



FORMING CONSCIENCES: FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP REFLECTIONS ON VOTING 2014

The Catholic Conference of Ohio encourages voters to carefully study and prayerfully consider their voting choices. The United States Catholic Bishops' 2011 updated 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.

During election years, there may be many handouts and voter guides that are produced and distributed. We encourage Catholics to seek those resources that are authorized by their own bishops, their state Catholic conferences, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

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.

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

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FAITHFUL CITIZENS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, lifts up our dual heritage as both faithful Catholics and American citizens. We are members of a community of faith with a long tradition of teaching and action on human life, and dignity, marriage and family, justice and peace, care for creation, and the common good. As Americans, we are also blessed with religious liberty which safeguards our right to bring our principles and moral convictions into the public arena. These Constitutional freedoms need to be both exercised and protected, as some seek to mute the voices or limit the freedoms of religious believers and religious institutions. Catholics have the same rights and duties as others to participate fully in public life. The Church through its institutions must be free to carry out its mission and contribute to the common good without being pressured to sacrifice fundamental teachings and moral principles.

Introductory Note: Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: a Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States

Among many current challenges, consider the recent Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate requiring almost all private health plans to cover contraception, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs. For the first time in our history, the federal government will force religious institutions to facilitate drugs and procedures contrary to our moral teaching, and purport to define which religious institutions are “religious enough” to merit an exemption. This is not a matter of whether contraception may be prohibited by the government. It is not even a matter of whether contraception may be supported by the government. **It is a matter of whether religious people and institutions may be forced by the government to provide coverage for contraception and sterilization, even when it violates our religious beliefs.**

USCCB Nationwide Bulletin Insert, April-May 2012

OPPOSING INTRINSIC EVILS, PURSUING JUSTICE, PROMOTING THE COMMON GOOD

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship is widely used to share Catholic teaching on the role of faith and conscience in political life. Although it has at times been misused to present an incomplete or distorted view of the demands of faith in politics, this statement remains a faithful and challenging call to discipleship in the world of politics. It does not offer a voters guide, scorecard of issues, or direction on how to vote. It applies Catholic moral principles to a range of important issues and warns against misguided appeals to “conscience” to ignore fundamental moral claims, to reduce Catholic moral concerns to one or two matters, or to justify choices simply to advance partisan, ideological, or personal interests. It does not offer a quantitative listing of issues for equal consideration, but outlines and makes important distinctions among moral issues acknowledging that some involve the clear obligation to oppose intrinsic evils which can never be justified and that others require action to pursue justice and promote the common good. In short, it calls Catholics to form their consciences in the light of their Catholic faith and to bring our moral principles to the debate and decisions about candidates and issues.

Introductory Note: Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: a Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States



[Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship](#) is a resource program of the Catholic Bishops of the United States.

The **Catholic Conference of Ohio** is the official representative of the Catholic Church in public matters affecting the Church and the general welfare of the citizens of Ohio.

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FORMING CONSCIENCES: FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP QUESTIONS FOR VOTING 2014

REFLECTION QUESTIONS ON CHOOSING CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

- ❖ What is the candidate's commitment to protect all human life, from conception to natural death?
- ❖ What is the candidate's commitment to opposing intrinsic evils (e.g. abortion, racism etc.)?
- ❖ What is the candidate's commitment to addressing other serious threats to human life and dignity such as: poverty, hunger, unemployment, lack of health care, unjust immigration policy, discrimination, the use of the death penalty, disregard for religious liberty, efforts that harmfully redefine marriage, and issues related to unjust war and world violence?
- ❖ How does the candidate measure up in both words and actions with the totality of Catholic Social Teaching?
- ❖ What would be morally grave reasons to support and/or oppose a candidate? (Please refer to the U.S. Bishops document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, paragraphs 34 through 37).
- ❖ What is my assessment of the candidate's personal integrity, governing philosophy, performance and ability to influence a given issue?
- ❖ Has the candidate demonstrated sufficient competency to hold such an elected position?



It must be noted that a well formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the 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

- ❖ Have I properly formed my conscience and allowed it to inform my political choices through consideration of the following:
 - Study of Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church as contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*;
 - Examination of background information regarding my various choices;
 - Prayerful discernment?
- ❖ How does my faith call me to move beyond individual self-interest to promotion of the common good?
- ❖ How do my spirituality, understanding of Catholic Social Teachings, and acts of charity and justice shape my involvement in public life?
- ❖ What views do I hold that are challenged by my faith and Catholic Social Teachings?
- ❖ How will my vote help protect and/or enhance the life, dignity and rights of the human person, prioritize the poor, defend religious liberty, and advance the common good?

GENERAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS REGARDING BALLOT ISSUES

- ❖ 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?
- ❖ Have I weighed the various arguments, for and against, and measured them in light of Catholic Social Teaching?
- ❖ Is the issue needed and well conceived?
- ❖ 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)?
- ❖ Do the benefits of an issue outweigh the potential financial costs and/or potential legal challenges?

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