

Bishop John Keenan, President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, calls for human dignity and the common good to shape Scotland's Programme for Government

As it prepares to publish its forthcoming Programme for Government, I urge the Scottish Government to place the dignity of every human person and the common good at the centre of its priorities for the year ahead.

At a time when many individuals, families and communities continue to experience anxiety about poverty, housing, health, loneliness, public services and the future of our shared environment, Scotland stands at another important moment in our national life. The forthcoming Programme for Government is not only a political document but an opportunity to reflect on the kind of society we are building together. Public policy should be judged by how it protects the weakest, supports families, strengthens communities and enables every person to flourish.

Human dignity

Human dignity is not granted by the state, nor earned by wealth, health, productivity, age, ability or social status. It belongs to every person, from the beginning of life to natural death, and must be reflected in the choices of government. I therefore ask that the Programme for Government affirm a consistent commitment to the protection of life, from conception until natural death; the care of those who are vulnerable; and the provision of support that allows people to live with security, hope and participation in society.

This commitment should be visible in policies that tackle child poverty, homelessness, addiction, mental ill-health and social isolation; in care for older people and disabled people; in support for women and families facing crisis pregnancies; and in a renewed determination to ensure that no one is made to feel disposable or forgotten.

The common good

The common good requires more than the pursuit of individual advantage or short-term political gain. It calls for conditions in which every person and family can flourish: decent work, secure housing, accessible healthcare, good education, safe communities, care for creation and respect for freedom of conscience and religion.

I encourage the Scottish Government to work constructively with civic society, faith communities, local authorities, charities, schools, healthcare providers and community organisations. The Church and the political community have distinct roles, yet both serve the good of every person. When these responsibilities are exercised respectfully and in partnership, society flourishes, especially in its care for the weakest. The experience of those who stand daily beside people in need should shape policy, and their contribution should be recognised through fair, sustainable and predictable support.

Priorities for the Programme for Government

- **Protect life and uphold dignity:** ensure that law and policy safeguard the intrinsic worth of every person, especially unborn children, older people, disabled people, the seriously ill, people considering suicide, victims of crime, victims of modern slavery, those experiencing addiction, poverty, homelessness, isolation or other forms of vulnerability.
- **Strengthen families, marriage and communities:** support parents, carers, children and young people through practical measures that reduce poverty, improve housing security, lower the cost of living, respect the role of parents in education and promote stable family and community life.
- **Put the poorest first:** make the eradication of poverty a central test of government action, with particular attention to children, single-parent families, disabled people and those experiencing homelessness or destitution.
- **Public services around the person:** ensure health, social care, education and justice systems serve the whole person and are accessible, including for those with poor mental health, who suffer addiction and those in need of palliative care.
- **Promote solidarity across society:** foster a culture in which people are not divided by age, disability, poverty, race, migration status, religion or background, but are recognised as neighbours with shared responsibilities.
- **Promote integration and belonging:** support migrants and refugees not only in finding safety, but in building stable lives, accessing work, education and community life, and contributing fully to the common good of Scotland.
- **Respect conscience, faith and civic participation:** defend fundamental freedoms of thought, conscience and religion so that people and communities can express their beliefs openly and respectfully, and so that faith communities can continue to contribute to public life, education, healthcare, charitable service and debate.
- **Support Catholic schools and educational diversity:** recognise the right of parents to choose schools that reflect their convictions, and protect Catholic schools as a valued part of Scotland's educational landscape, serving families of all backgrounds and forming young people in faith, virtue and service.
- **Care for creation and pursue justice beyond Scotland:** pursue climate and environmental policies that protect the natural world while supporting workers, families and communities through a just transition, and maintain concern for peace, international solidarity and support for poorer nations.

A shared responsibility

The Catholic Church in Scotland remains ready to contribute to respectful and honest public conversation. Political life must not be poisoned by anger, division or rhetoric that diminishes the dignity of others. I ask the Scottish Government to ensure that its Programme for Government is measured not only by the number of actions it announces, but by whether those actions honour human dignity, strengthen the common good and give renewed hope to those who need it most.

Finally, I assure government and all elected representatives of the prayers of the Catholic bishops of Scotland. May the Holy Spirit inspire them with integrity and humility, and an unwavering commitment to human dignity and the common good.

Bishop John Keenan, President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland