

# *To be a people of hope!*

Statement by the Irish Catholic Bishops'  
Conference for General Election 2024



IRISH CATHOLIC  
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE  
COMHDHÁIL EASPAIG CAITLICEACH ÉIREANN



**'To be a people of hope! Bishops' statement for Election 2024 and questions for candidates**

## **Key takeaways:**

- **All eligible to vote should exercise their right to maximise the common good**
- **Homelessness is unacceptable. The inability to acquire a home affects social cohesion and is a scandal**
- **Politicians should lead by welcoming all immigrants who come with a willingness to contribute to our society**
- **The deliberate taking of human life undermines civilised society**
- **Political parties must urgently address pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity**
- **The war in Gaza and the Middle East must stop now. Enough is Enough!**
- **Church-State structured dialogue is not functioning and in need of review**

This General Election, on 29 November, is an opportunity for voters to bring to bear their influence on the values, policies and wider conversations that will shape our country's future, not just during the term of the new Dáil Éireann, but for years to come. As followers of Jesus Christ, we share this reflection based on the values of the Gospel and developed by Catholic Social Teaching, rooted in the God-given dignity of every human life. We do so conscious of the social, political, cultural, ethical and spiritual challenges our country and world faces now. People need hope in their lives, and our suggested questions – themed on hope – seek to assist voters engaging with candidates during the election campaign.

## **Christian duty to vote**

We begin by appealing to all those eligible to vote to exercise that right. Even if there are no candidates who reflect the full range of a voter's values or aspirations, it is a fundamental Christian duty to maximise the common good by taking part in the democratic process. The 'distinction between religion and politics and the principle of religious freedom constitute a specific achievement of Christianity and one of its fundamental historical and cultural contributions.'<sup>[1]</sup> We must always value this and enable it through

respectful and healthy dialogue.

### **Living with dignity**

Despite the indications of a buoyant economy, too many people in Ireland are still suffering financial hardships due to increased costs of food and energy. Also, the inability of so many individuals and families to acquire a home of their own affects social cohesion. Alongside this, the continuing increase in the levels of homelessness is a scandal. The latest available figures (September 2024) show that there are 14,760 people homeless in Ireland – the highest figure ever. Of these, 4,561 are children. For a country with such resources at its disposal, this situation is totally unacceptable. We reiterate our call that ‘all families, regardless of income level, should be able to access housing that is adequate to their needs, can be afforded without jeopardising the ability to meet other essential spending, and will provide long-term tenure so that their children can be raised in an atmosphere of security.’<sup>[2]</sup>

**Suggested questions for candidates:** What will you do to address the current housing and homelessness crisis and the consequent distress that affects people? Are you prepared to propose and support measures that will enable people to have a home and have real hope for the future?

### **Welcoming those who come to us in their need**

Our pastoral letter published on 12 October, *A Hundred Thousand Welcomes?*, addresses the challenge that increased immigration to Ireland has brought about.<sup>[3]</sup> As we continue to encounter these challenges, it is important that our political leaders alleviate the key shortcomings in our economy and social fabric so that all those who come to Ireland, to seek a better life and contribute to our society in so many ways, will be welcome and know that they belong.

**Suggested questions for candidates:** What measures will your party take to ensure that those seeking asylum in Ireland are not left in tents? Are you prepared to support a fair and more timely system for the processing of asylum applications? Will you publicly oppose all forms of racism, include racism on social media platforms?

### **Valuing every life in every condition**

We believe that an absolute commitment to dignity, value and right to life of every person – at every stage and in every condition of life – is vital for the sustaining of a vibrant, hope-filled cohesive, flourishing society. This commitment must be part of our political dialogue and the actions of those whom we elect. Over recent years, we have witnessed a diminution in the respect for human life in our political discourse. The value of people’s lives seems to be calculated as if it were simply part of a cost-benefit analysis. Where is the hope in this?

In recent years we have witnessed the introduction of a very liberal abortion law in Ireland. Since the introduction of the legislation in 2018, 40,000 abortions have been carried out in Ireland. And some politicians want to make it even more liberal. Now we have efforts being made to make legislative provision for ‘assisted dying’ in Ireland. A recent report from an Oireachtas Committee has made recommendations to the incoming Government that assisted dying be allowed in certain, restricted circumstances. We totally reject that recommendation because a fundamental principle of civilised society is that no person can lawfully take the life of another.<sup>[4]</sup>

**Suggested questions for candidates:** What is your stance on assisted dying legislation? Will you oppose this legislation, and any other legislation which would liberalise abortion in Ireland?

### **Caring for our common home**

We must continually remind our political leaders at every level of their responsibility to protect the future of our planet, our common home. Pope Francis reminds us that, ‘Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live.’<sup>[5]</sup> As a result, what the Holy Father describes

as ‘integral ecology’ states clearly that our interactions with the environment are woven into the fabric of economic, political, social, cultural, spiritual and ethical dimensions.

In the spirit of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Pope Francis states “we need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships”. (*Laudato Si’* para [86](#)). Later in *Laudate Deum* (2023) he addresses people of goodwill, admonishing the human family that has neglected its relationships with creation, one another, and above all, God. (*Jesuit Post, Laudate Deum: An Overview by [Nate Cortas, SJ](#) | Oct 10, 2023*)

Later in *Laudate Deum* (2023) Pope Francis highlights that, “Everything is connected” para 19, human beings must be recognised as a part of nature (para 26) and a healthy ecology is also the result of interaction between human beings and the environment (para 27).

The recent extreme rain and flooding in the Valencia and Costa del Sol regions of Spain have demonstrated the vulnerability of an even well-developed European country to dramatic weather events supercharged by greenhouse gas emissions. Each of us has a duty to play our part in addressing this question. The current discussions taking place during the 29<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, are an example of what could be achieved by strategies at global level. But, we need local action too.

**Suggested questions for candidates:** How will your party address, in a sustainable way, issues of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity? Will your party support infrastructure measures that will tackle environmental issues such as water quality, public transport, and the impact of fossil fuels? What will you do to support a just transition for farmers, workers and others who will be affected by climate action measures? Are you prepared to listen, to and work with, all stakeholders on this journey?

### **Work so that peace may reign in our hearts and our world**

The war in Gaza and the Middle East must stop now. Enough is enough! The plight of the people of the region is horrendous. So too is the inability of the international community to act to bring about a ceasefire and a longer-term solution to the questions involved. Similarly, the international community has a role to play in bringing peace to Ukraine and to other areas of conflict in our world, including Sudan, Myanmar, and Yemen. War, militarisation and the proliferation of arms, is a stain on our humanity. Pope Francis reminds us that throughout the *Bible*, justice, peace and faith go together. He invites us to oppose a culture of cruelty and war and, instead, always promote a culture of peace and bear witness to human solidarity and love.

Irish peacekeeping troops operate in many troubled areas of our world. As a nation we contribute also in the area of human development through a number of agencies operating from our country. We ask all political parties to ensure the budget for overseas development aid is maintained and increased over the coming mandate.

In our own land we give thanks to God that the political institutions in Northern Ireland are once again up and running. We encourage the Governments of Ireland and Britain to continue to support the Assembly and Executive in their work of governance for all the people of that part of our island. In this context, both Governments must continue to enhance measures that will genuinely address legacy issues, build true reconciliation at every level and underpin investment within Northern Ireland and on a cross-border basis. The work of the ‘Shared Island Initiative’ is one of the signs of hope for better understanding and progress.

**Suggested questions for candidates:** What is your position on the immediate ending of the war in Gaza and the Middle East? Will you support the enactment of the *Occupied Territories Bill 2018*, which seeks to ban and criminalise trade with, and economic support for, illegal settlements in territories deemed occupied under international law?

### **Church-State structured dialogue is not functioning and in need of review**

To be a ‘People of Hope’, we must listen to one another. In a fracturing society, real and meaningful social dialogue is needed so that people actually feel their voice is being heard and that they have a contribution to make. Government must engage purposefully with all sectors of society, including the community and voluntary sector. Churches and faith communities have an important contribution to bring to this national and local conversation by helping – with others – build and sustain an Ireland that protects and values the potential of every person. The current structures for Church-State dialogue are not functioning for the greater good of society and are in need of review. Any such structures must be made work so that the voice of Churches and other faith communities can be heard and contribute to a national reawakening based on the reality of people’s lives, and not ideology or special interests. As a Church, we are open to engaging with Government and with other Churches and faiths on this question.

**Suggested questions for candidates:** Are you prepared to support a process of structured dialogue that includes all voices and sectors in Ireland’s diverse society including Churches and faith communities? Similar to Governments in other European countries and at EU level, should a specific Government minister with responsibility for dialogue with Churches and other faith communities be appointed as part of the next administration?

### **Conclusion: There is Hope!**

In this 2024 election message, we set out some of the principal areas for reflection as we seek to bring the values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our national conversation. We do so respectfully. We do so inspired by the vision that gives us hope, namely: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If our politicians fail to give us reasons to hope; if they fail to engage with people of all sectors in society – including with voices of faith – then they contribute to the fracturing of society and the lowering of confidence in political institutions.

### **ENDS**

[1] *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, par. 50.

[2] Irish Catholic Bishops, *A Room at the Inn?*, (2018), p. 28.

[3] See, Irish Catholic Bishops, *A Hundred Thousand Welcomes?* [Bishops’ pastoral letter on immigration: ‘A Hundred Thousand Welcomes?’ downloadable resources | Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference](#)

[4] Irish Catholic Bishops, *Freedom to Live Fully* – [Bishops’ statement on end of life care: Freedom to Live Fully, Until Death Comes | Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference](#)

[5] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, par. 139.