

# RESOURCE MATERIALS

## FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP 2008

For use in Parishes & Schools





# FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP QUESTIONS FOR VOTING 2008

## 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?



# 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.



Forming Consciences For Faithful Citizenship

## Ohio Ballot Issues

November 2008

The Catholic Conference of Ohio encourages voters to carefully consider the Statewide Issues that are on the November 4, 2008 ballot.

Each of us has a responsibility to carefully and prudently discern public policies to determine whether they are morally sound, well conceived and practical. People of good will may differ regarding specific responses 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.

We also encourage Catholic voters to prayerfully read and reflect upon the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' statement: *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*. This statement and further information can be found at the Catholic Conference of Ohio's website, <http://www.ohiocathconf.org>.

### Ballot Reflection Questions

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?

## Issue 1

### Earlier Filing Deadlines for Statewide Ballot Issues Constitutional Amendment

Issue 1 requires that a citizen-initiated statewide ballot issue be considered at the next general election if petitions are filed 125 days before the election. The current deadline for a constitutional amendment change is 90 days before the election. The current deadline for a referendum petition is 60 days.

Issue 1 establishes tighter deadlines for boards of elections and the Secretary of State to determine the validity of citizen initiated petitions. It also gives the Ohio Supreme Court clear jurisdiction and expedited deadlines to address disputes.

### Pro Arguments

Ballots need to be printed well in advance of an election. In the past several elections, issues were listed on the ballot that did not officially make the ballot. This caused voter confusion, additional printing expense, unnecessary advertising expenses, and the need for additional explanations by election officials. Requiring an earlier deadline of 125 days prior to an election rather than the current 90 or 60 days deadlines should help avoid such problems.

### Con Arguments

A 125-day deadline before a general election is too long. Citizen groups often need the additional one or two months allowed under current law to gather sufficient signatures. If the deadline for placing an issue on the November ballot is in early July, citizens seeking a ballot change may have to wait till the following year's election. The issue may be more difficult and expensive to pursue if the issue is not fresh in people's minds.

### Church Teaching & Focus Question

In Catholic Social Teaching, shared participation of citizens in shaping the destiny of their community is an important right and duty.

Will Issue 1 help or hinder a citizen's ability to reasonably pursue statewide ballot initiatives?



### Catholic Conference of Ohio Position

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio are neutral on Issue 1.

Official Explanations and Arguments for all the Issues can be found on the Ohio Secretary of State's Website: <http://www.sos.state.oh.us>

## Issue 2

### Clean Ohio Program for Environmental Revitalization and Conservation Constitutional Amendment

Issue 2 authorizes the State to issue bonds of up to \$400 million for continuation of the *Clean Ohio Program for Environmental Revitalization and Conservation*.

This program will provide \$150 M for *green space* conservation, \$25 M for *recreational bike and hiking trails*, \$25 M for *farmland preservation*, and \$200 M for the revitalization and environmental cleanup of *brownfield* sites .

#### Pro Arguments

[http://www.morpc.org/energy/clean\\_ohio/clean\\_ohio\\_fund.asp](http://www.morpc.org/energy/clean_ohio/clean_ohio_fund.asp)

Ohio voters overwhelmingly passed the *Clean Ohio Program* in 2000. Issue 2 will continue this effective and helpful program.

Issue 2 will not raise taxes. Passage will stimulate the economy, bring new dollars into communities, preserve farmland and green space and create trails. Issue 2 was placed on the ballot through broad bi-partisan support from Ohio elected officials.

#### Con Arguments

Issuing \$400 M in bonds will result in too much debt for Ohio taxpayers. In difficult economic times, it may not be prudent for government to take out more debt. Private entities and/or State General Revenue monies, not borrowed dollars, should fund the Clean Ohio Program.

#### Church Teaching & Focus Question

In Catholic Social Teaching protecting the land, water, and air we share is a religious duty of stewardship. Economic development that serves the human person is also essential.

Is Issue 2 a reasonable, responsible and effective way to help care for the earth and promote helpful economic development?



#### Catholic Conference of Ohio Position

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio are neutral on Issue 2.

## Issue 3

### Private Property Rights in Groundwater, Lakes and other Watercourses Constitutional Amendment

Issue 3 will make it explicit in Ohio's Constitution that a private property owner has a right to the reasonable use of the ground water underlying their land or bordering a lake or other watercourse, although this right will remain subordinate to the public welfare.

#### Pro Arguments

Issue 3 will prioritize the importance of private property rights. Ohio statutes and common law practices related to private property rights are subject to varying court interpretations of "public trust" and "public welfare." Specifying water rights within the Constitution will aid courts in addressing future public and private water use disputes.

Issue 3 was placed on the ballot through broad bi-partisan support from Ohio elected officials.

#### Con Arguments

Issue 3 is unnecessary and should not be included in Ohio's Constitution. Current statutes and common law adequately protect and balance private property rights with public welfare needs.

Issue 3 does not give an accurate picture of private property rights. Property owners do not actually own the water beneath their land. They have a right to reasonable use of that water, but the state always has the power to regulate how it is used and take it for just compensation. Issue 3 gives owners a false sense of security that private property cannot be taken away at a later date.

#### Church Teaching & Focus Question

In Catholic Social Teaching, private property is an essential element of a just economic policy and social order. However, Christian tradition has never recognized this right as absolute and untouchable. It is subordinate to the rights of *common use* and the *common good* since the "goods" of God's creation are meant for everyone to share.

Does Issue 3 reasonably and effectively balance private property water rights with the needs of the common good?



#### Catholic Conference of Ohio Position

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio are neutral on Issue 3.

## Issue 4 Removed from Ballot

## Issue 5

### Payday Lending: Maintaining Section 3 of HB 545 Referendum

On June 2, 2008 the Governor signed into law HB 545. H.B. 545 was a result of 12 months of legislative debate regarding how best to reform Ohio's payday lending law.

Among other things, H.B. 545 places a 28% APR (annual percentage rate) cap on small loans; reduces to \$500 the amount that can be loaned; restricts borrowers to four loans per year; limits them to one loan at a time; allows them 30 days to repay the loan and prohibits internet lending.

Section 3 of this bill eliminated the existing payday lending provisions in favor of a more regulated and limited small loan program. Payday lenders are seeking to repeal this section of the new bill in order to allow pre-HB545 practices to continue.

In pre-HB 545 practices, a payday loan borrower writes a check (up to \$800) typically dated for two weeks later. The money is advanced for a fee (\$15 per \$100 borrowed). If the borrower is unable to pay back this loan within the two weeks, interest (5% per month on the unpaid principal) and collection fees are assessed. When fees and charges are converted to the federally required annual percentage rate (APR), they amount to 391%.

#### Voting Clarification

Issue 5 asks whether Section 3 of HB 545 should remain part of Ohio law. Voting NO will repeal Section 3 of HB 545, thus allowing the payday industry to continue as before. Voting YES will keep the reforms enacted by HB 545 that include the elimination of previous payday lending practices.

#### Pro Arguments <http://www.yesonissue5.com>

Voters should vote YES on Issue 5. HB 545 passed the Ohio General Assembly with overwhelming bi-partisan support. It is considered one of the best legislative responses to "breaking the cycle of debt" caused by over zealous lending practices and under-regulated payday loan businesses. The typical payday borrower is charged 391% APR in interest.

Payday lending is a debt-trap. Borrowers are given easy access to credit that most cannot afford. Studies indicate that only 1% of payday borrowers pay off their original loan in the standard two-week cycle. Typically, borrowers will take out another loan at another payday store in order to pay off the first loan. Studies indicate that the typical payday loan borrower takes out between 10-13 loans per year.

A NO vote on Issue 5, repealing Section 3 of HB 545, will create confusion over interest rates, and lead to expensive and time-consuming legal challenges. It will return Ohio to the less-regulated and abusive status quo. Retain Section 3 of HB 545: vote YES on Issue 5.

#### Con Arguments <http://www.ohioans4financialfreedom.com>

Section 3 of HB 545, which eliminates payday lending, should be repealed. Payday loans consumers should be able to decide if they want lending options for their simplicity, convenience and because it's cheaper than many alternatives. Consumers will pay more for less desirable, more costly alternatives like bounced checks and credit card late fees, and at much higher rates than a payday loan.

HB 545's replacement loan provisions are too restrictive and unsustainable as a business model. Capping APR charges at 28% will mean that a lender can charge only \$1.08 per \$100 borrowed. As a result up to 1,600 payday lending stores may close (stores are already closing). This would result in the loss of more than 6,000 good paying jobs with benefits, and a \$272.2 million total loss to Ohio's economy.

391% APR, while accurately based upon a year-long loan, is deceptive because the typical payday loan is two weeks. If the borrower pays back the loan on time, the borrower has typically paid 15 % in interest (\$15 per \$100 borrowed).

#### Church Teaching & Focus Questions

The teachings of our faith provide many warnings about usury and exploitation of people. Lending practices that, intentionally or unintentionally, take unfair advantage of one's desperate circumstances are unjust.

On balance, do you consider the pre-HB 545 payday lending practices to be fair, helpful and needed, or do you believe them to be exploitive, harmful and unnecessary?

Is Section 3 of HB 545, which prohibits payday loans from charging a 391% APR, a well conceived and appropriate response to the needs of consumers, especially low income consumers?



#### Catholic Conference of Ohio Position

On June 27, 2007 the Ohio Catholic Bishops stated their support for initiatives that protect the working poor and all Ohio consumers from the spiraling indebtedness caused by payday lending. The Catholic Conference of Ohio believes that HB 545 responsibly addresses this concern, and encourages a YES vote to maintain the significant and necessary reforms regarding payday lending.

## Issue 6

### Clinton County Casino Constitutional Amendment

Issue 6 will amend Ohio's Constitution to authorize one privately owned casino in the State of Ohio at a site located in southwest Ohio in Clinton County near Dayton, Columbus and Cincinnati.

The casino will be required to pay a tax of up to 30% on its gross receipts, a portion of which will be distributed to all Ohio counties based on population to be used at each county's discretion.

The tax percentage payable by the casino will be reduced in the event another casino is authorized in Ohio. It shall not exceed the lesser of twenty-five percent or the percentage payable by any other casino operations.

Issue 6 requires the casino operator to make a minimum initial investment of \$600 million for the development of the casino property. It will also authorize the casino to conduct any game permitted in the State of Nevada, or any state adjacent to Ohio, except bets on races or sporting events. Only persons age 21 and over would be permitted to place wagers.

A Gaming Regulatory Commission would be established.

#### Pro Arguments <http://myohionow.com>

All Ohio counties will share the wealth from revenue generated by the resort casino. Approximately \$211 million in tax revenue is projected to be divided among Ohio's 88 counties based on population, and each county will decide how to best spend their money.

The world-class destination resort expects to create up to 5,000 permanent jobs with average salaries of \$34,000.

A minimum of \$600 million will be spent on developing the resort casino project. Phase One of the project will include a facility featuring approximately 5,000 slot machines, 150 table games (including blackjack, roulette and craps), and a 20-table poker room. A luxury hotel with approximately 1,500 rooms, and a championship golf course and shooting sports course will also be developed.

#### Con Arguments <http://www.votenocasinos.com>

Casinos and slot machines harm families and seduce gamblers, especially those with lower incomes. Gamblers can quickly lose large amounts of money within casinos. Studies have indicated that the problems of gambling addiction double when gambling opportunities are placed within 50 miles of the gambler.

Incidents of crime (substance abuse, prostitution, assault and battery, etc.) often increase around casinos.

Projected revenues from this casino are overstated and offer no guarantees. While individual counties will receive some monies, the state will not receive any revenues. Due to the "competition clause" in Issue 6, tax revenues could greatly decrease if another casino is authorized, especially one controlled by a Native American tribe that would not have to pay taxes to any state or county entity.

Passage of Issue 6 will establish Ohio as a Class III gambling state under the federal *Indian Gaming Regulatory Act* making it easier for Indian casinos to open in Ohio.

The Ohio Constitution should not be used as a tool for private companies to set up exclusive monopolies, take money out of Ohio, and exempt themselves from local zoning ordinances. The gambling owners will reap extensive monetary gain and have a constitutionally protected monopoly in the State.

#### Church Teachings & Focus Question

Games and schemes of chance are not in themselves contrary to justice. The Church recognizes, however, that a variety of social ills can become associated with any form of gambling. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, forms of gambling "become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others. The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement."

In previous Catholic Conference of Ohio statements on gambling, a distinction was made between charitable bingo and casino gambling. While there are a variety of social ills that can also be associated with charitable bingo, the gambling stakes are much lower and 100% of the proceeds are used for charitable purposes. The Catholic Bishops of Ohio would prefer, and in fact have encouraged, our institutions to raise needed funds through alternative forms of fundraising, where feasible.

Is Issue 6 well conceived and in the long-term best interest of the people of Ohio?



#### Catholic Conference of Ohio Position

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio are opposed to Issue 6. The Catholic Conference of Ohio believes casino gambling is not in the best moral, social and economic interests of the citizens of our state. Furthermore, the Conference believes that the Ohio constitution should not be amended primarily to benefit a single private entity. The Conference encourages a NO vote on Issue 6.



## **ABORTION**

Abortion has become a preeminent threat to human life and dignity because it directly attacks life itself, the most fundamental good and the condition for all others. Abortion, the deliberate killing of a human being before birth, is never morally acceptable and must always be opposed.

In Ohio there is a prohibition on using public monies to support abortions. Ohio also requires parental consent prior to abortion for minors and informed consent for adults. Ohio recently passed a law requiring licensure of abortion clinics and client access to ultrasound results in clinics.

**Where does the candidate stand on protecting unborn children?**

## **DEATH PENALTY**

Ohio's increasing reliance on the death penalty cannot be justified. Since there are other ways to protect society that are more respectful of human life, our Church supports efforts to end the use of the death penalty and, in the meantime, to restrain its use through broader use of DNA evidence, access to effective counsel, and efforts to address unfairness and injustice related to application of the death penalty.

Ohio has nearly 200 men and 2 women on death row. Ohio has executed twenty-six persons in the past nine years. Legislation is pending to establish a study commission regarding Ohio's death penalty.

**Where does the candidate stand on establishing a statewide study commission on the death penalty in Ohio? Does the candidate support an Ohio moratorium on the use of the death penalty?**

## **ECONOMIC JUSTICE**

We believe that a just economy is one that serves the human person. Questions of fair wages, fair taxation, fair treatment of workers and fair business practices are important public policy debates. The State Budget is an expression of moral priorities. This budget should adequately fund health and safety,

education and human services, economic development and environmental security. The needs of the poor and vulnerable should be a high priority.

We support tax policies that fairly raise adequate revenues, and mitigate the impact on persons with fixed and low incomes. We believe wages should be adequate for workers to provide for themselves and their families with dignity.

**Where does the candidate stand on issues related to economic justice?**

## **EDUCATION**

Parents—the first and most important educators—have a fundamental right to choose the education best suited to the needs of their children, including public, private and religious schools. Government, through such means as tax credits and publicly funded scholarships, should help provide resources for parents, especially those of modest means, to exercise this basic right without discrimination.

Over the years, the Ohio General Assembly and Ohio's Governors have provided tax-supported assistance for pupils attending Catholic and other chartered nonpublic schools. Ohio's elected officials have allocated funds for resources such as textbooks, tutoring, bus transportation, counseling and psychological services, administrative support, computer hardware and software, and teacher training. The Ohio EdChoice Scholarship Program, Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, and Autism Scholarship Program help make Catholic school education possible for families and students with special needs.

**Where does the candidate stand on helping parents access the education best suited to the needs of their children? Does the candidate support tax-funded assistance so that parents of modest financial means and parents of children with special learning needs can exercise their right to make appropriate educational choices for their children?**

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## **ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE**

At its core, global climate change is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both the human environment and the natural environment. It is about stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us.

There is a growing agreement among scientists that global warming is real. Many experts predict that millions of people (mostly poor people) will be subjected to deadly droughts, floods, heat waves and extreme weather events such as tropical storms and hurricanes. In addition, a dramatically altered climate will impact generations yet to be born. Our actions today could reduce or increase this future risk.

**Where does the candidate stand on issues related to global climate change?**

## **EUTHANASIA & ASSISTED SUICIDE**

*Euthanasia* is a direct action or omission of an action that is *intended* to cause death and so eliminate suffering. *Assisted Suicide* occurs when a physician, family member or some other person aids one in a voluntary decision for death and helps carry out these explicit wishes at the behest of the person who is choosing death.

Concern for the inalienable and inherent dignity of each person, especially the most vulnerable members of society, is the foundation of our opposition to the legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide.

There is a substantive moral difference between foregoing treatment (thereby allowing one to die naturally from an underlying pathology), and an action that of itself or by intention causes death.

Compassion for people in pain and suffering is better expressed by appropriate pain management, intelligent use of stated ethical principles regarding life-sustaining medical treatment and use of advance directives relating to health care decisions.

**Where does the candidate stand on euthanasia and assisted suicide?**

## **GAMBLING**

Games and schemes of chance are not in themselves inherently wrong. They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his or her needs and those of others.

Experience indicates that a variety of social ills are associated with casino gambling and slot machines. These include a tendency to promote addictive gambling, familial irresponsibility, alcohol and/or substance abuse, and organized crime.

Bingo should be viewed as distinct from casino gambling. Bingo games in Ohio use 100% of the net proceeds for charitable purposes. Thousands of volunteers donate their time to staff such "lower stakes" charitable fundraising.

**Where does the candidate stand on casino gambling and slot machines in Ohio?**

## **HEALTH CARE**

Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. More than 47 million Americans lack health care coverage. This coverage needs to be expanded to everyone within a cost-effective, quality-driven system of care.

Catholic hospital systems in Ohio provided more than \$400 million in charity care and community benefits during 2007. Local health care transformation continues to occur through promotion of health and wellness programs, chronic disease initiatives, expansion of information technology, and other care innovations.

Concerns remain over cost effective utilization of Medicaid, adequate provider reimbursement for government health programs, growing medical costs, affordable health insurance and improved coverage for impoverished children, families and other uninsured persons.

**What are the candidate's plans for ensuring affordable and accessible health care for everyone?**

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## HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

Shelter is one of the basic rights of the human person. In 2007 approximately 150,000 Ohioans were homeless. Nearly one in four Ohioans could not afford the fair-market rent of a two-bedroom unit and foreclosures continued to be higher than the national average.

We support efforts to remove the cap on the Ohio Housing Trust Fund, increase the supply of quality housing and to preserve, maintain, and improve existing housing through public/private partnerships. We continue to oppose unjust housing discrimination.

**What are the candidate's plans for increasing affordable and safe housing?**

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. Trafficking in persons inherently rejects the dignity of the human person and exploits conditions of global poverty.

Examples in the U.S. include adolescent Mexican girls trafficked for prostitution, Indian men trafficked for forced labor, and African women and children trafficked for domestic servitude. Approximately 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year, about 14,500-17,500 of them into the United States.

**What are the candidate's plans for addressing human trafficking?**

## HUNGER

Food, like life itself, is a basic human right. The rising costs of food, fuel and medicine coupled with high unemployment have led to increased hunger here and abroad.

Ohio food banks, pantries and emergency feeding programs are experiencing an overall shortage in food resources due to higher demand and declining

donations. In any given week, 207,700 different Ohioans receive emergency food assistance. More than forty percent of persons in food lines across the state are the *working poor*. Throughout the world statistics show that 35,000 persons die of hunger and its consequences every day.

**What are the candidate's plans for addressing hunger here and abroad?**

## IMMIGRANTS

The Gospel calls us to welcome immigrants with compassion and hopeful expectation. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matt. 25:35). Ohio has a large number of Hispanic immigrant workers recruited by businesses to labor year round in Ohio industries. Many are undocumented.

We believe that current federal immigration law is unjust, unnecessarily restrictive and fails to properly balance the rights of immigrant workers and their families with the state's right to control its borders. We support comprehensive reforms at the national level.

Ohio should show judicious restraint in pursuing state enforcement legislation while important debate over changes in the law continues at the federal level. Proposed state legislation declaring English as the official language is unnecessary and void of additional resources to help immigrants learn English.

**Where does the candidate stand on support for documented and undocumented immigrants?**

## MARRIAGE & FAMILY LIFE

We believe that the family is the basic cell of human society. Marriage ought to be protected as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman and our laws should reflect this principle. Policies related to the definition of marriage, taxes, the workplace, divorce, and welfare should be designed to help families stay together and to reward responsibility and sacrifice for children.

**Where does the candidate stand on protecting and strengthening marriage and family life?**

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## PAYDAY LENDING

In June 2008 reform legislation was enacted in Ohio that eliminates the current payday loan product. The Short-term Loan Act that limits annual interest rates at 28% replaces it. Efforts are underway by payday owners to place a referendum on the November 2008 ballot to repeal this important reform.

Many Ohioans are trapped in a cycle of payday loan debts. The upfront fees charged to take out two-week loans are typically \$15.00 per \$100.00. Studies indicated that the typical Ohio borrower took out between eight to twelve of these loans per year. The cumulative effect of these multi loans resulted in insurmountable debt for too many people. When fees were compared to an annualized interest rate, they amounted to a very troubling 391%.

In the teachings of our faith we have many warnings about usury and exploitation of people. Lending practices that, intentionally or unintentionally, take unfair advantage of one's desperate circumstances are unjust.

**Where does the candidate stand on retaining the recently enacted Ohio payday lending reforms?**

## PEACE

The Church is called to be an instrument of peace in the world. Peace is both a gift of God and a human work.

The Christian tradition possesses two ways to address conflict: non-violence and just war. Non-violence consists of a commitment to resist injustice and public evil, with means other than force. The just war tradition begins with a strong presumption against the use of force and then establishes the conditions when this presumption may be overcome for the sake of preserving the kind of peace that protects human dignity and human rights.

Lethal force may be used only if all of the following criteria are met. *Just cause* – the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations is lasting, grave and certain. *Legitimate authority* - only legitimate public authority may use deadly force or wage war. *Comparative justice* – the injustice suffered

by one party must significantly outweigh that suffered by the other. *Right intention* – force may be used only in a truly just cause and solely for that purpose. *Probability of success* – arms may not be used in a futile cause or in a case where disproportionate measures are required to achieve success. *Proportionately* – the use of arms may not produce disorders greater than the evils to be eliminated. *Last resort* – force may be used only after all peaceful alternatives have been exhausted. The conduct of hostilities once initiated must be evaluated constantly to ensure non-combatant immunity, no disproportionate collateral damage to civilian life or property and the continuing intention to restore peace with justice.

The U.S. Bishops raised concerns about whether the war in Iraq meets such criteria. The Bishops have urged a responsible transition in Iraq that will ensure local control, freedom and peace in the country.

Other situations in the world that require due regard involve the Israel-Palestine conflict and the ongoing crisis in Darfur. The Church has been an advocate for diplomatic and multinational remedies to these conflicts. The Church has condemned the arms trade and the use of antipersonnel landmines that continue killing even after hostilities have stopped.

**What are the candidate's plans for a responsible transition in Iraq? Where does the candidate stand on issues related to peace?**

## PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Catholic Conference of Ohio is committed to working for greater justice and inclusion for people who live with physical, intellectual, sensory and emotional disabilities.

We call upon people of good will to reexamine their attitudes toward people with disabilities and promote their well-being and integration into the Christian community and society. We urge the defense of the right to life and other rights for people with disabilities including the right to equal opportunity in education, in employment, in housing, and in health care, as well as the right to free access to public accommodations, facilities and services.

Ohio is considering the creation of a special education scholarship that could be utilized at chartered non-public schools and with other private providers.

**Where does the candidate stand on issues related to persons with disabilities?**



## POVERTY

Poverty and racism continue to undermine our nation's most basic promise of liberty and justice for all. More than one million Ohioans (13%) are impoverished. One in six children live in poverty. The majority of Ohio families in poverty in 2007 were employed in low paying jobs. These "working poor," especially if they were persons of color, were among the most affected by poverty. African Americans, Latino Americans, and Native Americans are about three times as likely to live in poverty as are whites. Recent studies show that Cleveland, Cincinnati, Toledo and Columbus have some of the highest poverty rates in the nation.

The needs of the poor and vulnerable members of our society must become a high priority within the state budget and throughout public policy. The Catholic Conference of Ohio is a partner in the Catholic Charities USA nationwide campaign to reduce poverty in half by the year 2020.

**Where does the candidate stand on providing assistance and services to the poor and vulnerable members of our society? What are the candidate's plans for reducing the Ohio poverty rate in half by the year 2020?**

## PRISON MINISTRY & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The Catholic Conference of Ohio supports the redirection of public resources towards programs designed to rehabilitate and reintegrate ex-offenders back into society. Government should prioritize the funding of programs aimed at crime prevention, rehabilitation, education, substance abuse treatment, probation, parole, and reintegration.

Each diocese in Ohio has a coordinator for prison ministry. Many persons- priests, deacons, women religious and lay volunteers- provide services to inmates in Ohio state institutions. Many family members of inmates also receive outreach. Increased attention is being given to reentry ministries.

**Where does the candidate stand on issues related to reentry and criminal justice reforms?**

## PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has approved a *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. In the charter the bishops have promised to reach out to those who have been sexually abused as minors by anyone serving the Church in ministry, employment, or a volunteer position, whether the sexual abuse was recent or occurred many years ago.

The pastoral and spiritual care and emotional well being of those who have been sexually abused and of their families is of the highest priority. The bishops are working with parents, civil authorities, educators, and various organizations in the community to make and maintain the safest environment for minors. In the same way, the bishops are evaluating the background of seminary applicants as well as all church personnel who have responsibility for the care and supervision of children and young people.

**Where does the candidate stand on issues related to child protection?**

## RACISM

The heart of the race question is moral and religious. The existence of racial intolerance, discrimination, and privilege is absolutely irreconcilable with Christian faith and belief. Racism fractures the unity of the human family, violates the human rights of individuals and groups, and mocks the God-given equal dignity of human beings. Poverty and racial injustice are the results of human agency.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Charities USA are calling upon Catholics and all people of good will to confront racial injustice and inequality. A renewed commitment to racial justice is needed, especially in the areas of housing, education, employment, immigration, criminal justice, and public assistance.

**Where does the candidate stand on the issues related to racism?**

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## RURAL LIFE & LAND USE

A just agricultural system should promote food security and food safety. Justice also demands stewardship of the land and resources used in agricultural production and attention to the dignity and fair treatment of all who work in the system.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Ohio has lost over 3 million acres of farmland and nearly 42,000 farms since 1970. During the same period, the average farm size has grown, leaving agricultural production in our state to fewer hands. We continue to support state policies and reforms to the recently passed Federal Farm bill that promote farmland preservation, environmental protection, and the enhancement of rural communities and family farms.

**Where does the candidate stand on promoting food security, farmland preservation, environmental protection, and enhancing rural communities and family farms?**

## STEM CELL RESEARCH & CLONING

The Catholic Church supports ethically responsible stem cell research, while opposing any research that exploits or destroys human embryos. The Catholic Church has long supported research using stem cells from adult tissue and umbilical cord blood, which poses no moral problem. Many of these cells are already being used to treat people with a wide variety of diseases.

Cloning is a depersonalized way to reproduce in which human beings are manufactured in the laboratory to preset specifications. It is not a worthy way to bring a new human being into the world. When done for stem cell research, it involves the moral wrong of destroying an innocent human life for possible benefit to others, plus an additional wrong: it creates human beings solely in order to kill them for their cells. This is the ultimate reduction of a fellow human being to a mere means, to an instrument of other people's wishes.

**Where does the candidate stand on the issues of human cloning and embryonic stem cell research?**

## SENIOR CITIZEN CARE

We believe that honoring older people involves welcoming them, helping them and making good use of their gifts, talents and experience. A fully human civilization shows respect, love and care for the elderly.

We support legislation that will expand the assisted living program, adequately fund the PASSPORT program, maintain quality nursing homes, provide affordable health care, and maintain supportive services such as food and transportation.

**Where does the candidate stand on the issues related to senior citizens?**

## VIOLENCE

Families are torn by violence. Communities are destroyed by violence. Faith is tested by violence. Violence in any form"—physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal"—is sinful. Society cannot tolerate an ethic that uses violence to make a point, settle grievances or get what we want. The path to a more peaceful future is found in a rediscovery of personal responsibility, respect for human life and human dignity, and a recommitment to social justice.

Domestic violence, child abuse, abortion, terrorism, gun violence and war are several issues that must be addressed.

**Where does the candidate stand on reducing the culture of violence?**

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has issued a statement entitled: *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility*. This statement highlights the role of the Church in the formation of conscience, and the



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corresponding moral responsibility of each Catholic to hear, receive, and act upon the Church's teaching in the lifelong task of forming his or her own conscience. With this foundation, Catholics are better able to evaluate policy positions, party platforms, and candidates' promises and actions in light of the Gospel and the moral and social teaching of the Church in order to help build a better world.

[www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org)



## Forming Consciences For Faithful Citizenship Questions Regarding Ohio Ballot Issues

### General Questions

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?

### Issue 1 -- Ballot Deadlines

Issue 1 requires that a citizen-initiated statewide ballot issue be considered at the next general election if petitions are filed 125 days before the election.

Will Issue 1 help or hinder a citizen's ability to reasonably pursue statewide ballot initiatives?

**The Catholic Conference of Ohio has taken a neutral position on Issue 1.**

### Issue 2 -- "Clean Ohio" Bonds

Issue 2 authorizes the State to issue bonds of up to \$400 million for continuation of the *Clean Ohio Program for Environmental Revitalization and Conservation*.

Is Issue 2 a reasonable, responsible and effective way to help care for the earth and promote helpful economic development?

**The Catholic Conference of Ohio has taken a neutral position on Issue 2.**

### Issue 3 -- Water Rights

Issue 3 will make explicit in Ohio's Constitution that private property owners have a right to the reasonable use of the ground water underlying their land or bordering a lake or other watercourse, although this right will remain subordinate to the public welfare.

Does Issue 3 reasonably and effectively balance private property water rights with the needs of the common good?

**The Catholic Conference of Ohio has taken a neutral position on Issue 3.**

### Issue 4 -- Sick Leave (removed from the ballot)

### Issue 5-- Payday Lending Reform

**Issue 5** asks whether Section 3 of HB 545, the payday lending reform act, should remain part of Ohio law. Section 3 eliminated the existing payday lending provisions in favor of a more regulated and limited small loan program.

Voting YES will keep the reforms enacted by HB 545. Among other things, these reforms lower the maximum interest rate from 391% APR (annual percentage rate) to 28 % APR.

On balance, do you consider the pre-HB 545 payday lending practices to be fair, helpful and needed, or do you believe them to be exploitive, harmful and unnecessary?

**The Catholic Conference of Ohio supports a YES vote on Issue 5. The Conference encourages the retention of payday lending reforms.**

### Issue 6 -- Private Casino

Issue 6 will amend Ohio's Constitution to authorize one privately owned casino in the State of Ohio in Southwest Ohio.

Is Issue 6 well conceived and in the long-term best interest of the people of Ohio?

**The Catholic Conference of Ohio opposes Issue 6. The Conference believes it is not in the best interest of the people of Ohio.**



## Forming Consciences For Faithful Citizenship Catholic Conference of Ohio & Ballot Issues

There are five possible statewide issues on the November 2008 ballot. Voters are encouraged to study, pray and reflect upon these issues, and to keep in mind Catholic social teachings on care for people, care for the earth, and care for justice. The Catholic Conference of Ohio believes each of these issues involves prudential decisions. Conscientious voters may arrive at differing positions on these issues.

For your consideration, 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 Casino).

### Vote YES on Issue 5 Payday Lending Reform

Issue 5 asks whether Section 3 of HB 545, the payday lending reform act, should remain part of Ohio law. Section 3 eliminated the existing payday lending provisions in favor of a more regulated and limited small loan program.

Voting YES will keep the reforms enacted by HB 545. Among other things, these reforms lower the maximum interest rate from 391% APR (annual percentage rate) to 28 % APR.

The teachings of the Catholic faith provide many warnings about usury and exploitation of people. Lending practices that, intentionally or unintentionally, take unfair advantage of one's desperate circumstances are unjust.

**The Catholic Bishops of Ohio believe that HB 545 responsibly protects the working poor and all Ohio consumers from the spiraling indebtedness caused by payday lending.**

The Catholic Conference of Ohio encourages a YES vote to maintain the significant and necessary reforms regarding payday lending.



### Vote NO on Issue 6 Private Casino.

Issue 6 will amend Ohio's Constitution to authorize one privately owned casino in southwest Ohio.

Games and schemes of chance are not in themselves contrary to justice. The Church recognizes, however, that a variety of social ills can become associated with any form of gambling, especially casino gambling.

Previous Catholic Conference of Ohio statements on casino gambling raised concerns over the seductiveness of high stakes gambling and the harm such gambling has had on families, especially those with lower incomes.

Some catholic institutions still operate bingo. While there are a variety of social ills that can be associated with charitable bingo, in bingo, the gambling stakes are much lower, and 100% of the proceeds are used for charitable purposes.

**The Catholic Bishops of Ohio are opposed to Issue 6. The Catholic Conference of Ohio believes casino gambling is not in the best moral, social and economic interests of the citizens of our state. Furthermore, the Conference believes that the Ohio constitution should not be amended primarily to benefit a single private entity.**

The Conference encourages a NO vote on Issue 6.



## Issue 5 Payday Lending

On June 2, 2008 the Governor signed into law HB 545. H.B. 545 was a result of 12 months of legislative debate regarding how best to reform Ohio's payday lending law.

Among other things, H.B. 545 places a 28% APR (annual percentage rate) cap on small loans; reduces to \$500 the amount that can be loaned; restricts borrowers to four loans per year; limits them to one loan at a time; allows them 30 days to repay the loan and prohibits internet lending.

Section 3 of this bill eliminated the existing payday lending provisions in favor of a more regulated and limited small loan program. Payday lenders are seeking to repeal this section of the new bill in order to allow pre-HB545 practices to continue.

In pre-HB 545 practices, a payday loan borrower writes a check (up to \$800) typically dated for two weeks later. The money is advanced for a fee (\$15 per \$100 borrowed). If the borrower is unable to pay back this loan within the two weeks, interest (5% per month on the unpaid principal) and collection fees are assessed. When fees and charges are converted to the federally required annual percentage rate (APR), they amount to 391%.

### Voting Clarification

Issue 5 asks whether Section 3 of HB 545 should remain part of Ohio law. Voting NO will repeal Section 3 of HB 545, thus allowing the payday industry to continue as before. Voting YES will keep the reforms enacted by HB 545 that include the elimination of previous payday lending practices.

### Pro Arguments <http://www.yesonissue5.com>

Voters should vote YES on Issue 5. HB 545 passed the Ohio General Assembly with overwhelming bi-partisan support. It is considered one of the best legislative responses to "breaking the cycle of debt" caused by over zealous lending practices and under-regulated payday loan businesses. The typical payday borrower is charged 391% APR in interest.

Payday lending is a debt-trap. Borrowers are given easy access to credit that most cannot afford. Studies indicate that only 1% of payday borrowers pay off their original loan in the standard two-week cycle. Typically, borrowers will take out another loan at another payday store in order to pay off the first loan. Studies indicate that the typical payday loan borrower takes out between 10-13 loans per year.

A NO vote on Issue 5, repealing Section 3 of HB 545, will create confusion over interest rates, and lead to expensive and time-consuming legal challenges. It will return Ohio to the less-

regulated and abusive status quo. Retain Section 3 of HB 545: vote YES on Issue 5.

### Con Arguments <http://www.ohioans4financialfreedom.com>

Section 3 of HB 545, which eliminates payday lending, should be repealed. Payday loans consumers should be able to decide if they want lending options for their simplicity, convenience and because it's cheaper than many alternatives. Consumers will pay more for less desirable, more costly alternatives like bounced checks and credit card late fees, and at much higher rates than a payday loan.

HB 545's replacement loan provisions are too restrictive and unsustainable as a business model. Capping APR charges at 28% will mean that a lender can charge only \$1.08 per \$100 borrowed. As a result up to 1,600 payday lending stores may close (stores are already closing). This would result in the loss of more than 6,000 good paying jobs with benefits, and a \$272.2 million total loss to Ohio's economy.

391% APR, while accurately based upon a year-long loan, is deceptive because the typical payday loan is two weeks. If the borrower pays back the loan on time, the borrower has typically paid 15 % in interest (\$15 per \$100 borrowed).

### Church Teaching & Focus Questions

The teachings of our faith provide many warnings about usury and exploitation of people. Lending practices that, intentionally or unintentionally, take unfair advantage of one's desperate circumstances are unjust.

On balance, do you consider the pre-HB 545 payday lending practices to be fair, helpful and needed, or do you believe them to be exploitive, harmful and unnecessary?

Is Section 3 of HB 545, which prohibits payday loans from charging a 391% APR, a well conceived and appropriate response to the needs of consumers, especially low income consumers?



### Catholic Conference of Ohio Position

On June 27, 2007 the Ohio Catholic Bishops stated their support for initiatives that protect the working poor and all Ohio consumers from the spiraling indebtedness caused by payday lending. The Catholic Conference of Ohio believes that HB 545 responsibly addresses this concern, and encourages a YES vote to maintain the significant and necessary reforms regarding payday lending.



## Issue 6 Clinton County Casino

Issue 6 will amend Ohio's Constitution to authorize one privately owned casino in the State of Ohio at a site located in southwest Ohio in Clinton County.

The casino will be required to pay a tax of up to 30% on its gross receipts, a portion of which will be distributed to all Ohio counties based on population to be used at each county's discretion.

The tax percentage payable by the casino will be reduced in the event another casino is authorized in Ohio. It shall not exceed the lesser of twenty-five percent or the percentage payable by any other casino operations.

Issue 6 requires the casino operator to make a minimum initial investment of \$600 million for the development of the casino property. It will also authorize the casino to conduct any game permitted in the State of Nevada, or any state adjacent to Ohio, except bets on races or sporting events. Only persons age 21 and over would be permitted to place wagers.

A Gaming Regulatory Commission would be established.

### Pro Arguments <http://myohionow.com>

All Ohio counties will share the wealth from revenue generated by the resort casino. Approximately \$211 million in tax revenue is projected to be divided among Ohio's 88 counties based on population, and each county will decide how to best spend their money.

The world-class destination resort expects to create up to 5,000 permanent, jobs with average salaries of \$34,000.

A minimum of \$600 million will be spent on developing the resort casino project. Phase One of the project will include a facility featuring approximately 5,000 slot machines, 150 table games (including blackjack, roulette and craps), and a 20-table poker room. A luxury hotel with approximately 1,500 rooms, and a championship golf course and shooting sports course will also be developed.

### Con Arguments <http://www.votenocasinos.com>

Casinos and slot machines harm families and seduce gamblers, especially those with lower incomes. Gamblers can quickly lose large amounts of money within casinos. Studies have indicated that the problems of gambling addiction double when gambling opportunities are placed within 50 miles of the gambler.

Incidents of crime (substance abuse, prostitution, assault and battery, etc.) often increase around casinos.

Projected revenues from this casino are overstated and offer no guarantees. While individual counties will receive some monies, the state will not receive any revenues. Due to the "competition clause" in Issue 6, tax revenues could greatly decrease if another casino is authorized, especially one controlled by a Native American tribe that would not have to pay taxes to any state or county entity.

Passage of Issue 6 will establish Ohio as a Class III gambling state under the federal *Indian Gaming Regulatory Act* making it easier for Indian casinos to open in Ohio.

The Ohio Constitution should not be used as a tool for private companies to set up exclusive monopolies, take money out of Ohio, and exempt themselves from local zoning ordinances. The gambling owners will reap extensive monetary gain and have a constitutionally protected monopoly in the State.

### Church Teachings & Focus Question

Games and schemes of chance are not in themselves contrary to justice. The Church recognizes, however, that a variety of social ills can become associated with any form of gambling. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, forms of gambling "become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others. The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement."

In previous Catholic Conference of Ohio statements on gambling, a distinction was made between charitable bingo and casino gambling. While there are a variety of social ills that can also be associated with charitable bingo, the gambling stakes are much lower and 100% of the proceeds are used for charitable purposes. The Catholic Bishops of Ohio would prefer, and in fact have encouraged, our institutions to raise needed funds through alternative forms of fundraising, where feasible.

Is Issue 6 well conceived and in the long-term best interest of the people of Ohio?



### Catholic Conference of Ohio Position

**The Catholic Bishops of Ohio are opposed to Issue 6. The Catholic Conference of Ohio believes casino gambling is not in the best moral, social and economic interests of the citizens of our state. Furthermore, the Conference believes that the Ohio constitution should not be amended primarily to benefit a single private entity. The Conference encourages a NO vote on Issue 6.**

# The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship



This brief document is a summary of the United States bishops' reflection *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. It complements the teaching of bishops in dioceses and states. A large-print version of this document is available free at [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org).



Our nation faces political challenges that demand urgent moral choices. We are a nation at war, with all of its human costs; a country often divided by race and ethnicity; a nation of immigrants struggling with immigration. We are an affluent society where too many live in poverty; part of a global community confronting terrorism and facing urgent threats to our environment; a culture built on families, where some now question the value of marriage and family life. We pride ourselves on supporting human rights, but we fail even to protect the fundamental right to life, especially for unborn children.

We bishops seek to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with the truth, so they can make sound moral choices in addressing these challenges. We do not tell Catholics how to vote. The responsibility to make political choices rests with each person and his or her properly formed conscience.

## Why Does the Church Teach About Issues Affecting Public Policy?

The Church's obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith, a part of the mission given to us by Jesus Christ. Faith helps us see more clearly the truth about human life and dignity that we also understand through human reason. As people of both faith and reason, Catholics are called to bring truth to political life and to practice Christ's commandment to "love one another" (Jn 13:34). According to Pope Benedict XVI, "charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as 'social charity'" (Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 29).

The United States Constitution protects the right of individual believers and religious bodies to participate and speak out without government interference, favoritism, or discrimination. Civil law should recognize and protect the Church's right and responsibility to participate in society without abandoning our central moral convictions. Our nation's tradition of pluralism is enhanced, not threatened, when religious groups and people of faith bring their convictions into public life. The Catholic community brings to the political dialogue a consistent moral framework and broad experience serving those in need.

## Who in the Church Should Participate in Political Life?

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. As Catholics, we should be guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a political party or interest group. In today's environment, Catholics may feel politically disenfranchised, sensing that no party and few candidates fully share our comprehensive commitment to human life and dignity. Catholic lay women and men need to act on the Church's moral principles and become more involved: running for office, working within political parties, and communicating concerns to elected officials. Even those who cannot vote should raise their voices on matters that affect their lives and the common good.

## How Does the Church Help Catholics to Address Political and Social Questions?

### A Well-Formed Conscience

The Church equips its members to address political questions by helping them develop well-formed consciences. "Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act. . . . [Every person] is obliged to follow faithfully what he [or she] knows to be just and

right" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1778). We Catholics have a lifelong obligation to form our consciences in accord with human reason, enlightened by the teaching of Christ as it comes to us through the Church.

### The Virtue of Prudence

The Church also encourages Catholics to develop the virtue of prudence, which 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). Prudence shapes and informs our ability to deliberate over available alternatives, to determine what is most fitting to a specific context, and to act. Prudence must be accompanied by courage which calls us to act. As Catholics seek to advance the common good, we must carefully discern which public policies are morally sound. A good end does not justify an immoral means. At times Catholics may choose different ways to respond to social problems, but we cannot differ on our obligation to protect human life and dignity and help build through moral means a more just and peaceful world.

### Doing Good and Avoiding Evil

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. These intrinsically evil acts must always be rejected and never supported. A preeminent example is the intentional taking of human life through abortion. It is always morally wrong to destroy innocent human beings. A legal system that allows the right to life to be violated on the grounds of choice is fundamentally flawed.

Similarly, direct threats to the dignity of human life such as euthanasia, human cloning, and destructive research on human embryos are also intrinsically evil and must be opposed. Other assaults on human life and dignity, such as genocide, torture, racism, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war, can never be justified. Disrespect for any human life diminishes respect for all human life.

As Catholics we are not single-issue voters. A candidate's position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter's support. Yet a candidate's position on a single issue that involves an intrinsic evil, such as support for legal abortion or the promotion of racism, may legitimately lead a voter to disqualify a candidate from receiving support.<sup>1</sup>

Opposition to intrinsically evil acts also prompts us to recognize our positive duty to contribute to the common good and act in solidarity with those in need. Both opposing evil *and* doing good are essential. As Pope John Paul II said, "the fact that only the negative commandments oblige always and under all circumstances does not mean that in the moral life prohibitions are more important than the obligation to do good indicated by the positive commandment" (Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 52). The basic right to life implies and is linked to other human rights to the goods that every person needs to live and thrive—including food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work. The use of the death penalty, hunger, lack of health care or housing, human trafficking, the human and moral costs of war, and unjust immigration policies are some of the serious moral issues that challenge our consciences and require us to act.

### Making Moral Choices

Difficult political decisions require the exercise of a well-formed conscience aided by prudence. This exercise of conscience begins with always opposing policies that violate human life or weaken its protection. "Those who formulate law

therefore have an obligation in conscience to work toward correcting morally defective laws, lest they be guilty of cooperating in evil and in sinning against the common good” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], *Catholics in Political Life*).

When morally flawed laws already exist, prudential judgment is needed to determine how to do what is possible to restore justice—even if partially or gradually—without ever abandoning a moral commitment to full protection for all human life from conception to natural death (see Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Evangelium Vitae*, no. 73).

Prudential judgment is also needed to determine the best way to promote the common good in areas such as housing, health care, and immigration. When Church leaders make judgments about how to apply Catholic teaching to specific policies, this may not carry the same binding authority as universal moral principles but cannot be dismissed as one political opinion among others. These moral applications should inform the consciences and guide the actions of Catholics.

## What Does the Church Say About Catholic Social Teaching in the Public Square?—Seven Key Themes

A consistent ethic of life should guide all Catholic engagement in political life. This Catholic ethic neither treats all issues as morally equivalent nor reduces Catholic teaching to one or two issues. It anchors the Catholic commitment to defend human life and other human rights, from conception until natural death, in the fundamental obligation to respect the dignity of every human being as a child of God.

Catholic voters should use Catholic teaching to examine candidates’ positions on issues and should consider candidates’ integrity, philosophy, and performance. It is important for all citizens “to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose their political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest” (USCCB, *Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 33). The following themes of Catholic social teaching provide a moral framework for decisions in public life.<sup>2</sup>

### The Right to Life and the Dignity of the Human Person

Human life is sacred. Direct attacks on innocent human beings are never morally acceptable. Within our society, life is under direct attack from abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, and destruction of human embryos for research. These intrinsic evils must always be opposed. This teaching also compels us as Catholics to oppose genocide, torture, unjust war, and the use of the death penalty, as well as to pursue peace and help overcome poverty, racism, and other conditions that demean human life.

### Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The family, based on marriage between a man and a woman, is the fundamental unit of society. This sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children must not be redefined, undermined, or neglected. Supporting families should be a priority for economic and social policies. How our society is organized—in economics and politics, in law and public policy—affects the well-being of individuals and of society. Every person and association has a right and a duty to participate in shaping society to promote the well-being of individuals and the common good.

### Rights and Responsibilities

Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible. Each of us has a right to religious freedom, which enables us to live and act in accord with our God-given dignity, as well as a right to access to those things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

### Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

While the common good embraces all, those who are in greatest need deserve preferential concern. A moral test for society is how we treat the weakest among us—the unborn, those dealing with disabilities or terminal illness, the poor and marginalized.

### Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Economic justice calls for decent work at fair, living wages, opportunities for legal status for immigrant workers, and the opportunity for all people to work together for the common good through their work, ownership, enterprise, investment, participation in unions, and other forms of economic activity.

### Solidarity

We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Our Catholic commitment to solidarity requires that we pursue justice, eliminate racism, end human trafficking, protect human rights, seek peace, and avoid the use of force except as a necessary last resort.

### Caring for God’s Creation

Care for the earth is a duty of our Catholic faith. We all are called to be careful stewards of God’s creation and to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for vulnerable human beings now and in the future.

### Conclusion

In light of Catholic teaching, as bishops we vigorously repeat our call 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. This kind of political participation reflects the social teaching of our Church and the best traditions of our nation.

### Notes

- 1 For more on the moral challenge of voting, see *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, nos. 34-39. Visit [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org).
- 2 These themes are drawn from a rich tradition more fully described in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). For more information on these seven themes, see [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org). For information on how we bishops of the United States have applied Catholic social teaching to policy issues, see [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org).

**For a wide range of educational and other resources to help share Faithful Citizenship, go to [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org).**

*The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* was developed by the chairmen, in consultation with the membership, of the Committees on Domestic Policy, International Policy, Pro-Life Activities, Communications, Doctrine, Education, and Migration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It was approved for publication by the full body of bishops at its November 2007 General Meeting and has been authorized for publication by the undersigned.

Msgr. David J. Malloy, STD  
General Secretary, USCCB

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# Catholic Social Teaching in the Public Square

## Seven Key Themes<sup>1</sup>

A consistent ethic of life should guide all Catholic engagement in political life. This Catholic ethic neither treats all issues as morally equivalent nor reduces Catholic teaching to one or two issues. It anchors the Catholic commitment to defend human life and other human rights, from conception until natural death, in the fundamental obligation to respect the dignity of every human being as a child of God. The following themes of Catholic social teaching provide a moral framework for decisions in public life.

### **The Right to Life and the Dignity of the Human Person**

Human life is sacred. Direct attacks on innocent human beings are never morally acceptable. Within our society, life is under direct attack from abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, and destruction of human embryos for research. These intrinsic evils must always be opposed. This teaching also compels us as Catholics to oppose genocide, torture, unjust war, and the use of the death penalty, as well as to pursue peace and help overcome poverty, racism, and other conditions that demean human life.

### **Call to Family, Community, and Participation**

The family, based on marriage between a man and a woman, is the fundamental unit of society. This sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children must not be redefined, undermined, or neglected. Supporting families should be a priority for economic and social policies. How our society is organized—in economics and politics, in law and public policy—affects the well-being of individuals and of society. Every person and association has a right and a duty to participate in shaping society to promote the well-being of individuals and the common good.

### **Rights and Responsibilities**

Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible. Each of us has a right to religious freedom, which enables us to live and act in accord with our God-given dignity, as well as a right to access to those things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

### **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

While the common good embraces all, those who are in greatest need deserve preferential concern. A moral test for society is how we treat the weakest among us—the unborn, those dealing with disabilities or terminal illness, the poor and marginalized.

### **Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers**

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Economic justice calls for decent work at fair, living wages, opportunities for legal status for immigrant workers, and the opportunity for all people to work together for the common good through their work, ownership, enterprise, investment, participation in unions, and other forms of economic activity.

### **Solidarity**

We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Our Catholic commitment to solidarity requires that we pursue justice, eliminate racism, end human trafficking, protect human rights, seek peace, and avoid the use of force except as a necessary last resort.

### **Caring for God's Creation**

Care for the earth is a duty of our Catholic faith. We all are called to be careful stewards of God's creation and to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for vulnerable human beings now and in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the United States Catholic Bishops bulletin insert: *The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. For more information go to [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org).