



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **PAULIST FATHERS STATEMENT ON MORAL ISSUES IN THE 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

*"The American people may rest assured that whenever a question arises involving fundamental principles, Catholics will always be found on the side of liberty, fair play and equal rights. "*

**- Servant of God Isaac Thomas Hecker (1819-1888), Paulist Fathers founder**

It is hard to imagine a more challenging period in recent American politics than the 2016 presidential election cycle. It has been a year dominated by shocking headlines that have left us disturbed and often disoriented.

Language and methods once considered out-of-bounds for political candidates have been found acceptable by a not-insignificant number of our fellow citizens.

Prejudices that we hoped dead were merely sleeping. These prejudices have been awakened and given new voice.

As a community of Catholic priests, we do not endorse political candidates or political parties. But, the issues of 2016 are not just political. More than ever, the themes of this presidential campaign are moral ones that we, and all people of good will, are compelled to face and address.

In particular, we are obliged to address the five areas of concern outlined below.

#### **A New Rise of Bigotry and Xenophobia**

*"You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt." (Ex 23:9)*

Since our community was founded in 1858, many Paulist Fathers have been immigrants, the children of immigrants and the grandchildren of immigrants. And, throughout our 158 years, our ministry to the people of God has been enriched by the immigrant experience. We have walked with immigrants and their descendants, sharing their joys and sorrows in every place we have served.

Paulist Fathers witnessed firsthand the discrimination against new Irish immigrants in New York City in the

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1800s. We saw for ourselves the "No Italians Need Apply" signs in Portland, Oregon, in the early 1900s. From the turn of the last century to the present day, we have been blessed to serve immigrants from Asia and the South Pacific in San Francisco and Los Angeles. And, for decades, in cities throughout the United States, we have shared in the journeys of Spanish-speaking immigrants from Mexico, Latin America, South America and the Caribbean.

The story of the Catholic Church in the United States is the story of immigrants and refugees. It is a story in which we have always seen the working of the Holy Spirit.

It is therefore with sorrow and alarm that we have seen growing support in the electorate for sweeping and inaccurate generalizations that demean the law-abiding nature and intrinsic worth of men and women who are new to this country.

With sorrow and alarm, we have seen the plight of millions of refugees from Syria and Somalia disregarded because of fear and the harmful actions of a few.

With sorrow and alarm, we have seen the integrity of a federal judge impugned because of his parents' country of origin.

With sorrow and alarm, we have seen disparagement of Muslim-Americans based solely for their religious affiliation. This included a call to temporarily ban entry by all Muslims into the United States, which would be an unprecedented violation of the Freedom of Religion enshrined in our Constitution.

With sorrow and alarm, we have seen a coy hesitancy to disavow the support of individuals and organizations that have promoted discrimination and racism, particularly against African-Americans.

As each of these attacks occurred, we were reminded of the pledges of "never again" each time bigotry and xenophobia gained public support in the last century.

"Never again" would we tolerate attacks on a single faith tradition, many leaders said after the Holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s. "Never again" would we tolerate the scapegoating of a single ethnic group, many leaders said after the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s.

Sadly, these attacks against basic human decency are happening again. These attacks are happening in our own country and are gaining the active support of some U.S. citizens and the passive acceptance of others. Both the cheers of the rally crowds and the silent tolerance of those watching at home are deeply troubling.

As the electorate prepares to vote, we pray they will be mindful of Pope Francis' words to the U.S. Congress on September 24, 2015:

*"We, the people of this continent, are not fearful of foreigners, because most of us were once foreigners. I say this to you as the son of immigrants, knowing that so many of you are also descended from immigrants ... Our world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War. This presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions. On this continent, too, thousands of persons are led to travel north in search of a better life for themselves and for their loved ones, in search of greater opportunities. Is this not what we*

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*want for our own children? We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal."*

**Acts of Violence**

*"You shall not kill." (Ex 20: 13)*

The many recent incidents of mass violence and individual gun violence in the United States and other parts of the world have rattled the collective nerves of our society. We brace ourselves at news of each bombing or shooting. We brace ourselves as the death totals are announced and we learn about the victims and the injured. "Why again?!" we cry out to God. "Why does this keep happening?!"

Then we grieve. At times, we grieve from a distance. At times, when the incident hits close to home, we grieve personally with our parishioners and friends. But we always grieve.

And we pray. We pray that God will turn the hand and soften the heart of the next man or woman who is contemplating violence. We pray for God's inspiration for the best pastoral response and the best public policy response.

We note when the attacker is a native son or daughter of the place where the violence occurred. We note when the attacker is from a foreign place or motivated by an ideology. In our vocabulary, both kinds are terrorists, seeking to cause pain and disrupt our social fabric.

We note when an act of violence causes discord between law enforcement officials and the communities they serve.

We know these incidents are in the minds of many voters. We know these incidents are shaping how some voters view their neighbors.

We pray that our societal and public policy response to these acts of violence will be seen as a pro-life issue. We must rank these acts of violence alongside war, abortion, the death penalty and euthanasia as attacks upon the sacredness of all human life.

We pray all voters will remember the words of Pope Francis in his address to Congress:

*"All of us are quite aware of, and deeply worried by, the disturbing social and political situation of the world today. Our world is increasingly a place of violent conflict, hatred and brutal atrocities, committed even in the name of God and of religion. We know that no religion is immune from forms of individual delusion or ideological extremism ... We know that in the attempt to be freed of the enemy without, we can be tempted to feed the enemy within. To imitate the hatred and violence of tyrants and murderers is the best way to take their place. That is something which you, as a people, reject. Our response must instead be one of hope and healing, of peace and justice."*

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**The Sacredness of All Human Life**

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord." (Is 55: 8)*

As we consider the many incidents of mass violence and individual gun violence, we acknowledge they have not occurred in a vacuum. We exist in a society that does not always cherish human life.

The American people have grown numb to war, paying scant attention to a 15-year military operation in Afghanistan that has seen thousands of people killed. Headlines rarely draw our attention to the plight of civilians in war zones as well as U.S. veterans returning home with injuries both visible and hidden. At the same time, government spending on war and weapons is rarely examined.

Abortion of the unborn also threatens our culture. We pray that all people will see human life as a precious gift from God that begins in the womb. We also recommit ourselves to be present to single women and couples facing unplanned pregnancies. We recommit ourselves to support those who have welcomed children despite difficulties and challenges.

Similarly, the death penalty and euthanasia are the easy solutions of a culture seeking to avoid the heavy-lifting of reconciliation and the burden of pain. Our society will be stronger when all human life, from conception to natural death, is protected.

In his address to Congress, Pope Francis spoke of the sacredness of human life in this way:

*"The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us. The Golden Rule also reminds us of our responsibility to protect and defend human life at every stage of its development. This conviction has led me, from the beginning of my ministry, to advocate at different levels for the global abolition of the death penalty. I am convinced that this way is the best, since every life is sacred, every human person is endowed with an inalienable dignity ... "*

**Economic Uncertainty, the Middle Class and the Poor**

*"Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying aloud, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts." (James 5: 4)*

Economic uncertainty has been one of the great motivating factors of the 2016 presidential election. While new technologies and innovations have galvanized some sectors of our economy, many Americans still feel uncertain about their jobs and the financial future of their families.

Pockets of the United States have never fully recovered from the recession of 2002 - 2003 and "The Great Recession" of 2008. Income disparity is at historic levels with the richest Americans controlling more of the country's wealth than ever before. At the same time, the middle class is shrinking and many poor families are having incredible difficulty rising out of poverty.

These factors have caused a strain on our nation's social fabric that must be repaired with detailed, specific and measurable policies that strengthen businesses and lift up workers. We know that, for our democracy to thrive,

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we must have a healthy middle class and that the American dream cannot be out of reach for the poor.

We join with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in the belief that "social and economic policies should foster the creation of jobs for all who can work with decent working conditions and just wages" and that "barriers to equal pay and employment for women and those facing unjust discrimination must be overcome."

As Pope Francis said to Congress:

*"If politics must truly be at the service of the human person, it follows that it cannot be a slave to the economy and finance. Politics is, instead, an expression of our compelling need to live as one, in order to build as the greatest common good: that of a community which sacrifices particular interests in order to share, in justice and peace, its goods, its interests, its social life."*

### **Care for Our Common Home**

*"God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen 1:31)*

Care for the environment also is a moral issue that has not received the serious attention it deserves during this year's presidential election. We note that Pope Francis continually calls all people to greater concern for "our common home."

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is correct in its statement that "protecting the land, water, and air we share is a religious duty of stewardship" and "effective initiatives are required for energy conservation and the development of alternate, renewable, and clean-energy resources." We join the bishops' call to address global climate change, "focusing on the virtue of prudence, pursuit of the common good, and the impact on the poor, particularly on vulnerable workers and the poorest nations."

In the words of Pope Francis to Congress:

*"... I call for a courageous and responsible effort to 'redirect our steps' and to avert the most serious effects of the environmental deterioration caused by human activity. I am convinced that we can make a difference and I have no doubt that the United States - and this Congress - have an important role to play. Now is the time for courageous actions and strategies ..."*

### **Conclusion**

In an accompanying commentary, we offer a more in-depth rationale for Catholics' civic participation in our polarized time. We hope it will be helpful for those seeking a secure footing to engage with the moral questions that have dominated 2016.

Despite the challenges we have outlined, we are reassured by the knowledge that American experiment still inspires our own citizens and countless people around the world. The passions and principles that led to our nation's founding – and have sustained it for 240 years – have not been extinguished.

May God bless America in the months and years ahead.