



# Diocese of Youngstown

**On Being Faithful Citizens**  
**A Pastoral Letter to the Diocese of Youngstown**  
**By**  
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Election Day, Tuesday, November 4, 2008, provides us an opportunity to participate in determining the direction our country will take for the next four years. Consequently, it is important that Catholics vote and essential that we cast informed votes, that is, votes that are the result of well-formed consciences.

A well-formed conscience is one which integrates into each decision that is made the Ten Commandments, the teachings of Jesus Christ as found in the Scriptures and the teachings of His Church. I encourage everyone, in order to make decisions from the basis of a well-formed conscience, to read, reflect and pray over the United States Catholic Bishops document, *"Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: The U.S. Bishops' Reflection on Catholic Teaching and Political Life,"* which can be found at [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org).

Knowing that many of you may not have an opportunity to read this document in its entirety, I would like to emphasize **five critical points** in this Pastoral Letter to help you understand better its essential message.

**First**, we must carefully review and strive to understand the Catholic Tradition concerning **conscience**. In *Faithful Citizenship* we Bishops write:

*"Conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere 'feeling' about what we should or should not do. Rather, conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil" (paragraph 17).*

**Second**, we must understand the reality of **intrinsically evil actions** and our obligation to avoid supporting them in our personal choices and public policies. In *Faithful Citizenship* we describe the challenge this way:

*"There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called 'intrinsically evil' actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia. In our nation, 'abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others' (Living the Gospel of Life, no. 5). It is a mistake with grave moral consequences to treat the destruction of innocent human life merely as a matter of individual choice. A legal system that violates the basic right to life on the grounds of choice is fundamentally flawed" (paragraph 22).*

We Bishops continue to list a number of other very serious evils in the world:

*"Similarly, direct threats to the sanctity and dignity of human life, such as human cloning and destructive research on human embryos, are also intrinsically evil. These must always be opposed. Other direct assaults on innocent human life and violations of human dignity, such as genocide, torture, racism, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war, can never be justified" (paragraph 23).*

**Third**, we must be **consistent and advance human life in all of its dimensions, since we have a positive obligation to respond to the needs of others**. *Faithful Citizenship* clearly states:

*"The right to life implies and is linked to other human rights—to the basic goods that every human person needs to live and thrive. All the life issues are connected, for erosion of respect for the life of any individual or group in society necessarily diminishes respect for all life. The moral imperative to respond to the needs of our neighbors—basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work—is universally binding on our consciences and may be legitimately fulfilled by a variety of means. Catholics must seek the best ways to respond to these needs" (paragraph 25).*

**Fourth**, making good moral decisions is complex. Therefore as Catholics, **we must rely on a well-formed conscience and the virtue of prudence**. In our document we reflect that:

*"The Church fosters well-formed consciences not only by teaching moral truth but also by encouraging its members to develop the virtue of prudence. Prudence enables us "to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1806) (paragraph 19).*

**Fifth**, we must seriously consider **how we are going to vote**. The following two paragraphs, (34-36), read together, explicitly explain the Church's tradition:

*"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 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" (paragraph 34).*

*"There 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" (paragraph 35).*

To be faithful citizens, all of us must critically review each candidate's positions. We must ask ourselves if the candidate, or the party the candidate represents, promotes threats to the sanctity of human life. As stated above, such positions can never be justified. For example, does the candidate promote abortion or policies or positions that would extend the so-called "right to an abortion"? Does the candidate support embryonic stem cell research, which directly destroys human life? Does this candidate support policies that promote genocide or torture or racism or the death penalty? Does he or she oppose legislation that would provide basics such as food, clothing, shelter, health care, education and meaningful employment for the poor?

These are all difficult questions and sometimes the candidates and/or their parties are not clear on where they stand on these matters. Many times, campaign promises are not fulfilled after an election. To make the best choice, we must examine the candidates' positions in the light of the teachings of the Church. We can accomplish that task by reflecting on *Faithful Citizenship* and then visiting the candidates' websites; reading their campaign materials; calling and asking for their position papers. We should never be idle spectators to the political process. Rather, we are called as Catholics to be active citizens in the world.

On the State level, the Catholic Bishops of Ohio have reviewed the five pending ballot issues and have published a *Ballot Issue Reflection Guide*. This *Guide* offers summaries of the issues, assets and liabilities, reflection questions and position statements. I also want to encourage you to study, pray and reflect upon these statewide subjects. On these topics the Catholic Bishops of Ohio have chosen to take the following public positions: Neutrality on Issues 1 (Ballot Deadlines), 2 ("Clean Ohio" Bonds), and 3 (Water Rights), YES on 5 (Payday Lending Reform), and NO on 6 (Private Casinos). Further materials on State ballot issues may be found at the Catholic Conference of Ohio's website: [www.ohiocathconf.org](http://www.ohiocathconf.org) .

It is my hope that all Catholics, and all people of goodwill, will become better informed about the major moral and social issues of our day. Each of us will be held accountable by God for how we have lived the Gospel. Together, let us pray for wisdom and courage in the decisions that we will make.