



CONGREGAZIONE
PER LA DOTTRINA
DELLA FEDE

00120 Città del Vaticano,
Palazzo del S. Uffizio

May 7, 2021

PROT. N. 3277/70 – 82755

Your Excellency,

Thank you for your letter of March 30, 2021 informing this Congregation that the bishops of the United States are preparing to address the situation of Catholics in public office who support legislation allowing abortion, euthanasia, or other moral evils. We are grateful that you plan to send us the draft of a document on worthiness to receive Holy Communion for an informal review prior to its submission to the body of bishops for vote.

Regarding Cardinal Ratzinger's 2004 letter to Cardinal McCarrick, this Congregation respects Cardinal Ratzinger's stipulation that "these principles were not intended for publication." The letter was in the form of a private communication addressed to the bishops. Insofar, therefore, as these principles are not published by the Conference, they may be of assistance in the preparation of the draft of your document. It should be noted that the Congregation's Doctrinal Note: *On Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (2002) predated Cardinal Ratzinger's personal communication. During the 2004 ad limina visits to which he refers in his letter, questions arose on several occasions concerning the reception of Holy Communion by Catholic politicians who supported the so-called "right to choose" an abortion. When the Doctrinal Note was discussed during these ad limina visits, it was clear that there was a lack of agreement regarding the issue of communion among the bishops. At that time, the development of a national policy was not under consideration, and Cardinal Ratzinger offered general principles on the worthy reception of Holy Communion in order to assist local ordinaries in the United States in their dealings with Catholic pro-choice politicians within their jurisdictions. Cardinal Ratzinger's communication should thus be discussed only within the context of the authoritative Doctrinal Note which provides the teaching of the Magisterium on the theological foundation for any initiative regarding the question of worthy reception of Holy Communion.

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His Excellency

Most Reverend José H. GOMEZ

Archbishop of Los Angeles

President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

3211 Fourth Street NE

Washington, D.C. 20017

UNITED STATES

When this issue re-surfaced during the 2019-2020 ad limina visits of the United States bishops, this Congregation advised that dialogue among the bishops be undertaken to preserve the unity of the episcopal conference in the face of disagreements over this controversial topic. The formulation of a national policy was suggested during the ad limina visits only if this would help the bishops to maintain unity. This Congregation notes that such a policy, given its possibly contentious nature, could have the opposite effect and become a source of discord rather than unity within the episcopate and the larger Church in the United States. Thus, we advised during the ad limina visits that the effective development of a policy in this area requires that dialogue occurs in two stages: first among the bishops themselves, and then between bishops and Catholic pro-choice politicians within their jurisdictions.

The first stage of dialogue would take place among the bishops so that they could agree as a Conference that support of pro-choice legislation is not compatible with Catholic teaching. The bishops should therefore discuss and agree to the teaching in the above-mentioned Doctrinal Note which affirms in article 3 that “Christians are called to reject, as injurious to democratic life, a conception of pluralism that reflects moral relativism and accept that democracy must be based on the true and solid foundation of non-negotiable ethical principles, which are the underpinning of life in society.” The bishops should affirm as a Conference that “those who are directly involved in lawmaking bodies have a grave and clear obligation to oppose any law that attacks human life” (Doctrinal Note art. 4). After this agreement is reached, the bishops could then move to implement the second stage in which the local Ordinaries would reach out to and engage in dialogue with Catholic politicians within their jurisdictions who adopt a pro-choice position regarding abortion legislation, euthanasia, or other moral evils, as a means of understanding the nature of their positions and their comprehension of Catholic teaching.

Once these two stages of extensive and serene dialogue have taken place, the Conference would face the difficult task of discerning the best way forward for the Church in the United States to witness to the grave moral responsibility of Catholic public officials to protect human life at all stages. If it is then decided to formulate a national policy on worthiness for communion, such a statement would need to express a true consensus of the bishops on the matter, while observing the prerequisite that any provisions of the Conference in this area would respect the rights of individual Ordinaries in their dioceses and the prerogatives of the Holy See (cf. *Apostolos Suos*, 22 & 24). Furthermore, the Congregation advises that any statement of the Conference regarding Catholic political leaders would best be framed within the broad context of worthiness for the reception of Holy Communion on the part of all the faithful, rather than only one category of Catholics, reflecting their obligation to conform their lives to the entire Gospel of Jesus Christ as they prepare to receive the sacrament (Doctrinal Note art. 4). It would be misleading if such a statement were to give the impression that abortion and euthanasia alone constitute the only grave matters of Catholic moral and social teaching that demand the fullest level of accountability on the part of Catholics.

Every effort should be made to dialogue with other episcopal conferences as this policy is formulated in order both to learn from one another and to preserve unity in the Universal Church.

We ask that this letter be shared with all of the bishops of the United States.

Assuring you of my warmest Easter regards and with gratitude for your service of the Church, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Luis F. Ladaria". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Luis F. Card. LADARIA, S.I.
Prefect