

# THE BELIZE CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

## A Catholic Brief On Foundational Principles





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## Introduction

In November 2022, the Government of Belize launched the People’s Constitution Commission. Its purpose is to review the Belize Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, with the intention of amending or rewriting it. The Government of Belize has requested all citizens of Belize to participate in this educational and democratic process. The Roman Catholic Church, in solidarity with all citizens and with other denominations and other faith-based communities, calls on all the faithful and all Belizeans of goodwill to participate in this civic process by reading and studying the Constitution, participating in the consultation sessions to be held in every district, and rededicating themselves to living virtuous lives so as to build what St. John Paul II called “a civilization of love.” The Church, however, cautions against moving with undue haste to change the highest law of the country, since any change of law risks destabilising society through unintended consequences. Change should not be sought, unless there is a surpassing good to be achieved by it. Thus, much effort, expertise, and consultation on the part of many people must be expended for the constitutional review process to be successful.

With this teaching document, the Catholic Church draws on her rich tradition of social teachings to assist the faithful of all ages and cultures in contributing to this historic constitutional review process. Since without Jesus, human efforts can accomplish nothing (Jn 15:5), the Christian faithful are also invited to an examination of conscience and conversion of heart. Any endeavour to improve Belizean society will be possible only when Christian faithful live what they profess to believe.

## 1 The Belize constitutional review process and the role of the Catholic Church

### 1.1 The potential in the current review process

In a democracy, the government has certain responsibilities to enable the active participation of its citizens. It must work in a transparent manner, making information about its activities widely available and easily accessible. The government should promote love of Belize and a sense of shared responsibility in all its citizens. Encouraging virtuous citizens and facilitating the ability to vote responsibly is indispensable. The government has a duty to listen to its people and involve them in its workings insofar as possible, and it must provide for the education of its citizens on the structure of government and their rights and responsibilities of participation in it, as stipulated in the Constitution and other laws. Special efforts should be made on the part of the government to increase the participation



of Belizean citizens who are members of groups historically under-represented in public life. The question of constitutional review raised by the present Government of Belize is an opportunity to exercise many of the aforementioned responsibilities. The Catholic Church supports enterprises which aim to improve good and prudent governance in our generation, provided that these enterprises align with the founding principles of Belize and are carried out legally and honestly.

It is the duty of all people, and especially Christians, to participate in the cultural, economic, and political life of the societies in which they are citizens. Through active participation in solidarity with others, each citizen contributes to the common good. Exercising the right to vote, paying taxes lawfully due, engaging in debates over issues of public interest, standing up for human dignity and human rights, and maintaining an appropriate respect for government leaders and institutions are primary ways in which people participate in public life. The constitutional review process is a moment of highest importance for Belizean citizens to exercise their own responsibilities to share in the governance of Belizean society.

## 1.2 The Catholic Church's role

In the history of the development of Belize, the Catholic Church has been a positive influence, providing guidance for Belizean political life, especially in the realm of education and community-driven good governance at all levels of the young democracy. Impelled by

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the love of Christ, the Catholic Church promotes human values based on the truth derived from both Christian revelation and reason. “The Church is, by the will of Christ, the teacher of the truth. It is her duty to give utterance to, and authoritatively to teach, that truth which is Christ Himself, and also to declare and confirm by her authority those principles of the moral order which have their origins in human nature itself” (*Dignitatis Humanae* 14). The Church, while recognizing her limited role in the structure of actual governance, nevertheless has the responsibility to speak, teach, and dialogue on such human and Christian principles and values. She cannot let this responsibility be delegated solely to special interest groups or the government itself. It is the Church's task

“always and everywhere to announce moral principles, even about the social order, and to render judgement concerning any human affairs insofar as the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls requires it” (*Code of Canon Law* 747 §2).



The Catholic Church sees her role as touching various parts of the current constitutional review process. Her primary duty is to pray that the Holy Spirit pour out the gifts of wisdom, counsel, understanding, and knowledge on all involved so that the fruits of the process may be reaped by all members of Belizean society. The Church desires to animate participation of her members in this important endeavour, especially through her numerous schools and communities of worship. By educating her members in Christian values and principles, the Church will provide a framework for her members to employ in advocating for a just society. The Church claims no special competence in the technical matters of constitutional law, such as the structure and divisions of government, the powers and conduct of the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary arms, and other matters that should be left to the prudent judgement of specialists. She does, however, have special competence in human nature, human dignity, and human rights and the forms of society which promote or degrade them. The Church will not fail to weigh in on those concrete proposals raised in the review process which affect human dignity. She also has a special concern for poor and marginalized peoples. The Church intends to be an advocate for those whose voices are rarely heard or taken seriously among the powerful of Belizean society.

### **1.3 The purpose of this present document**

The present document surveys the main principles and concerns which the Roman Catholic Church in Belize believes should drive the constitutional review process. Its intended audience is Catholic priests, religious, and laity, especially those who hold leadership positions in Catholic institutions. By careful engagement with this document and with the text of the Constitution, they will be able to articulate the characteristics of a just society whose foundation is the dignity of the human person and a communal commitment to work for the common good. It is hoped that other Christian churches will find substantial common ground with the vision of this document and be able to use it in the education of their own members. Lastly, all persons of goodwill who are involved in the debate over constitutional issues are invited to examine this document so that a deeper understanding of the Catholic position can be reached and a more fruitful dialogue on the Belize Constitution be established.

This teaching document elaborates themes from Catholic Social Teaching found in the Preamble and Fundamental Rights and Freedoms in the current Constitution. The Church believes the Preamble is a wonderful gift to Belizean society, for it enshrines in the Constitution many of the principles and values upon which a just society can be built. The constitutional review process will be successful if it is able to translate more faithfully those principles and values espoused by the people of Belize in the Preamble into the highest law of the land. The present document intends to elucidate those principles and values in



order that greater understanding of them be achieved. In Part II, it begins by emphasizing the importance of the supremacy of God, which is the first and highest principle found in the Preamble, and then moves to what follows from acknowledging the supremacy of God, namely, human dignity, human rights, morality and true freedom, and the principles of social justice. In Part III, it descends into more particular considerations on how human dignity and human rights should be fostered in human society generally and in Belizean society specifically.

## 2 Fundamental principles: the supremacy of God and what follows from it

### 2.1 The supremacy of God

The Preamble to the Belize Constitution asserts that “the Nation of Belize shall be founded upon principles which acknowledge the supremacy of God.” These principles, such as truth, justice, goodness, virtue, moral law, freedom, and natural rights, are universal principles rooted in the order of creation established by God. Vitally necessary for a free and virtuous

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democracy, these principles precede the Constitution, and thus their meaning is not decided by the Constitution or a social contract. While the Bible and revealed faith give privileged access to them, these principles are not strictly religious. All people can perceive them by examining human nature in which they are grounded. The Government of Belize’s Citizen Guide indeed affirms that the Constitution is “based on human nature.” By understanding the needs and the purpose of human nature, humans can comprehend the characteristics of a just society which meets those needs and enables human fulfilment.

Acknowledging the supremacy of God affirms the priority of the natural law over any form of civil law. The natural law, inscribed in the heart of every human and discernible by human reason, enables a person to know what is good or evil, in accord with God’s design for Creation and humanity’s place within it. Since God-given human nature is singular and objective, there is a common set of principles which make up the natural law aimed at human fulfilment. Even though human beings inhabit a great variety of times, places, and cultures, all people are inclined in some way to pursue essential human goods, like preserving



life, reproducing, living in community, worshipping God the Creator, etc. The natural law enlightens the prudential decisions of citizens and their elected officials in pursuit of these goods.

There are challenges to knowing the natural law. Human beings suffer from sinfulness and ignorance, which harm unity and impede a clear and immediate grasp of the natural law. As a consequence, the humble acknowledgement of humanity's sinful condition is needed. Such an acknowledgement affirms the need for grace and revelation so that moral and spiritual truths may be known by everyone with more certainty and errors may more easily be avoided (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1960). Along with grace and revelation, careful inquiry into human nature, even carried out by sinful human beings, assists in comprehending natural law's principal elements.

The natural moral law must inform civil law to ensure the good of all. Any removal of the principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God would alter the foundation of civil law. Instead of an objective foundation for civil law, based on the dignity of the human person and a commitment to the common good, civil law would become a contest for influence among the wealthy and powerful, disregarding the foundations required for human flourishing and harming the most vulnerable. Building society upon the truth of the natural moral law serves as a safeguard against those who would twist the laws for their own benefit. "It must be observed in this regard that if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism" (St. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 46). All Christians with a formed conscience will reject any amendment that includes removing the acknowledgement of God's supremacy or the natural law foundation it implies.

## 2.2 Human dignity

The first consequence of affirming the supremacy of God is recognition of the dignity of every human person. Every Belizean is made in the image and likeness of the Creator, and, as our National Prayer reminds us, every person who loves God has a destiny of eternal life in heaven. These facts show that the human person possesses a transcendent

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WITHIN IT.**



dignity which is contingent neither upon government recognition nor the exercise of human will. The government of a nation exists for the good of the persons who make it up, and any government that degrades or enslaves its citizens is morally illegitimate. The dignity of the human person is also intrinsic to the person. Simply by virtue of being human,

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a person possesses transcendent dignity. This transcendent dignity can never be stripped from a person since it is not granted by the State or the government or claimed by an individual’s autonomous decision. As such, the Government of Belize, in accord with the Constitution, must ensure that all laws, policies, and any proposal for constitutional amendments are in keeping with the inherent dignity of each and every person in Belize, male or female, before and after birth, in light of the natural law.

Universal, inherent human dignity puts limits on the democratic process. In a truly just democracy, not everything can be left up to the decision of the people. Most importantly, the majority cannot decide to strip any person or persons, especially a minority group, of their transcendent dignity before the law. Failure to protect equal and universal human dignity leads inevitably to grave injustice in society. “The root of modern totalitarianism is to be found in the denial of the transcendent dignity of

the human person ... Not even a majority of society may violate these rights, by going against the minority, by isolating, oppressing, or exploiting it, or by attempting to annihilate it” (St. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 44). By affirming the supremacy of God and the human dignity with which all humans are endowed, the Constitution of Belize provides a firm foundation for the protection of inviolable and inalienable human rights. The People’s Constitutional Commission is correct to limit its authority when it states it “cannot get rid of the existing legal framework” and “must continue with the legal tradition of Belize” (*PCC Act Summary*). The natural law tradition, as a custodian of human dignity, is the context in which popular sovereignty is expressed in Belize. The Church emphasizes that this tradition is an essential foundation which gives the Belize Constitution its legitimacy and binding authority on the consciences of the people.

### 2.3 Human rights

Public recognition of the inherent dignity of persons from conception to natural death is the basis of human rights, the equality of each person before the law, fundamental freedoms,





and the protections that every person should receive under the law. The Preamble and Constitution acknowledge that equal and inalienable rights are endowed by the Creator. As a consequence, these natural human rights existed before the Constitution of 1981, and they will continue to exist with or without the Constitution or government. Natural rights are universal, that is, for all persons, since they are based on shared human nature. The State must acknowledge and protect the natural rights of Belizean citizens, including the poor and disadvantaged, incarcerated persons, and other marginalized persons, as well as immigrants and visitors to Belize. Since natural rights and fundamental freedoms are endowed by the Creator, the State does not grant them and may not remove them in a free and virtuous society. The practice of confusing legal rights, which are founded in law and dependent on the government's enforcement and protection, and inalienable natural rights, which are perpetual and prior to a nation's laws, must be avoided.

The Catholic Church has a great responsibility to distinguish between inherent human rights and the various unwarranted claims of human rights proposed by scholars and international organisations in the contemporary world. Some of these proposed rights may be legitimate, but many are inventions of special interest groups unconcerned with the common good. The Church and the Belize Constitution recognize that human rights are inextricably linked to human nature and natural law. A robust understanding of inherent human rights is the result of a well-formed understanding of human nature, deriving from both revelation and reason. What cannot be accepted is the idea that governments have the authority to decide on, bestow, or limit natural human rights through legislative power. Governmental action does not create these basic human rights, and therefore, is unable to remove them. The government merely uses civil law to acknowledge formally those inalienable natural rights and to protect them as necessary for the common good in a particular society.

## 2.4 Morality and freedom

The Preamble makes a remarkable statement about the nature of freedom, asserting, "Men and institutions remain free only when freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values and upon the rule of law." When the moral and spiritual foundations of freedom are removed, humans and their institutions risk sliding into slavery to passion,

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addiction, violence, and oppression. On the other hand, when the moral and spiritual foundations of freedom are preserved, then true freedom flourishes because it is put to the service of justice and peace. The Church wishes to underscore the importance of the Preamble’s notion of freedom, since “the more one does what is good, the freer one becomes” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1733).

The freedom to do good mentioned in the Preamble is distinct from physical or psychological freedom, which are simply the absence of constraints on one’s actions. Individuals in society do need a certain measure of physical and psychological freedom to pursue the true goods that enable human beings to flourish. Among these freedoms are the freedom to obey and worship God, to help one’s fellow human beings, to try to improve one’s livelihood, to acquire virtue, and to live a good life, all while respecting others who have the same freedoms

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and rights. However, members of a just society do not need the freedom to do whatever they desire. The law of Belize ought to create conditions where true freedom may thrive in the nation by ensuring that the moral and spiritual values of Belizeans are enshrined in law.

Caring for the moral and spiritual values of Belizean society does not mean that all moral evils should be punished by society or even made illegal. In some cases, to outlaw an evil may create more evil than such a law would ameliorate. Crime and sin should be distinguished in these complex situations. The fact that some evil acts are not punished as crimes by the State does not mean it is morally permissible

to commit such evil. Tolerance of evil must never be confused with a right to do evil. Encouraging evil in society, or even promoting a moral evil as a right through legislation, would harm the true freedom of persons and institutions in that society. Good governance preserves moral and spiritual values while also maintaining the respect for the rule of law among all.

## 2.5 The principles of social justice

The Preamble of the Constitution uses the phrase ‘the principles of social justice,’ but it does not define them. It names certain beliefs which follow from those principles and uses the terminology of equality, the common good, human dignity, and human rights. Nevertheless, a full-fledged theory of social justice is implicit in the Preamble.

Over the last century, the Catholic Church has articulated a theory of social justice through her Social Teaching. This theory has deeply influenced the history and development of contemporary Belize. The Founding Fathers of Belize, led by Rt. Hon. George



Price, studied Catholic Social Teaching in adult night classes at Saint John’s College in the 1940s. The Preamble of the Constitution particularly reflects the vision of social justice they encountered. The Church in Belize invites all Belizeans, but above all Belizean Catholics, to investigate the rich teachings of the Church in the social domain, not just to understand their history better, but also to see the clear importance of these teachings to the constitutional review process.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* outlines the principles of social justice in Catholic Social Teaching (especially paragraphs [1928-1942]). These include, but are not limited to, the transcendent dignity of the human person, the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity. The first two are treated in other sections of the present document. Solidarity is the virtue of social friendship which makes one firmly determined to work for the common good out of a strong sense of personal responsibility for all others. The meaning is very close to the Garifuna ideal of togetherness, *Uwarraguni*. Subsidiarity is the principle that larger institutions should not intervene in smaller institutions in a society by taking away what pertains to their proper roles. For example, the national government should support smaller community organisations and families by respecting their specific responsibilities and creating an environment that enables them to fulfill such responsibilities. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004) contains much more extensive presentations of these principles and others. Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) and Pope Francis’s encyclicals *Laudato Si’* (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020) are the most recent advancements of Catholic Social Teaching. For young people, the *DOCAT: What to Do? The Social Teaching of the Catholic Church* (2016) is a wonderful resource for learning these foundational teachings for a just and virtuous society.

The vision of social justice following from the supremacy of God is that of a civilization of love. In a civilization of love, each person loves and receives love which transforms both individuals and society in harmony with the transcendent dignity of all. A civilization of love sometimes stands in contrast to impoverished visions of social justice in contemporary society. Often, contemporary social justice movements are driven by a utopian goal of eliminating all differences in society. Unjust inequalities ought indeed to be eliminated. “Excessive

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UWARRAGUNI.**



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**IN A CIVILIZATION  
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economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace” (*Gaudium et Spes* 29). Unjust inequalities among rich and poor nations, among men and women, and among different races of persons are results of sinful behaviours embodied in social structures and laws that are incompatible with the equal participation of all persons in a just human society. However, some differences naturally occur in creation. There are different physical, economic, and intellectual capabilities among persons. Although all persons enjoy the same personal dignity, the “talents” are not distributed equally (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1936; see Mt. 25:14-30). These

natural differences should be seen as a gift from God in the light of our shared human dignity. They create opportunities for solidarity and interdependence among the peoples of the world that, when taken, lead to actions which will build a civilization of love.

### 3 Particular areas of concern for the Catholic Church

The Constitution of Belize, as the highest law of the country, is the organic framework for legislation adopted by the National Assembly on a vast range of issues. It is impossible for the constitutional review process to touch on every aspect of good governance for a flourishing society. In the debates over specific aspects of the Constitution to amend, the Catholic Church wishes that the following considerations be borne in mind. The items included in this section do not exhaust the Church’s interests, and further issues of concern to the Church will undoubtedly be uncovered in the course of public consultation. Nevertheless, the following considerations will provide a basis for the Church’s dialogue with other parties over how to improve the current Constitution and the legislation that puts into practice the principles on which the Constitution is founded.

#### 3.1 The common good and material goods

Promotion of the common good is the essential task of the government of a nation. The government has no justification for its existence outside of its ability to foster the common good, that is, the social conditions which enable human beings to reach fulfillment. The common good is not reducible to the sum of the desires of a society’s individuals and



advocacy groups, but rather, the common good is that which serves the true good of all, as seen in the light of natural law. Since human fulfillment has individual and communal dimensions, as well as material and transcendent dimensions, the State has to be organised in such a way that it protects each of these aspects of fulfillment. To achieve its purpose, the State should support a peaceful society in which human dignity is respected, the nation's political powers are prudently organised, the judicial system is independent and just, and its citizens can live in harmony with the environment.

The basis of a peaceful society is respect for human dignity and the inalienable rights which flow from that dignity. Therefore, a fundamental step in securing the common good is ensuring that human rights are promoted for all people. These rights include, among others, freedom of association, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion. In addition to protecting human rights, governments should support the material conditions which allow for human fulfillment insofar as possible. While the concrete manner of this support will vary in different contexts, governments should create the conditions for, *inter alia*, access to water, food, energy, health services, education, and housing, and opportunities to participate in work, income generating activities, and/or businesses. Given that human fulfillment goes beyond mere material satisfaction, the government can encourage cultural, moral, and spiritual pursuits which develop these important dimensions of the human person.

The common good requires that all people have access to the means of living which allow for their integral fulfillment. All the goods of the earth, as gifts from the Creator, are meant to provide for the necessities of all people without distinction. The goods of the earth thus are given for the use of all persons. This universal destination for the goods of creation does not preclude private ownership of goods. In fact, private property is an essential means of promoting human fulfillment because by prudent stewardship of their possessions, people exercise their rational capacities to pursue and secure their own livelihood. In cultures in which communal ownership of property is the norm, especially certain indigenous cultures, it is through participation in the communal stewardship of goods and in accordance with subsidiarity that members exercise their rational capacities.

Private ownership of goods is so important to the development of the individual and

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**IN A WORLD IN WHICH MULTITUDES LACK THE RESOURCES WHICH THEIR DIGNITY DEMANDS, PROPERTY OWNERS AND GOVERNMENTS OUGHT TO EXERCISE A PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR, USING THE GOODS AT THEIR DISPOSAL IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE POOR ALSO BENEFIT FROM THOSE GOODS.**”



to a well-ordered society that it is appropriate to speak of a right to private property. However, this right is not absolute. In disposing of their goods, property owners are obliged to consider how their decisions will affect the good of all, not just themselves or their immediate families. In a world in which multitudes lack the resources which their dignity demands, property owners and governments ought to exercise a preferential option for the poor, using the goods at their disposal in such a way that the poor also benefit from those goods. Since God created the goods of the earth for the benefit of all people, providing basic necessities to those in need is less an act of charity than an act of justice, for it is giving to the needy what is their due. The government is responsible both for protecting the right to private property in a well-functioning society and for enacting public policies which give preference to and empower those most in need in that society.

### 3.2 The sanctity of life

Human dignity serves as the basis for the doctrine of the sanctity of life. Life in general, and human life in particular, is worthy of awe, grave respect, and reverence because God is supreme over it. Human life comes from God and is a gift to each person. Since it is not given to be disposed of by an individual's own will, it must not be violated before or after birth. Life is an inalienable natural right endowed by the Creator, and a just

“**HUMAN LIFE COMES FROM GOD AND IS A GIFT TO EACH PERSON. SINCE IT IS NOT GIVEN TO BE DISPOSED OF BY AN INDIVIDUAL'S OWN WILL, IT MUST NOT BE VIOLATED BEFORE OR AFTER BIRTH.**”

society will go to great lengths to protect and defend human life, especially in civil law. This protection must extend from the conception of a person in the mother's womb to the person's natural death. The practices of direct abortion, by either surgical and chemical means, and euthanasia have no place in a just society, and any claims of rights to such practices must be held as illusory. The current law that allows for an intentional abortion simply because a child before birth has a disability is especially scandalous as it fails to recognize the inviolable dignity of every human and the inalienable right to life of a baby in the womb (*Criminal Code of Belize* 112(1)(b)). The Church supports a constitutional amendment strengthening protections of the right to life of the unborn.

The God-given right to life is recognized in the Preamble and specified in Part II.4. The Catholic Church calls attention to the fact that the death penalty remains legal in the Constitution and supports amending Part II.4(1) to eliminate it formally in Belize. This change would bring the law into line with the current *de facto* elimination of the death penalty in Belize. As Pope Francis has taught, “the death penalty is inadmissible because



it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2267).

### 3.3 Family

The basic unit of social life and society is the family. The exclusive, life-long union of a husband and wife establishes a family which, if God permits, bears fruit in children who perpetuate a society. It is in the family that a person learns how to love, support, and treat other human beings. The quality of familial relationships ripples throughout the rest of society. When members of a family learn to care for one another, treating each other as persons to nurture rather than as objects to exploit, the society at large benefits from the habits formed by these members. Habits of care are most evident when vulnerable individuals, especially the young, the elderly, the infirm, the unborn and the disabled, receive from their families the support they need for their fulfilment as human beings.

In a society of free human beings and free institutions, the status of the family, as a natural society, takes priority over that of the State. In other words, governments exist for the sake of the family, not vice versa. It is beyond the authority of the government to redefine or arbitrarily interfere with marriage and the family. The government’s role is to foster strong and fruitful families, protecting their inviolable rights and bolstering the conditions which make them possible. In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, the government’s task thus is twofold. On one hand, it cannot assume responsibilities that belong properly to the family. For example, parents are the first educators of their children and have the right to determine the form the rest of their children’s education will take, including in the moral and spiritual realms. The private property of families must be protected so that the heads of families can make decisions regarding their families’ well-being. In a democracy, the government should respect these rights of heads of households and other roles specific to the family. On the other hand, governments must work to create and sustain the conditions in which families may flourish. For instance, they should encourage a system of healthcare which enables families to care for their members. Governments ought to protect families from societal dangers, like domestic violence and drug and alcohol addiction. They may consider legislation which aids families, such as mandatory, paid maternal and paternal leave, free childbirth, or tax deductions for children.

Because of various shortcomings, breakdowns, or tragedies, families may not be capable

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FRUITFUL FAMILIES,  
PROTECTING THEIR  
INVIOABLE RIGHTS  
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CONDITIONS WHICH  
MAKE THEM  
POSSIBLE.**”



of providing the support which their members need. In these cases, the government has the duty to ensure the existence of social bodies which contribute what is lacking. Consonant with the principle of subsidiarity, the government would most effectively discharge this duty by supporting churches and other private charities as the first places of recourse for families in need.

### 3.4 Labour

Made in the image and likeness of God the Creator, men and women participate in God's creative activity through human work. By working, humans make use of their own natural gifts and the goods of the earth to cultivate a fitting home for all humanity. Even though the sins of Adam and Eve turned human work into a source of toil, it could not destroy the dignity of work. Jesus Christ himself shared the human experience of labouring by working in a carpenter's shop.

While work is an essential human activity, it is not humanity's highest good. Reaching the kingdom of God is that highest good. Therefore, work must be seen in its proper place among human activities. Education must prepare children to understand the gifts that each of them has been given to develop for their own good and the good of society, and the economic marketplace must be structured in a way that allows each person to develop those

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gifts. Workers must be protected from exploitation that would reduce their value to their output alone. The use of child labour, unsafe working conditions, underpaid labour, and disproportionate demands from employers are all ways in which human work gets distorted into exploitation.

To counteract the tendency to exploit labour, the rights of workers must be upheld. Following the Creator who rested from work on the seventh day, societies should protect workers' right to rest. Sundays (or Saturdays for those who celebrate the Sabbath that day) should be privileged days in which all can participate in spiritual and leisure activities and take care of their families. The right to private property ensures workers can possess and enjoy the fruits of their labour. Moreover, the right of workers to participate in the long-term ownership and disposal of both the means of production and of the assets produced should be fostered as much as possible.

A chief goal of any society should be the full employment of all its members. Full employment means that work is accessible for all persons capable of it. Only through full





employment can the human right to work be met. The government plays an important role in creating the conditions for businesses to thrive, thus securing job opportunities for its citizens. Workers have a right to a just wage, paid in a timely manner, for their labour. The government ought to enact policies to guarantee that employers respect and nurture the family lives of their workers, especially women, and women must be defended from any workplace discrimination, including salary discrimination. The government also has a special obligation towards its members for whom employment represents a special challenge, such as parents with children, the disabled, ex-convicts, and immigrants who are seeking a better life in Belize for themselves and their families. The unemployed members of society should have access to forms of social support, such as state subsidies for training, to make their livelihood possible.

A basic way for workers to advocate for themselves is to form labour unions and other professional associations. The Church recognizes these as legitimate, and the government needs to safeguard workers' right to associate. Unions possess the tools to contend with employers, even to the extreme of striking, but these tools must be exercised for the common good, not for sheer economic or political power.

### 3.5 Our common home: the environment

God has placed human beings in the middle of a vast creation, tasking us with creating a home for ourselves within it. The entire universe shows forth the wisdom and goodness of God. Humanity is not meant to treat creation as an object to be manipulated and dominated at will, but is called to live harmoniously with the rest of creation.

Misuse of new technologies in the modern world have broken the harmony that once existed between humanity and the rest of creation. The planet shows symptoms of serious disrepair. Within its domain, the government has the responsibility to deter practices which damage the environment. It also should play a role in promoting best practices for sustainable and integral development. Care for the environment is not simply for the good of the environment itself, but it is vital to the promotion of an integral ecology, that is, a situation in which the political, social, economic, and environmental domains flourish in harmony.

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the shoulders of the world's most vulnerable and poor, it is necessary for the government to exercise particular concern for the social aspects of the environmental crisis. Fishermen livelihoods, for example, are particularly affected by the harm caused to our rivers and reefs. Indigenous people and their way of life are in danger due to unchecked development. The rights of indigenous people to their lifestyle and lands must be safeguarded, and they may be held up as examples of living in concord with nature. Given the deleterious natural and social effects of environmental degradation, the Church strongly urges cognizance of these environmental concerns in Belize among all participants in the review process.

### 3.6 Religious freedom

Religious freedom, like the right to life, is an essential human right in a healthy democracy. It arises from human dignity and each individual's responsibility to search for truth and conform one's life to it. This right has been well-respected and cherished both by law and by custom in Belize since independence, and the constitutional review process should continue to maintain, and even expand where appropriate, strong protections of it. Religious freedom is not just the right to possess religious beliefs, but it entails the right to worship God publicly, in accord with the social dimension of human nature. It provides the liberty to teach, speak, and live according to religious standards both in private life and in public. Places of public worship and schools in which religious values are transmitted are thus constitutive parts of religious freedom.

The Catholic Church highlights an apparent conflict in the clauses in Part II.11(3) by which a recognized religious community may establish and maintain places of education "at its own expense" and provide education, including religious education, for its members in such places "whether or not it is in receipt of a government subsidy . . . designed to meet in whole or in part the cost of such course of education." Religiously-established educational institutions in Belize, as a matter of law, occupy a grey area between public and private institutions. Their independence from the government has even been denied, having been characterised as the "*alter ego* of the government, or its emanation" (*Roches v. Wade* 2004, 36). Clarifying the legal status of religious schools and the extent to which they are subject to anti-discrimination laws in Belize is a desideratum of the Church, because she considers a measure of reasonable preference

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in employment absolutely essential for religious education. Religious education does not consist simply in a communication and mastery of facts, but it is an encounter with living models of the faith for inspiration and imitation. The Church would like to see explicit protections, perhaps in the form of a *ministerial exception* that will be respected in Belizean law, allowing religious communities the autonomy to ensure the integrity of their religious instruction. This includes the right to give preference to their denominational adherents in hiring and to include clauses in faculty contracts requiring faculty to abide by religious teachings pertaining to morality, witness of life, and fidelity to the teachings of the religious community.

Religious freedom also involves freedom from pressure imposed by society or the government to adopt or repudiate religious beliefs. Government is without power to impose ideologies that would hinder the free exercise of religion, which includes the liberty of conscience to live according to one's religious beliefs and moral standards. The government can never compel a person to act in a manner that violates religious conscience. All attempts to denigrate religious groups or impede free speech of religious views should be prevented in the Constitution. Freedom of religion is a natural human right, and, as a natural human right among other human rights, it is not therefore without limits. It must respect the other natural rights endowed by the Creator. The Belize Constitution recognizes that communal interests in "defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health" may allow for governmental actions which, with due process, limit the practices of a religious community (*Belize Constitution*, Part II.11(5)(a)).

When religions are recognized by the government, they often have certain privileges: tax deductions for buildings dedicated to worship; facilities for acquiring visas for missionaries; deductions in customs duties for imported charitable aid or medical supplies; and more. These privileges are just and appropriate in Belize, because of the substantial benefit that religious or church-run institutions provide to the community. They are places which build social cohesion among their members, and their charitable works often reach the marginalized in ways which government social programs do not. The Church's unique contribution and role in civil society is inseparable from the natural right to freedom of religion. It is beyond the scope of government's authority to attempt to control or dictate the internal affairs of religious institutions, which are inextricably bound with matters of belief and conscience, beyond the minimum necessary to ensure public safety. Therefore, the Church is not simply one of many "non-profit" organizations in civil society and should not be treated as such without proper safeguards that ensure there is no possibility of overreach or coercion from external influences in her operations.



### 3.7 Gender equality

The term “gender equality” was added to the Preamble in 2001 by the constitutional commissioners to further strengthen women’s equality. The current Preamble asserts there is to be no privilege or disparity in Belizean society on the basis of “sex, which ensures gender equality.” It is evident that “gender equality” in this context denotes equal protection of men and women on the basis of their biological sex. International advocacy groups and

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organizations have recently been pushing reinterpretations of the concept of “gender” that hold it to be a matter of purely subjective and socially-constructed experience, even to the point of being something fluid which can change over time. This reconfigured meaning of gender is not consistent with human nature, the immutability of sexual difference, or the current Constitution of Belize. The Church supports and promotes efforts of gender equality, understood as the equality of males and females, but she denies any reinterpretations of “gender” as a social construct separate from biological sex or human nature.

Pope Francis has warned against “ideological colonization,” especially in the realm of gender. While the Church recognizes the suffering and the inviolable human dignity of those who question their lived experience of sex and gender, “it is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality” (Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 56).

### 3.8 Corruption and the right to vote

In any government made up of fallible humans, the temptation to vice and corruption is always present. The improper use of public resources for direct personal, familial, or political gain by an elected official is a violation of their oath of office, the public trust, distributive justice, and good governance. The Church strongly condemns any form of corruption in Belizean society, for it is a betrayal of the good faith of Belizean citizens and a dereliction of the duty of elected officials entrusted with power to work for the common good. The Church hopes that the constitutional review process will identify concrete proposals that will advance the fight against corruption in Belize.

One particular area of concern is the need for truly free elections. Every citizen of voting age in a democratic society has the right to exercise her or his free will in voting for the best candidate(s) for government at national, municipal, and local levels. No one should interfere



directly or indirectly, through enticement to special benefits, being offered money, or any other form of bribe to the electors to vote for favoured candidates. The buying of votes by candidates for political office invalidates the basis of truly representative government, because the government would not be “freely elected by universal adult suffrage” under such interference or obstruction. Hence, buying votes should be considered a criminal activity punishable to the extent of the laws of Belize.

### 3.9 Civic participation

The current constitution review process underway in Belize is a prime opportunity for civic education in Belize. While the task of learning about the law and government of Belize pertains to all Belizeans, it is particularly important for the youth to understand the structure and function of their State and society. Teaching the youth about the Constitution and forming them in moral virtues are the best defences against poor, incompetent, and corrupt government. Voting and participation in civic duties is pivotal to a vibrant, participatory, sustainable, and resilient democracy. Therefore, a strong justification can be made for mastering the Belize Constitution as a central component of education in Belize, to be as strategic and essential as learning English, mathematics, sciences, and other fundamental or required courses of study. Civic education can take place at all levels of the Belizean educational system (primary, secondary, and tertiary). Relevant concepts, principles, and sections of the Constitution can be tailored to the level of understanding of each age group. For students in Catholic institutions, Catholic Social Teaching should be the primary resource for young Belizeans to better understand the guiding principles of social justice in the Belize Constitution.

## Conclusion

The Church-State partnership is a benefit to a free and virtuous society. By this document, the Roman Catholic Church hopes to contribute to the constitutional process for the sake of the common good. The current Constitution’s guiding principles are well-founded on human nature and consistent with democratic values. The citizens of Belize are called to

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learn and live according to these principles with creativity and love. The Church desires by prayer, teaching, and practical charity to assist all Belizeans in building a civilization of love.

The constitutional process is an opportunity to reap the benefits of the Church-State partnership in Belize. The Catholic Church encourages the faithful to continue to listen, dialogue, and discern what the Holy Spirit is asking in this democratic endeavour. She implores the Holy Spirit to come and guide the entire constitutional review process. May it be a time of respectful dialogue and wise insight with persons of all cultures and creeds. It is an occasion to enrich each other with the diverse gifts each Belizean has to offer through their civic participation. The Church prays that this process may be free from undue manipulation or discord and that solidarity among each and every person will flourish in the *Land of the Free by the Carib Sea*. Finally, she asks especially that the representatives of the People's Constitutional Commission and all government ministers be blessed with the gifts of wisdom, understanding, and fortitude as they seek to know the will of God for future generations of Belizeans.



# Belize National Prayer

Almighty and Eternal God, who through Jesus Christ  
has revealed Your Glory to all nations,  
please protect and preserve Belize, our beloved country.

God of might, wisdom and justice,  
please assist our Belizean government and people  
with your Holy Spirit of counsel and fortitude.

Let your light of Your divine wisdom  
direct their plans and endeavours  
so that with Your help we may attain our just objectives.  
With Your guidance, may all our endeavours tend to  
peace, social justice, liberty, national happiness,  
the increase of industry, sobriety and useful knowledge.

We pray, O God of Mercy, for all of us  
that we may be blessed in the knowledge  
and sanctified in the observance of Your most holy law,  
that we may be preserved in union and in peace  
which the world itself cannot give.

And, after enjoying the blessings of this life,  
please admit us, dear Lord, to that eternal reward  
that You have prepared for those who love You.

Amen.