



“Building a world of respect for human life and dignity, where justice and peace prevail, requires more than just political commitment. Individuals, families, businesses, community organizations, and governments all have a role to play. Participation in political life in light of fundamental moral principles is an essential duty for every Catholic and all people of good will.”

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

Call to Faithful Citizenship

These are lofty words. Most of us are probably more concerned with those things in our lives that make us happy, that bring us some measure of joy, hope and pleasure than in the policy issues of the nation and world around us. But the reality is that what we experience in our personal lives is impacted by what is going on in the world. And thus from the point of view of our personal interests, we are challenged to be engaged with public issues because they do impact our lives.

But it is not just a question of advancing our personal interests—of what is best for me and my family. It is a question of what is best for all of us joined together as the human family. Our Catholic faith calls us to participate in society, to share our gifts and talents for the good of all. And as we seek this common good, build life-giving and sustaining community, and grow in solidarity with others, we are called to engage in political life in ways that foster human life and dignity, build economic and human security, and promote justice and peace. Our Catholic faith can guide us. This is our call to faithful citizenship.

Principles to Guide Us

→ A Well-Formed Conscience. We are not on our own in our quest to be faithful citizens. As Catholics, we can be formed by the truth which sustains and enlivens the Church. A well-formed conscience is nourished and sustained by Scripture, the teaching of the Church, and the insights we receive from natural law. Pope Benedict XVI also speaks of the importance of our encounter with the living God through Jesus Christ in word, sacrament, and prayer. Formation of our conscience is a life-long process.

→ The Virtue of Prudence. Prudence is the “queen of the virtues,” as it helps us discern and process information to choose the best options available and the ways to do the right thing. Prudence is important for faithful citizenship. As we seek to be faithful Christians and good citizens and contribute to the common good of our community and country prudence helps us choose from different competing political options. When we consider candidates for public office and choose among policy issues, prudence helps us to embrace positions that promote dignity, protect life, strengthen community, and build solidarity with others.

→ Doing Good and Avoiding Evil. A basic principle of moral teaching is that we should avoid evil and do good. Scripture teaches us that (see Psalm 33:15; 1 Peter 3:12). It is basic teaching of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, among many others. Our Catholic understanding is that there are some things so evil we must never do them, such as taking a life through abortion. In addition, we understand that “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.”

At the same time we avoid evil, we are called to do good. Thus we support public policy positions that promote the common good, help the poor and vulnerable, build community and the ties that bind us to one another in solidarity, and promote peace and human security and dignity at home and abroad. There are many legitimate ways to do this, and the challenge for us becomes one of discerning which work best in light of limited resources and their likelihood of success.



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A Faith-Based World View

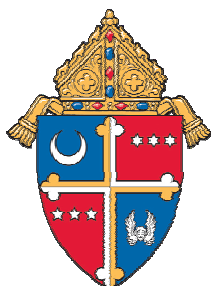
Catholic Social Teaching. The principles of Catholic Social Teaching can guide us. (See the sidebar listing seven of these principles.) These principles are guidelines which can help us reflect on the qualities of political candidates and the appropriateness of various policy options. Reflect on the options before you as a citizen in light of these principles. Ask the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Wisdom, to guide you. Pray about the options. You will likely find that your options are not perfect, but that some may be better than others.

The Catholic Way of Life. Catholics are called to make the world better. That is what it means to build the kingdom of God. We all have a role to play in this. It is our essential duty to do this in light of sound moral teaching. While it is often tempting to retreat into our personal lives and do the things that make us happy, what brings us the greatest and deepest happiness is to contribute to the common good and we seek to advance the kingdom of God in this world.

And thus, we accept the challenge to faithful citizenship. In the coming days, look at the candidates and issues in light of Catholic teaching and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in choosing those which best promote God's work in this world and advance the common good of all.

Key Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

- * **Life and Dignity of the Human Person.** Human life is sacred and must be protected. Every person has God-given dignity.
- * **Call to Family, Community and Participation.** Strong families are the cornerstone of our communities and need to be nurtured. We are called to participate in community life and work for the common good.
- * **Rights and Responsibilities.** Our rights as human persons call us to be responsible members of society. We are called to care for others.
- * **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable.** The test of a just society is how the poor and vulnerable are treated. We are called to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.
- * **The Dignity and Rights of Workers.** Workers should be treated fairly and justly compensated for their labors.
- * **Solidarity.** We are one human family and called to love and respect our neighbor, despite racial, ethnic, national, or economic differences.
- * **Care for God's Creation.** We show our respect for our Creator by our stewardship of creation and care for the environment where we live.



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Did you know...?

From Pope Benedict XVI... The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society ... is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity... The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility. (*Deus Caritas Est*, 29)

From the *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*... Catholics often face difficult choices about how to vote. Our faith does not ask us to be one issue voters. 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. (34)

There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position may decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil. (35)

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. (36)