

Communiqué

To: Members of the American Catholic Council

From: Voice of the Faithful, Santa Barbara Area

Date: January 29, 2011

VOTFSBA applauds the ACC's December 15th revision of the Catholic Bill of Rights and Responsibilities (CBRR). It is a giant step in the right direction. At the Santa Barbara Listening Session in September 2010, the previous version of the CBRR was discussed, and concerns were expressed. At a later VOTF meeting that draft was discussed at greater length, and there was a nearly unanimous consensus that it needed revision. Judging from the ACC's Dec. 15th revision, the national drafting committee was sensitive to this.

In parallel with (but unaware of) the ACC's revisions, we created a committee to try creating our own revision. Our goal was a short, clear document that gave equal weight to rights and responsibilities. The committee came to a consensus on a draft on December 13, coincidentally two days before the ACC draft was posted. In looking at the ACC's revision at a later meeting, members agreed that, while it is much clearer and shorter, it could be further improved. We have pasted the Santa Barbara draft below in the hope that it will make some contribution to the next revision. A motion in support of this draft and of sending it to ACC was passed by an overwhelming majority at our January 24th meeting.

Our principal concerns are with the treatment of responsibilities in the ACC draft. By using the stem: "Every Catholic has the right and responsibility ..." the ACC draft treats rights and responsibilities as completely complementary. The five statements that describe responsibilities use the same words to describe rights: we have these rights and we have the responsibility to exercise these rights. While these statements are correct, we believe they do not provide an adequate treatment of the responsibilities of Catholics. Our responsibilities go far beyond simply exercising our rights. Some of our responsibilities are not associated with rights, because there is no way that we could be denied the opportunity to fulfill them. Prayer is a good example. The opposite is also true; we do not have the responsibility to exercise all of our rights, for example, the right to bear arms. The ACC draft implicitly acknowledges this point by associating responsibilities with only five of the rights. We believe that the only way that responsibilities can be described adequately is to put them in separate statements. The Santa Barbara draft is one example.

What follows are A) the VOTFSBA version and B) some more specific comments comparing it with the ACC revision:

A) **Statement of Rights and Responsibilities of Catholics**

Rights

1. All Catholics have the right to belong to a Eucharistic community.
2. All Catholics have the right to have access to all the sacraments.
3. All Catholics have the right to speak and act in accord with an informed conscience.
4. All Catholics have the right to have meaningful participation in decision making, including the selection of leaders and representatives.
5. All Catholics have the right to participate in the development of Church teaching in that all teaching must be consistent with the “sense of the faithful”.
6. All Catholics have the right to be eligible for selection to leadership roles.

Responsibilities

1. All Catholics have the responsibility to follow the teachings of Jesus.
2. All Catholics have the responsibility to pray and reflect.
3. All Catholics have the responsibility to receive the sacraments regularly.
4. All Catholics have the responsibility to continue to grow in their adult faith through scripture, theology, and Church history.
5. All Catholics have the responsibility to participate in the Catholic community, sharing their resources, talents and gifts.
6. All Catholics have the responsibility to work for the incorporation of Christian values in society, including justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

B) **Comparison of ACC and SB versions:**

Rights

Seven of the ACC’s rights are in general accord with SB’s six rights. SB 3 combines freedom of conscience and freedom of expression.

ACC 8. The right of every Catholic to interpret the Gospel and Church tradition seems to us to be overreaching. It is not reasonable to give every Catholic,

without regard to education, the right to interpret the Gospel and Church tradition for others. We think that the right to the indirect influence that we all jointly should have through the “sense of the faithful” is sufficient. Perhaps this is what ACC means to express with the phrase “share in”. If so, we urge that this be made clear. See SB right 5.

The other three of ACC’s rights do not seem to us to be fundamental enough to be in this statement.

ACC 6. The right to a good name and due process. It is not clear what “right to a good name” means. Due process presumably refers to due process when a Catholic is accused of something by the Church. Since canon law provides for processes in such cases, apparently the critical word here is “due.” While we don’t doubt that judicial processes in the church need revision, this does not seem to us to be a **fundamental right** of every Catholic, because very few are ever accused. When the right to freedom of expression and action is established, there will be still fewer accusations.

ACC 9. The right to **summon** and speak in assemblies. The right to speak is a special case of ACC 4 and SB 3--freedom of expression. We do not have a right to summon in the common sense of “command to appear”. If what is meant is “convene,” the document should say so. A more important point is that this does not seem to rise to the level of a **fundamental right** of every Catholic. Do we really want every individual Catholic to have the right to convene church assemblies? This would seem more properly to be a right of groups of Catholics.

ACC 10. The right to have these rights respected. It is in the nature of rights that they are to be respected. This right is redundant.

Responsibilities

ACC responsibilities include nothing on prayer (SB 2), nothing on religious development (SB 4), and nothing on incorporation of Christian values in society (SB 6). We think that the list of responsibilities is incomplete.

Lastly, please note our use of the wording “All Catholics.” This is meant to emphasize that no Catholic is excluded; gay Catholics, divorced and remarried Catholics, male and female Catholics—all are included.