



# General Election 2017

A letter from the Bishops of Scotland  
To be read and/or distributed at all Masses on  
20/21 May 2017

This General Election presents us with an opportunity to reflect on Catholic social teaching. As Christians, we have a civic and moral duty to engage with our democracy. As Catholics, we believe that the primary goal of society should be the common good; that is the good of all people and of the whole person. Indeed, the common good is the very reason political authority exists.

This election provides an opportunity to reflect on the beauty and goodness of Church teaching and to keep that teaching at the forefront of our minds as we engage with candidates across all parties. During elections, a range of issues compete for your attention; we highlight some of them here in the hope that you will reflect on them and raise them with your candidates.

## Human Life

Human life at every stage of development is precious and must be protected. Any laws which permit the wilful ending of life must always be rejected as reprehensible and unjust. We must create a culture of life where the most vulnerable are valued and their dignity respected. The undeniable value of human life, created in the image and likeness of God, is fundamental to the Catholic faith. We should remind our politicians that abortion, assisted suicide and euthanasia are always morally unacceptable.

## Marriage and the Family

Society relies on the building block of the family to exist. The love of man and woman in marriage and their openness to new life is the very basic cell upon which society is built. The wellbeing of society depends on the flourishing and health of family life and those in authority should respond to this with policies that create economic and other advantages for families with children.

## Poverty

Sadly, poverty continues to be a scourge for many at home and abroad. Too many people still struggle to make ends meet. This sad reality cannot and should not endure in our country in the twenty-first century. Our concerns should also extend to providing international assistance, while ensuring that aid is not used to support immoral practices such as those which compromise the basic right to life.

## Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Immigration

The United Kingdom should be a place where the most vulnerable are welcomed and given the resources necessary to rebuild their lives. At the same time, we should provide for those people living in and around conflict zones, and commit to working towards the peaceful resolution of conflict.

## Living in Europe

There are millions of EU citizens living in the UK and millions of UK citizens living across the EU. Mindful of the uncertainty affecting them, candidates should commit to working towards delivering stability and security for them in future. Our politicians should forge and renew international partnerships and establish rights for those who wish to work in the UK, in a spirit of cooperation and friendship.

#### Freedom of Religion and Conscience

Millions of people worldwide are persecuted for their beliefs. People of faith, including Christians, should be able to freely practise their faith and bear witness to it in their lives, without fear of prejudice, intolerance, abuse or violence. Candidates should be committed to the right of people not to be forced to act against their conscience.

#### Nuclear Weapons and the Arms Trade

The use of any weapon that causes more than individual and proportionate harm to civilians is immoral and, thus, rejected by the Church. The use of weapons of mass destruction is a serious crime against God and against humanity. While states are entitled to possess the means required for legitimate defence, this must not become an excuse for an excessive accumulation of weaponry which becomes a considerable threat to stability and freedom.

#### Respectful Politics

Often, politicians are tempted to score points or resort to insults. We need politicians who are willing to change this and to take politics in a new direction, where dialogue is respectful, and where different points of view, including those of a religious nature, are tolerated.

As we cast our votes this election, let us bear in mind the words of Pope Francis when he said, **“The greatness of any nation is revealed in its effective care of society’s most vulnerable members.”** Our nation, our Parliament, and our Government will be judged on how it treats its poorest and most vulnerable citizens.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

- + Philip Tartaglia, President, Archbishop of Glasgow
- + Leo Cushley, Archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh
- + Joseph Toal, Vice-President, Bishop of Motherwell
- + Hugh Gilbert, Episcopal Secretary, Bishop of Aberdeen
- + Stephen Robson, Bishop of Dunkeld
- + John Keenan, Bishop of Paisley
- + William Nolan, Bishop of Galloway
- + Brian McGee, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles