### Unit: Religious Citizenship

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Concept of Religious Citizenship
The concept of *religious citizenship* is largely misunderstood due to its underused nature in western culture where there is frequently a strong push for a separation of church and nation-state. Further, because citizenship is generally understood at the state level (i.e., a citizen of Australia), the terms *religion* and *citizen* are rarely seen together.

Religious citizenship refers to the rights and responsibilities afforded an individual in regard to their worship and religious affiliation or the general social equality of an individual based on one's specific religion and its perception within the community. Religious citizenship is not a specific type of citizenship such as national or state citizenship, but more an aspect of one's current citizenship status within the state in which they live.

Core Values of Religious Citizenship
In a religious context there are some core values associated with being a *good citizen*. In Catholic Social Teaching, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. The Australian nation like all others continually faces political challenges that demand urgent moral choices. We are a country often divided by race and ethnicity; a nation of immigrants struggling with immigration. We are an affluent society where too many live in poverty; part of a global community confronting terrorism and facing urgent threats to our environment; a culture built on families, where some now question the value of marriage and family life. We pride ourselves on supporting human rights, but we sometimes fail even to protect the fundamental right to life, especially for the last, the least and the left-out.

Moral Character of Society
The Church equips its members to address political questions by helping them develop well-formed consciences. “Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act. [Every person] is obliged to follow faithfully what he [or she] knows to be just and right” *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1778)*. Catholics have a lifelong obligation to form their consciences in accord with human reason, enlightened by the teaching of Christ as it is interpreted through the Church.

The Church’s obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of faith, a part of the mission of Jesus Christ. Faith helps believers see more clearly the truth about human life and dignity that is
also understood through human reason. As people of both faith and reason, Catholics are called to bring truth to political life and to practice Christ’s commandment to “love one another” (John 13:34).

**Dignity of Human Life in Community**
A consistent ethic of life should guide all Catholic engagement in political life. This Catholic ethic neither treats all issues as morally equivalent nor reduces Catholic teaching to one or two issues. It anchors the Catholic commitment to defend human life and other human rights, from conception until natural death, in the fundamental obligation to respect the dignity of every human as created in the image and likeness of God.

As Pope John Paul II said, “the fact that only the negative commandments oblige always and under all circumstances does not mean that in the moral life prohibitions are more important than the obligation to do good indicated by the positive commandment” (Encyclical Veritatis Splendor, no. 52). The basic right to life implies and is linked to other human rights and to the goods that every person needs to live and thrive - including food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work. The use of the death penalty, hunger, lack of health care or housing, human trafficking, the human and moral costs of war, and unjust immigration policies are some of the serious moral issues that challenge our consciences and require us to act as religious citizens.

This teaching also compels religious citizens to oppose genocide, torture, unjust war, and the use of the death penalty, as well as to pursue peace and help overcome poverty, racism, and other conditions that demean human life.

**Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers**
The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Economic justice calls for decent work for fair wages, opportunities for legal status for immigrant workers, and the opportunity for all people to work together for the common good through their work, ownership, enterprise, investment, participation in unions, and other forms of economic activity. The Catholic Church is unambiguous in its support for the right of citizens to form associations and engage in communal bargaining for just working conditions. The responsibility to see my rights as inextricably linked to the rights of others is a moral imperative of religious citizenship. “What do I owe to my times, to my country, to my neighbors, to my friends? Such are the questions which a virtuous man ought often to ask himself.” (Johann Kaspar Lavater, German poet 1741-1801).
Solidarity
While the common good embraces all, those who are in greatest need deserve preferential concern. A moral test for any religious citizen is how we treat the weakest among us - the unborn, those dealing with disabilities or terminal illness, the aged, the poor and marginalized.

The Church teaches that we are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. A Catholic commitment to solidarity requires that believers pursue justice, eliminate racism, end human trafficking, protect human rights, seek peace, and avoid the use of force except as a necessary last resort.

Ecological Stewardship
Care for the earth is also a core value of religious citizenship. We all are called to be careful stewards of God’s creation and to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for vulnerable human beings now and in the future. “We all have an obligation as global citizens of this earth to leave the world a healthier, cleaner, and better place for our children and future generations.” (Blythe Danner)

Religious Citizenship in Action
Charles A. Gallagher (2004) proposes eight actions that define how religious citizenship might be manifested at the local, state and global levels.

Religious citizens accept the moral imperative to contribute to the betterment of the community through acting locally but thinking globally.

Religious citizens are honest and trustworthy in their dealing with others. They see the human being before the cultural difference and actively acknowledge that diversity contributes to the rich tapestry that is human existence.

Religious citizens are fully aware of what their religious tradition asks of them. In the context of Catholic Christianity, religious citizens know what they subscribe to as a Catholic religious citizen. In short, they walk their talk, leading by example.

Religious citizens unequivocally respect the rights of others to practice their religion with integrity and authenticity and actively support that right through word and action.
Religious citizens are able to give a religious voice to everyday events. They do not blindly accept the hegemonic cultural mores of the day but become informed about the world in which they live. In short, religious citizens recognise that they are a citizen of the world.

Religious citizens respect the rights of others but hold others to account for their actions. Words matter. Actions matter.

Religious citizens take seriously their responsibility for the challenges facing the world. Gallagher writes at a practical level, “Hate violence, act thoughtfully, hate injustice, write to your local member.”

Religious citizens bring about their own ecological conversion and help others to do the same.