



MAKING MORAL CHOICES IN VOTING

In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue. The responsibility to make political choices rests with each person and his or her properly formed conscience.

As bishops, we do not intend to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote. Our purpose is to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with God's truth". (#7 *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*)

Catholic voters are called to properly form their consciences in preparation for voting and for the continued advocacy for just laws and policies required after voting. This process should focus on moral principles, the defense of life, the needs of the weak, and the pursuit of the common good. It requires constant prayer, understanding of Church teaching, and discernment that goes beyond campaign rhetoric and partisan politics.

This discernment should focus on a candidate's consistency with moral principles, sincerity, integrity and the ability to effect the policies that he or she promotes. It should also include seeking and verifying background information regarding a candidate's stance on policy issues, and a consideration of those who would be directly impacted by such policies.

**FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP:
A CALL TO POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES
PARAGRAPHS 34-37**

Catholics often face difficult choices about how to vote. This is why it is so important to vote according to a well-formed conscience that perceives the proper relationship among moral goods. A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to subhuman living conditions, redefining marriage in ways that violate its essential meaning, or racist behavior, if the voter's intent is to support that position. In such cases, a Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in grave evil. At the same time, a voter should not use a candidate's opposition to an intrinsic evil to justify indifference or inattentiveness to other important moral issues involving human life and dignity.

There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position even on policies promoting an intrinsically evil act may reasonably decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil.

When all candidates hold a position that promotes an intrinsically evil act, the conscientious voter faces a dilemma. The voter may decide to take the extraordinary step of not voting for any candidate or, after careful deliberation, may decide to vote for the candidate deemed less likely to advance such a morally flawed position and more likely to pursue other authentic human goods.

In making these decisions, it is essential for Catholics to be guided by a well-formed conscience that recognizes that all issues do not carry the same moral weight and that the moral obligation to oppose policies promoting intrinsically evil acts has a special claim on our consciences and our actions. These decisions should take into account a candidate's commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue. In the end, this is a decision to be made by each Catholic guided by a conscience formed by Catholic moral teaching.



REFLECTIONS ON CHOOSING POLITICAL CANDIDATES

WALKING WITH GOD

We take up the task of serving the common good with joy and hope, confident that God, who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son," walks with us and strengthens us on the way (Jn 3:16). God is love, and he desires that we help to build a "civilization of love"—one in which all human beings have the freedom and opportunity to experience the love of God and live out that love by making a free gift of themselves to one another." *Introduction, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*

RESPECTFUL, THOUGHTFUL AND CIVIL DIALOGUE

We who follow Christ must not only speak the truth but must do so in love (Eph 4:15). It is not enough that we know or believe something to be true. We must express that truth in charity with respect for others so that the bonds between us can be strengthened in building up the body of Christ." *Civil Discourse: Speaking Truth in Love, Cardinal Wuerl*

PRUDENTIAL DISCERNMENT

The Church's teaching is clear that a good end does not justify an immoral means. As we all seek to advance the common good—by defending the inviolable sanctity of human life from the moment of conception until natural death, by promoting religious freedom, by defending marriage, by feeding the hungry and housing the homeless, by welcoming the immigrant and protecting the environment—it is important to recognize that not all possible courses of action are morally acceptable. We have a responsibility to discern carefully which public policies are morally sound. Catholics may choose different ways to respond to compelling social problems, but we cannot differ on our moral obligation to help build a more just and peaceful world through morally acceptable means, so that the weak and vulnerable are protected and human rights and dignity are defended." #20 *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*

What is the candidate's commitment to protect all human life, from conception to natural death?

What is the candidate's commitment to addressing threats to marriage and family, as understood by the Church, as well as other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism and other unjust discrimination, the use of the death penalty, resorting to unjust war, the use of torture, war crimes, the failure to respond to those who are suffering from hunger or a lack of health care, or an unjust immigration policy?

How does the candidate measure up in both words and actions with the totality of Catholic Social Teaching?

What would be morally grave reasons to support and/or oppose a candidate? (Please refer to the U.S. Bishops document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, paragraphs 34 through 37).

What is my assessment of the candidate's personal integrity, governing philosophy, performance and ability to influence a given issue?

Has the candidate demonstrated sufficient competency to hold such an elected position?

Examining party platforms in light of Catholic teaching may be a helpful consideration, especially when a voter faces a dilemma in a voting choice.