Pastoral letter from the Catholic Bishops of Scotland on the Scottish Parliament Election

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the 2026 Scottish Parliament Election approaches, we find ourselves at another important moment in our nation's life. Elections are not only political events but opportunities to reflect prayerfully on our responsibilities as citizens and disciples of Jesus Christ. Our participation in public life expresses our love of neighbour and our desire to build a society that honours God through truth, justice, and charity.

The Church and the political community have distinct roles, yet both serve the good of every person. The Church forms consciences through the light of the Gospel, while politics shapes society's structures. When these work together respectfully, society flourishes, especially in its care for the weakest. It is therefore vital that Catholics approach this election with faith-formed minds and hearts moved by charity.

Many in Scotland today face deep vulnerability: unborn children; the elderly; families in poverty; the disabled; those with poor mental health; people suffering addiction; victims of modern slavery; migrants seeking safety; people considering suicide; and victims of crime. They deserve not only compassion but public policies that protect their dignity. We need representatives who act with integrity, value every human life, and prioritise the poorest. Public service is noble when rooted in humility and the common good.

Our elected officials must also defend fundamental freedoms—thought, conscience, and religion—so Scotland remains a place where people can express beliefs openly and respectfully. Public discourse thrives when diverse voices can speak without fear and disagreements are handled with civility. Silencing religious expression deprives society of moral and spiritual richness.

We affirm the rights of parents, who have the God-given responsibility to educate their children, including choosing schools that reflect their convictions. Authorities must safeguard this right and protect Catholic schools, which serve families of all backgrounds and help form young people in faith, virtue, and service. Attempts to marginalise, or remove, these schools would weaken Scotland's educational diversity.

As you prepare to vote, reflect on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching—human dignity, the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity—which illuminate the key moral issues of our time:

- the protection of life from conception to natural death;
- care for the poor and vulnerable;
- fair and sustainable economic conditions;
- accessible healthcare;
- the elimination of modern slavery;
- the strengthening of marriage and family life;
- care for creation;
- the promotion of peace and support for poorer nations; and
- the defence of religious freedom and conscience.

These are not merely political issues, but moral ones rooted in the Gospel and the Church's commitment to every person's dignity. Study and pray with these principles as you discern your vote. Resources from the Scottish Catholic Parliamentary Office (rcpolitics.org) can help form your conscience, enabling you to seek truth, weigh moral implications, and consider the impact on the vulnerable. Above all, we urge you to use your right to vote.

We pray for respectful and honest conversation throughout this election. Political life must not be poisoned by anger, division, or populist rhetoric. May all debates reflect concern for human dignity and the common good.

We entrust Scotland—its people, leaders, and future—to the care of Our Lady, Queen of Peace. May her intercession guide us toward justice, compassion, and unity. May the Holy Spirit inspire candidates with integrity and humility, and voters with responsibility, prayerfulness, and love of neighbour.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ John Keenan, President, Bishop of Paisley
+ Brian McGee, Vice President, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles
+ Andrew McKenzie, Episcopal Secretary, Bishop of Dunkeld
+ Leo Cushley, Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh
+ William Nolan, Archbishop of Glasgow
+ Joseph Toal, Bishop of Motherwell
+ Hugh Gilbert, Bishop of Aberdeen
+ Francis Dougan, Bishop of Galloway