

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

October 28, 2010 at 10:27am

Pope says bishops must educate faithful to vote against abortion

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Bishops must guide their faithful to use their vote to oppose efforts to legalize abortion and euthanasia, Pope Benedict XVI told bishops from Brazil.

"Dear brother bishops, to defend life we must not fear hostility or unpopularity, and we must refuse any compromise or ambiguity which might conform us to the world's way of thinking," the pope said Oct. 28 during a meeting with bishops from northeast Brazil.

The bishops were making their "ad limina" visits to report on the status of their dioceses.

Pope Benedict did not mention the fact that Brazilians were to vote Oct. 31 in a presidential election, but said he wanted to discuss with the bishops their obligation to give their faithful the information and moral guidance they need to ensure their political decisions contribute to the true good of humanity.

Both of Brazil's presidential candidates, Dilma Rousseff and Jose Serra, have said they oppose lifting restrictions on abortion, but Brazil's anti-abortion laws still have been a recurrent theme in the campaign.

Pope Benedict told the Brazilian bishops that while direct involvement in politics is the responsibility of the laity, "when the fundamental rights of the person or the salvation of souls requires it, pastors have a serious duty to make moral judgments even in political matters."

Certain actions and political policies, such as abortion and euthanasia, are "intrinsically evil and incompatible with human dignity" and cannot be justified for any reason, the pope said.

While some may claim they support abortion or euthanasia to defend the weak and the poor, "who is more

helpless than an unborn child or a patient in a vegetative or terminal state?" he said.

"When political positions openly or covertly include plans to decriminalize abortion and euthanasia, the democratic ideal -- which is truly democratic only when it acknowledges and safeguards the dignity of every human person -- is betrayed at its foundations," Pope Benedict told the bishops.

Bishops and priests have an obligation to help Catholic laity live in a way that that is faithful to the Gospel in every aspect of their lives, including their political choices, he said. "This also means that in certain cases, pastors should remind all citizens of their right and duty to use their vote to promote the common good," the pope said.

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