



FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP QUESTIONS FOR VOTING 2008

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

34. 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.

35. 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.

36. When 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.

37. 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 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.

The Catholic Conference of Ohio encourages voters to carefully study and prayerfully consider their voting choices. The United States Catholic Bishops' 2007 Statement, "*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*," calls for a renewed politics that focuses on moral principles, the defense of life, the needs of the weak, and the pursuit of the common good.

The Catholic Church does not tell voters how to vote. 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 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.



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REFLECTION QUESTIONS ON CHOOSING CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

1. What is the candidate's commitment to protect all human life, from conception to natural death?
2. What 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?
3. How does the candidate measure up in both words and actions with the totality of Catholic Social Teaching?
4. 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).
5. What is my assessment of the candidate's personal integrity, governing philosophy, performance and ability to influence a given issue?
6. Has the candidate demonstrated sufficient competency to hold such an elected position?



It must be noted also that a well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals. The Christian faith is an integral unity, and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine. A political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the Church's social doctrine does not exhaust one's responsibility towards the common good.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, No. 4.

GENERAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR VOTERS

1. Have I properly formed my conscience based upon what is true, just, and right and allowed it to inform my political choices?
2. How does my faith call me to move beyond individual self-interest to promotion of the common good?
3. How do my spirituality, understanding of Catholic Social Teachings, and acts of charity and justice shape my involvement in public life?
4. What views do I hold that are challenged by my faith and Catholic Social Teachings?
5. How will my vote help protect and/or enhance the life, dignity and rights of the human person, prioritize the poor, and advance the common good?

GENERAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS REGARDING BALLOT ISSUES

1. Will passage of an issue promote the value and dignity of the human person, enhance the health and well-being of Ohioans, and advance the common good of persons in the state, especially the poor and vulnerable?
2. Is the issue needed and well conceived?
3. Does the issue reflect a change that should be addressed in the state constitution (as opposed to an issue that ought to be addressed through the legislative process)?
4. Do the benefits of an issue outweigh the potential financial costs and/or potential legal challenges?
5. Does the issue enhance family life and improve neighborhoods and communities throughout the state?
6. Does the issue promote economic justice by fairly addressing the needs of employers, workers and consumers?