

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

PRESS RELEASE

Catholic politicians should be guided by faith - Vatican

The Vatican has called on Catholic politicians and lay people to be guided by their moral convictions when making political decisions, particularly on matters of life and human dignity.

Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference President, Archbishop Francis Carroll said the call was made in a Doctrinal Note issued to bishops worldwide by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The note also reasserted the right and the duty of Catholics to have a legitimate role in public debate and emphasised they were not to divorce their political and moral life.

Cardinal Ratzinger said the note was deemed necessary because of some ambiguous positions and questionable opinions among Catholics on the relationship between ethics and politics.

"The Church recognises that while democracy is the best expression of the direct participation of citizens in political choices, it succeeds only to the extent that it is based on a correct understanding of the human person," the note said.

Scientific advances had led to difficult ethical considerations and in some cases laws were proposed which attacked human life.

"Catholics, in this difficult situation, have the right and the duty to recall society to a deeper understanding of human life and to the responsibility of everyone in this regard," it said.

"This is the case with laws concerning abortion and euthanasia. Such laws must defend the basic right to life from conception to natural death.

"In the same way, it is necessary to recall the duty to respect and protect the rights of the human embryo."

Marriage and the family also needed to be safeguarded, religious freedom protected, and violence and terrorism rejected, it said.

Archbishop Carroll welcomed the note, saying it sought not to impose any single view on complex matters, but to restate established Church teaching and highlight the need for Christians to integrate faith and life.

"At a time when the world faces increasing uncertainty on so many fronts, this note offers Christians soundly based guidance to help them make decisions in the interests of human life and the common good," he said.

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The full Vatican document will be available at www.vatican.va from 2200 (AEDT), Thursday January 16.