



# MAKING MORAL CHOICES IN VOTING

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

**C**atholics 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 takes a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, such as abortion or racism, 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.

**T**here may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position may 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.

**W**hen all candidates hold a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, 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.

**I**n 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 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.

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.

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.

It should also focus on a candidate's consistency with moral principles, sincerity, integrity and the ability to effect the policies that he or she promotes.

The Catholic Conference of Ohio's website offers further election-related reflections and candidate information.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS ON CHOOSING POLITICAL CANDIDATES

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

**W**hat is the candidate's commitment to 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?

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

**W**hat 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).

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

**H**as the candidate demonstrated sufficient competency to hold such an elected position?

## PRAYER BEFORE AN ELECTION

Lord God, as the election approaches, I seek to better understand the issues and concerns that confront our city, state, and country, and how the Gospel compels me to respond as a faithful citizen in my community.

I ask for eyes that are free from blindness so that I might see others as brothers and sisters, one and equal in dignity, especially those who are victims of abuse and violence, deceit and poverty.

I ask for ears that will hear the cries of children unborn and those abandoned, men and women oppressed because of race or creed, religion or gender.

I ask for my mind and heart to be open to hearing the voice of leaders who will bring our world closer to your Kingdom.

I pray for discernment so that I may choose leaders who hear your Word, live your love, and keep in the ways of your truth.

I pray this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Prayers adapted from *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, revised edition (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007).