

ELECTIONS 2012 - A CALL TO BUILD ANEW

As the 2012 elections draw near, we are all encouraged to evaluate where we stand and where we're heading as a country, since we all belong to one nation that has a common good. Particularly in this moment, when so many of our fellow countrymen suffer from unemployment and economic distress, we know that many long for improvement in their lives. All the same, we don't believe this election will magically solve the gravest problems that America faces. Legislation, policies, and programs—no matter how perfect—depend on the freedom of flawed human beings like us.

We don't believe that the improvement in our country's situation can come from politics alone. Rather, we propose that America needs a renewed commitment by individuals and associations to pursue the noblest human ideals with realism and a capacity for sacrifice. Pope Benedict wrote, in *Deus Caritas Est (God Is Love)*, "Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew." This task belongs to all of us and we earnestly commit ourselves to it.

In this spirit, we refuse to give in to the enormous pressure for all Americans to be herded into one group or another. Instead, we propose the following essential considerations:

1. **The Pursuit of Happiness** — The desire for something better, for a greater good, for a fuller life both expresses the individual person's nature and drives any authentically human progress. Freedom's essence is our capacity to identify the greatest good in life and move toward it. This freedom necessarily includes the freedom to join with others and create movements, organizations, and works that express the consciences and incarnate the values of those who found them. *In its quest to "establish justice, insure domestic tranquility...promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty," government must support not only its own initiatives but, first and foremost, those that spring up from the free association of people.*
2. **Reality is Given** — It is reality that both provokes our desire for happiness and invites us to pursue such happiness within it; we cannot escape reality and find happiness. In his encounter with German politicians in 2011, Pope Benedict addressed the need to recognize reality's primacy in order to have a healthy political culture. With him we affirm, "Man... has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it, and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. In this way, and in no other, is true human freedom fulfilled." *Government must acknowledge and respect reality as given and avoid any attempt to manipulate or deconstruct it. The law must respect that human life originates at conception and is violated when ended by human will and that marriage and the family come before government and cannot be redefined by it, even in the name of freedom.*
3. **Freedom of Religion** — The apex of the pursuit of happiness is freedom of religion. Such freedom goes well beyond the way we worship, since we pursue our happiness in every aspect of our lives. *Government must protect this freedom in its fullness.* The current administration's Health and Human Services regulations, mandating Catholics and their associations violate their consciences, should alarm anyone who holds freedom dear. When people's conscience is transgressed and freedom of religion is threatened, no freedom is safe.
4. **Freedom of Education** — We could never be happy if our children were not happy. The freedom to propose to young people one's tradition and one's own discoveries and convictions about what matters most and what truly fulfills us is intimately bound up with our freedom to pursue happiness. *Government must use its power to support people in their attempt to provide the best education possible for the young, preferring such attempts to its own educational projects.*
5. **Solidarity** — Times of crisis can help us rediscover the importance of family, friendship, community, and charity. When times get tough, if social bonds are weak and charity has dried up, people have no recourse but to public welfare programs. A renewed attention to sharing the needs of others and to the value of solidarity with those in difficulty are necessary conditions for weathering any time of trial and are the basis of a healthy and humane society, even in "good times." *Government should support and defer to volunteer and charitable organizations and seek help from the non-profit sector in its attempt to ensure a safety-net for those struggling and in need.*

We invite all citizens of good will to join us in our efforts to renew our society. We also seek politicians who will recognize, value, and collaborate with those people and associations that wish to build for the common good of America.