human life which motivates our opposition to anything which endangers life especially at its most vulnerable moments – the life of the baby in the womb or in frail old age – through abortion, assisted suicide, or euthanasia. There are strong advocates in society today who seek to 'liberalise' these practices and the Church remains firmly opposed to such liberalisation. However, the Church's pro-life stand also includes a much wider understanding of 'life' to include all those conditions which allow the full flourishing of the human being, including health, education, housing, and the elimination of all forms of poverty. The Church also believes in the equality of all human beings and is opposed to any unjust discrimination against individuals or groups.

**Economic issues:** In 2008, the world experienced a catastrophic failure in its banking system which spread to the wider economic system with severe consequences for many countries and groups. This has had important consequences for public finances and the policies that these finances support. Although many of the key decisions about public finances are made at Westminster, the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government also have to make policy choices in a very difficult context. Pope Benedict XVI, in his speech to Britain's' leaders in Westminster Hall last September, drew attention to the ethical failures at the heart of the banking crisis and urged that more attention be paid to values in our financial and economic systems and choices. These remarks are apposite also to the Welsh government. The very difficult choices that have to be made involving which public services will be funded and to what degree must be informed by an ethical value system that is based on the absolute dignity of the human person and the common good of society. The Church is extensively involved in charitable work for that same Common Good of society and for community cohesion. Catholic voters should ask whether the party of the candidate of their choice will promote such a vision.

We ask Catholic voters and others to weigh carefully their choices asking whether their preferred candidates will reflect Catholic teaching on these issues.

+ **George Stack**  
Archbishop Elect of Cardiff

+ **Tom Burns**  
Bishop of Menevia

+ **Edwin Regan**  
Bishop of Wrexham