

A VISION FOR ENGAGING

*“Anyone who needs
me and whom I can
help is my neighbor.*

The concept of

“neighbor” is now

universalized... Jesus

identifies himself with

*the hungry, the thirsty,
the stranger, the naked,*

the sick and those in

prison... [In them] we

find Jesus himself, and

in Jesus we find God.”

Are these the rants of extremists and marginal crazies? Or the voices of faith, reason and compassion? The first quotation is from Pope Benedict XVI and the second from Pope John Paul II applying the Church’s accumulated social wisdom and Christian vision to issues of deep concern to American voters today.

“Catholic social teaching is not as well known to the general public as the Church’s positions on abortion, marriage, cloning or euthanasia,” says James E. Hug, SJ, President of the Center of Concern. “But it provides the kind of careful, practical reflection on biblical teaching and respectful, reasoned argument that the nation needs in today’s highly charged and divisive political atmosphere, where faith is too frequently manipulated for partisan advantage.”

It’s this much-needed voice that the Center of Concern is seeking to inject into the present political dialogue. The Washington, D.C.-based independent Catholic social justice center is launching a new project, ... **voting the common good: ELECTION 2008**, which factors in the values and principles of Catholic social teaching to the decisions facing the American people in the coming election year.

For more than two thousand years, Hug explains, Christians have struggled over how to live their faith in society and bring their biblical values to bear on the difficult choices confronting them. Since 1891, popes have drawn on that experience to crystallize principles and teachings for Christians in the modern world through encyclical letters and other teaching tools.

“For the more than 70 million Catholics who live in the U.S.,” Hug says, “the vision and reasoned argument of this extensive body of Catholic teaching provides important guidance as the nation is plunged into more than a year of political campaigning, culminating in perhaps the most important election of a lifetime.”

Many political observers pinpointed the Catholic vote as determining the winner of the last presidential election. “As a result,” Hug notes, “Catholics’ votes will be vigorously sought by both parties in this campaign season.”

To help guide Catholic and non-Catholic voters alike, the Center of Concern is publishing a series of policy papers and educational materials on campaign issues for personal and group reflection.

The first set of materials clarifies the notion of the **common good** as the context for all the major issues of the campaigns. The policy paper and educational materials point out that each issue – from immigration to jobs, from health care to global warming, from poverty to terrorism – is a new or more complicated problem because of globalization.

It is widely recognized that U.S. elections have global implications, but few U.S. citizens understand how much global influence they have or how people in the poor nations of the world in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia feel about them. Dr. Peggy Antrobus, an influential leader in global development circles, insists: “We citizens of the Global South should be able to vote in the U.S. elections, because decisions made in Washington have such profound effects in our lives and on our futures – often greater than the decisions of our own governments.”

“To attain the good of peace, there must be a clear and conscious acknowledgement that violence is an unacceptable evil and that it never solves problems. Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings.”

Many Christians know their faith requires them to care for the world's poor; but don't know how to go about putting that directive into action. The Center of Concern's ... **voting the common good: ELECTION 2008** is designed to help. It reframes national problems in their larger global context, using Catholic social thought's vision, values and principles to throw light on issues important to Catholic voters – and the wider Christian community.

Besides the policy paper, the packet includes a backgrounder on the common good, group process materials, questions for candidates, talking points, an insert for church bulletins, and a blog entry that can be modified for local use or media outreach.

All materials in the Center of Concern initiative will be posted at www.coc.org and www.educationforjustice.org, and are available free of charge for individual or group use. Future postings in this Center initiative will be made on the 1st and 15th of each month. Topics will include immigration, international relations, jobs and outsourcing, poverty, Iraq and security, health care, and climate change. Other topics may be developed as the campaigns evolve.

The Center of Concern is a Catholic organization working in ecumenical and interfaith collaboration to bring a prophetic voice for social and economic justice to the global context. Founded in 1971 by the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) at the request of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, it provides information and analysis and serves as a catalyst for greater justice and more authentic human development for the human community. Through analysis, education, advocacy and capacity-building, the Center challenges structural injustice and promotes innovative economic alternatives.

“With all the attention paid to the role of faith and faith communities in the nation's political life these days, we believe there have been too many simplistic sound bites and too little careful analysis of the pressing issues and the faith values essential to moving them toward successful resolution,” says Hug. “We hope to unite the Catholic and Christian communities in a process of careful discernment of the candidates and their positions during the primary season through to the November election.”