

Faithful Citizenship and Our Call to Political Responsibility

SEPT / OCT 2020

Catholics: Called to Build the Kingdom of Christ

ENGLISH https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1y_AaQbJSiE&list=PL18AF7577177E12D9&index=6&t=0s
ESPAÑOL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m041fyp9tfg&list=PL18AF7577177E12D9&index=6>

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

The goal of this ROH is to introduce a conversation on the document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship; A Call to Political Responsibility from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. This initiative is part of our responsibility, as members of the Church, to help each other walk in the light of Christ in every facet of life, and to carry out our Community's mission of renewing the face of the earth.



We hear this question often: "Does the Church have a role to play in the faithful's efforts to speak about the many political and social questions they encounter?" The above USCCB document is enlightening on this matter, as it says, "[T]he 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. 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"** (John 13:34)."

The Catholic Vote

We recognize the dilemma that many of us, Catholics and members of Couples for Christ, are facing in every electoral process. The discussions below should be helpful in our search for a decision that reflects the light of Christ. We encourage each one to read through this entire document, and all attachments to it, for a fuller understanding of the guidance being given us by our dear bishops as we approach a crucial time in our nation's journey.

The following two-paragraph excerpt provides a small summary of the guidance that our bishops are giving us when faced with the difficult choice of how to vote:

"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 favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to subhuman living conditions, redefining

marriage in ways that violate its essential meaning, or racist behavior, 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.

There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position even on policies promoting an intrinsically evil act may reasonably 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.

When all candidates hold a position that promotes an intrinsically evil act, 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."

(FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP, NO. 34 AND 35)

A Teaching Document from the Catholic Bishops

FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP;

A CALL TO POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY *from the Catholic Bishops of the United States, elaborates more on the above and starts with the below Introductory Letter issued in November, 2019:*

As Catholics, we bring the richness of our faith to the public square. We draw from both faith and reason as we seek to affirm the dignity of the human person and the common good of all. With renewed hope, we, the Catholic Bishops of the United States, are re-issuing Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, our teaching document on the political responsibility of Catholics, which provides guidance for all who seek to exercise their rights and duties as citizens.

Everyone living in this country is called to participate in public life and contribute to the common good. In Rejoice and Be Glad [Gaudete et Exsultate], POPE FRANCIS WRITES:

Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace.... You cannot grow in holiness without committing yourself, body and soul, to giving your best to this endeavor.

The call to holiness, he writes, requires a "**firm and passionate**" defense of "the innocent unborn." "Equally sacred," he further states, are "the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection."

Our approach to contemporary issues is first and foremost rooted in our identity as followers of Christ and as brothers and sisters to all who are made in God's image. For all Catholics, including those seeking public

office, our participation in political parties or other groups to which we may belong should be influenced by our faith, not the other way around.

Our 2015 statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, sought to help Catholics form their consciences, apply a consistent moral framework to issues facing the nation and world, and shape their choices in elections in the light of Catholic Social Teaching. In choosing to re-issue this statement, we recognize that the thrust of the document and the challenges it addresses remain relevant today.

At the same time, some challenges have become even more pronounced. Pope Francis has continued to draw attention to important issues such as migration, xenophobia, racism, abortion, global conflict, and care for creation. In the United States and around the world, many challenges demand our attention.

The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed. At the same time, we cannot dismiss or ignore other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism, the environmental crisis, poverty and the death penalty.

Our efforts to protect the unborn remain as important as ever, for just as the Supreme Court may allow greater latitude for state laws restricting abortion, state legislators have passed statutes not only keeping abortion legal through all nine months of pregnancy but opening the door to infanticide. Additionally, abortion contaminates many other important issues by

being inserted into legislation regarding immigration, care for the poor, and health care reform.

At our border, many arriving families endure separation, inhumane treatment, and lack of due process, while those fleeing persecution and violence face heightened barriers to seeking refuge and asylum. Within our borders, Dreamers, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, and mixed-status and undocumented families face continued fear and anxiety as political solutions fail to materialize. Lawmakers' inability to pass comprehensive immigration reform which acknowledges the family as the basic unit of society has contributed to the deterioration of conditions at the border. As we seek solutions, we must ensure that we receive refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants in light of the teachings of Christ and the Church while assuring the security of our citizens.

The wound of racism continues to fester; the bishops of the United States drew attention to this important topic in the recent pastoral letter, *Open Wide Our Hearts*. Religious freedom problems continue to intensify abroad and in the United States have moved beyond the federal to state and local levels. As international conflicts proliferate, addressing poverty and building global peace remain pressing concerns, as does the need to assist persons and families in our own country who continue to struggle to make ends meet. We must work to address gun violence, xenophobia, capital punishment, and other issues that affect human life and dignity. It is also essential to affirm the nature of the human person as male and female, to protect the family based

on marriage between a man and a woman, and to uphold the rights of children in that regard. Finally, we must urgently find ways to care better for God's creation, especially those most impacted by climate change—the poor—and protect our common home. We must resist the throw-away culture and seek integral development for all.

With these and other serious challenges facing both the nation and the Church, we are called to walk with those who suffer and to work toward justice and healing.

At all levels of society, we are aware of a great need for leadership that models love for righteousness (Wisdom 1:1) as well as the virtues of justice, prudence, courage, and temperance. Our commitment as people of faith to imitate Christ's love and compassion should challenge us to serve as models of civil dialogue, especially in a context where discourse is eroding at all levels of society. Where we live, work, and worship, we strive to understand before seeking to be understood, to treat with respect those with whom we disagree, to dismantle stereotypes, and to build productive conversation in place of vitriol.

Catholics from every walk of life can bring their faith and our consistent moral framework to contribute to important work in our communities, nation, and world on an ongoing basis, not just during election season. In this coming year and beyond, we urge leaders and all Catholics to respond in prayer and action to the call to faithful citizenship. In doing so, we live out the call to HOLINESS and work with Christ as he builds his kingdom of love.

SOURCE: FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP,
INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Prayer of the Month

Merciful Father,

Thank you for inviting each of us to join Your work of building the kingdom of love, justice and peace.

Draw us close to you in prayer as we discern your call in our families and communities.

Send us forth to encounter all whom you love; those not yet born, those in poverty, those in need of welcome.

Inspire us to respond to the call to faithful citizenship, during election season and beyond.

Help us to imitate your charity and compassion and to serve as models of loving dialogue.

Teach us to treat others with respect, even when we disagree, and seek to share Your love and mercy.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You in the Unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

—

*Taken from Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship
A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops
of the United States*

Discernment and Voting

As members of Couples for Christ and the Family Ministries, we urge you to respond to the call of our bishops by taking the following concrete steps:

- ① Develop A Well Formed Conscience
- ② Develop the Virtue of Prudence
- ③ Study the 4 major Principles of the Catholic Social Teaching
 - ▶ The Dignity of the Human Person
 - ▶ Subsidiarity
 - ▶ The Common Good
 - ▶ Solidarity
- ④ Prayerful Discernment
- ⑤ Vote
- ⑥ Participate responsibly and actively in public life

After the elections, we are called to continue studying with open hearts all issues that affect our society. We are called to love and understand our brothers and sisters – especially whom we may not agree with – while also critically exploring reputable sources of news and information across the political spectrum. A good starting point is to begin learning and participating in suggested organizations found in the "Living Our Faith Beyond the Elections" section.

We are called to bring together our principles, and our political choices, our values and our votes, to help build a civilization of truth and love.

(FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP, NO. 14)

Household Discussions

Attached are the documents for discussion. It is suggested to address the discussion in two separate meetings as the household schedule permits:

The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship is a brief document in two parts: These summarize the US bishops' reflection, **Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship**, which complements the teaching of bishops in dioceses and states.

PART ① PART I OF II: OUR CALL AS CATHOLIC CITIZENS (P11)

TOPICS

- ▶ Why Does the Church Teach About Issues Affecting Public Policy?
- ▶ Who in the Church Should Participate in Political Life?
- ▶ How Can Catholic Social Teaching Help Guide Our Participation?

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Which of the principles of Catholic social teaching spoke to me the most? In what concrete way can I get involved?

PART ② PART II OF II: MAKING MORAL CHOICES AND APPLYING OUR PRINCIPLES (P13)

TOPICS

- ▶ How Does the Church Help the Catholic Faithful to Speak About Political and Social Questions?
- ▶ What Public Policies Should Concern Catholics Most?

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

In addition to abortion, which of the intrinsically evil acts listed spoke to me the most? What can I do to make a difference?

The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship



Part I of II: Our Call as Catholic Citizens

This brief document is Part I of a summary of the US bishops' reflection, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, which complements the teaching of bishops in dioceses and states.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship is the teaching document of the Catholic Bishops of the United States on the political responsibility of Catholics. It provides guidance for all who seek to exercise their rights and duties as citizens. As Catholics, we bring the richness of our faith to the public square. We draw from both faith and reason as we seek to affirm the dignity of the human person and the common good of all.

Everyone living in this country is called to participate in public life and contribute to the common good.¹ In *Rejoice and Be Glad* [*Gaudete et exsultate*], Pope Francis writes:

Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace. . . . You cannot grow in holiness without committing yourself, body and soul, to giving your best to this endeavor.²

As Catholics, we are part of a community with profound teachings that help us consider challenges in public life, contribute to greater justice and peace for all people, and evaluate policy positions, party platforms, and candidates' promises and actions in light of the Gospel in order to help build a better world.

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. 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).

The US Constitution protects the right of individual believers and religious bodies to proclaim and live out their faith without government interference, favoritism, or discrimination. Civil law should recognize and protect the Church's right and responsibility to participate in society without abandoning its 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 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 any 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. This should not discourage us. On the contrary, it makes our obligation to act all the more urgent. 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. Faithful citizenship is an ongoing responsibility, not just an election year duty.

How Can Catholic Social Teaching Help Guide Our Participation?

In the words of Pope Francis, "progress in building a people in peace, justice and fraternity depends on four principles related to constant tensions present in every social reality. These derive from the pillars of the Church's social doctrine, which serve as 'primary and fundamental parameters of reference for interpreting and evaluating social phenomena.'"³ The four principles include the dignity of the human person, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity. Taken together, these principles provide a moral framework for Catholic engagement in advancing what we have called a "consistent ethic of life" (*Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 22).

Rightly understood, this ethic does not treat all issues as morally equivalent; nor does it reduce 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 summary of the four principles highlights several themes of Catholic social teaching for special consideration: these include **human rights and responsibilities, respect for work and the rights of workers, care for God's creation, and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable.**⁴

The Dignity of the Human Person

Human life is sacred because every person is created in the image and likeness of God. There is a rich and multifaceted Catholic teaching on human dignity summarized in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Every human being "must always be understood in his unrepeatable and inviolable uniqueness. . . . This entails above all the requirement not only of simple respect on the part of others, especially political and social institutions and their leaders with regard to every man and woman on the earth, but even more, this means that the primary commitment of each person towards others, and particularly of these same institutions, must be for the promotion and integral development of the person" (no. 131). The *Compendium* continues, "It is necessary to 'consider every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity' (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 27).

Every political, economic, social, scientific and cultural program must be inspired by the awareness of the primacy of each human being over society.”⁵

Subsidiarity

It is impossible to promote the dignity of the person without showing concern for the family, groups, associations, and local realities—in short, for those economic, social, cultural, recreational, professional, and political communities to which people spontaneously give life and which make it possible for them to achieve effective social growth.⁶ 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.

The principle of subsidiarity reminds us that larger institutions in society should not overwhelm or interfere with smaller or local institutions; yet larger institutions have essential responsibilities when the more local institutions cannot adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, and advance the common good.⁷

The Common Good

The common good is comprised of “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily.”⁸

Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if **human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met**. Every human being has a right to life, a right to religious freedom, and a right to have 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 ourselves, to our families, and to the larger society.

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. An economic system must serve the dignity of the human person and the common good by **respecting the dignity of work and protecting the rights of workers**. Economic justice calls for decent work at fair, living wages, a broad and fair legalization program with a path to citizenship 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. Workers also have responsibilities—to provide a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay, to treat employers and coworkers with respect, and to carry out their work in ways that contribute to the common good. Workers, employers, and unions should not only advance their own interests but also work together to advance economic justice and the well-being of all.

We have a duty to **care for God’s creation**, which Pope Francis refers to in *Laudato Si’* as “our common home.”⁹ 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. Pope Francis, consistent with St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI (World Day of Peace Message, 1990 and 2010), has lifted up pollution, climate change, lack of access to clean water, and the loss of biodiversity as particular challenges. Pope Francis speaks of an “ecological debt” (no. 51) owed by wealthier nations to developing nations. And he calls all of us to an “ecological conversion” (no. 219), by which “the effects of [our] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in [our] relationship with the world around [us]”.¹⁰ Indeed, this concern with “natural ecology” is an indispensable part of the broader “human ecology,” which encompasses not only material but moral and social dimensions as well.

Solidarity

Solidarity is “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to . . . the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible *for all*.” It is found in “a commitment to the good of one’s neighbor with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to ‘lose oneself’ for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to ‘serve him’ instead of oppressing him for one’s own advantage.”¹¹

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.

In a special way, our solidarity must find expression in the **preferential option for the poor and vulnerable**. 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 the marginalized.

Conclusion

In light of Catholic teaching, the bishops vigorously repeat their call for a renewed politics that focuses on moral principles, the promotion of human life and dignity, and the pursuit of the common good. Political participation in this spirit reflects not only the social teaching of our Church but the best traditions of our nation.

Notes

- 1 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1913-15.
- 2 *Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 25.
- 3 *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 221
- 4 These principles 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), no. 160. For more information on these principles, see *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 2016, nos. 40ff.
- 5 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 132. This summary represents only a few highlights from the fuller treatment of the human person in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. For the fuller treatment, see especially nos. 124-159 where many other important aspects of human dignity are treated.
- 6 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 185.
- 7 *Centesimus Annus*, no. 48; *Dignitatis Humanae*, nos. 4-6.
- 8 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 164
- 9 *Laudato Si’*, no. 77.
- 10 *Laudato Si’*, no. 217.
- 11 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 193. (See Mt 10:40-42, 20:25; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:25-27)

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The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship



Part II of II: Making Moral Choices and Applying Our Principles

This brief document is Part II of a summary of the US bishops' reflection, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, which complements the teaching of bishops in dioceses and states.

Part I of the summary of the US bishops' reflection, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, considered the core principles that underlie Catholic engagement in the political realm. Part II is a consideration of the process by which these principles are applied to the act of voting and taking positions on policy issues. It begins with the general consideration of the nature of conscience and the role of prudence. The application of prudential judgment does not mean that all choices are equally valid or that the bishops' guidance and that of other church leaders is just another political opinion or policy preference among many others. Rather, Catholics are urged to listen carefully to the Church's teachers when they apply Catholic social teaching to specific proposals and situations.

How Does the Church Help the Catholic Faithful to Speak About 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. 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 innocent human life, as in abortion. Similarly, human cloning, destructive research on human embryos, and other acts that directly violate the sanctity and dignity of human life including genocide, torture, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war, can never be justified. Nor can violations of human dignity, such as acts of racism, treating workers as mere means to an end, deliberately subjecting workers to subhuman living conditions, treating the poor as disposable, or redefining marriage to deny its essential meaning, ever be justified.

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 St. 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."¹ The basic right to life implies and is linked to other human rights such as a right to the goods that every person needs to live and thrive—including food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work.

Avoiding Two Temptations

Two temptations in public life can distort the Church's defense of human life and dignity: The first is a moral equivalence that makes no ethical distinctions between different kinds of issues involving human life and dignity. The direct and intentional destruction of innocent human life from the moment of conception until natural death is always wrong and is not just one issue among many. It must always be opposed. The second is the misuse of these necessary moral distinctions as a way of dismissing or ignoring other serious threats to human life and dignity. Racism and other unjust discrimination, the use of the death penalty, resorting to unjust war, environmental degradation, the use of torture, war crimes, the failure to respond to those who are suffering from hunger or a lack of health care or housing, pornography, human trafficking, redefining civil marriage, compromising religious liberty,

or unjust immigration policies are all serious moral issues that challenge our consciences and require us to act.

Making Moral Choices

The bishops do not tell Catholics how to vote; the responsibility to make political choices rests with each person and his or her properly formed conscience, aided by prudence. This exercise of conscience begins with always opposing policies that violate human life or weaken its protection.

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 St. John Paul II, *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.

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.¹

What Public Policies Should Concern Catholics Most?

As Catholics, we are led to raise questions about political life other than those that concentrate on individual, material well-being. We focus more broadly on what protects or threatens the dignity of every human life. Catholic teaching challenges voters and candidates, citizens and elected officials, to consider the moral and ethical dimensions of public policy issues. In light of ethical principles, we bishops offer the following policy goals that we hope will guide Catholics as they form their consciences and reflect on the moral dimensions of their public choices:

- Address the preeminent requirement to protect **human life**—by restricting and bringing to an end the destruction of unborn children through abortion and providing women in crisis pregnancies with the supports they need. End the following practices: the use of euthanasia and assisted suicide to deal with the burdens of illness and disability; the destruction of human embryos in the name of research; the use of the death penalty to combat crime; and the imprudent resort to war to address international disputes.
- Protect the fundamental understanding of **marriage** as the life-long and faithful union of one man and one woman

as the central institution of society; promote the complementarity of the sexes and reject false “gender” ideologies; provide better support for family life morally, socially, and economically, so that our nation helps parents raise their children with respect for life, sound moral values, and an ethic of stewardship and responsibility.

- Achieve comprehensive **immigration** reform that offers a path to citizenship, treats immigrant workers fairly, prevents the separation of families, maintains the integrity of our borders, respects the rule of law, and addresses the factors that compel people to leave their own countries.
- Help families and children overcome **poverty** and ensure access to and choice in **education**, as well as decent work at fair, living wages and adequate assistance for the vulnerable in our nation, while also helping to overcome widespread hunger and poverty around the world, especially in the policy areas of development assistance, debt relief, and international trade.
- Ensure full conscience protection and **religious freedom** for individuals and groups to meet social needs, and so enable families, community groups, economic structures, and government to work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, and care for creation.
- Provide **health care** while respecting human life, human dignity, and religious freedom in our health care system.
- Continue to oppose policies that reflect racism, hostility toward immigrants, religious bigotry, and other forms of **unjust discrimination**.
- Establish and comply with moral limits on the use of **military force**—examining for what purposes it may be used, under what authority, and at what human cost—with a special view to seeking a responsible and effective response for ending the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East and other parts of the world.
- Join with others **around the world** to pursue peace, protect human rights and religious liberty, and advance economic justice and care for creation.

Notes

1. *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 52.

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Faithful Citizenship Teaching Document Download

You may download the document, **FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP** in English or Español.

<https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-peace-human-development/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship>

Living Our Faith Beyond the Elections

Suggested Ways that I Get Involved in More Concrete Ways

① RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN LIFE

▶ Consistent Life Network

A network of organizations and individuals committed to the protection of life, which is threatened in today's world by war, abortion, poverty, racism, the death penalty and euthanasia. We believe that these issues are linked under a 'consistent ethic of life'.

▶ Catholic Charities USA

Aid in local communities on different outlets including: affordable housing, immigration and refugee services, food and nutrition, integrated health, disaster relief, etc.

▶ Catholic Relief Services

We use a holistic approach called integral human development to help people reach their full potential in an atmosphere of peace, social justice and human dignity.

▶ Local Crisis Pregnancy Centers

▶ 40 Days for Life

▶ Local and National Walks/Marches for Life

② MENTAL HEALTH

▶ Catholic Therapists

CatholicTherapists.com offers a referral base of qualified Catholic therapists; provides resources relative to therapy, the emotional and spiritual life, relationships, as well as marriage and family issues and also offers hand-picked books and other materials that can be helpful in your healing and spiritual journey.

③ ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

▶ Catholic Climate Movement

Local initiatives including: 'Green your parish', start a local chapter, etc.
 Global action: Season of Creation movement, fossil fuel divestment
 Also participating in Season of Creation movement with 5 webinars
 Feast of St. Francis 2020' Program: "The 2020 Feast of St. Francis program is framed around St. Francis' famous prayer, the Canticle of Creatures, to illuminate our current journey from the pandemic, from indifference to climate change, from political partisanship, to a place of healing through God, with each other and with Creation.

The program ends by offering ways to act, including courageous conversations with friends and family, learning more about our civic duties as Catholics, pledging to vote, and ways to embrace the call to protect life, our vulnerable communities and neighbors, and God's creation which sustains life."

▶ Catholic Energies

Associated with Catholic Climate Covenant, "Working exclusively with Catholic organizations, Catholic Energies provides expertise to design, implement and finance sustainable projects that reduce energy costs, enabling your organization to use those savings in support of your critical ministries."

▶ **Saint Kateri Conservation Center**

A national Catholic conservation group that promotes faith, integral ecology, and life. Programs include: **Saint Kateri Habitat:** Register your backyard, garden, church, school, forest, farm, or Catholic-owned land as a healthy habitat for people and wildlife; **Catholic Ecology Library:** We offer an extensive online collection of Catholic quotes and documents about ecology and the environment from faithful Catholic sources; **Catholic Land Trust:** We are a faith-based land trust that protects land and water for public benefit, including Catholic-owned lands, forests, meadows, wetlands, and farms.

④ HUMAN TRAFFICKING

▶ **Talitha Kum**

Talitha Kum, the International Network of Consecrated Life Against Trafficking in Persons, responsibly and creatively implements the decision taken in 2001 by the International Union of Superiors General (USIG) Plenary Assembly: "to work in solidarity with one another within our own religious communities and in the countries in which we are located to address insistently at every level the abuse and sexual exploitation of women and children with particular attention to the trafficking of women which has become a lucrative multinational business."

▶ **New Hope Cooperative**

In May 2004, Casa Rut gives life to the New Hope Social Cooperative, an ethnic tailoring shop, where migrant women can regain their dignity through work. The Cooperative was born from the need to overcome the too many forms of assistance that have developed around the migratory phenomenon but which do not free people, and do not restore full dignity to those who have lived on their skin that form of slavery that is the 'trafficking of beings' humans'. Over the years, New hope has become a concrete possibility of redemption, the possible 'sign' of a solidarity economy, as well as an expression of constant commitment in the fight against trafficking. The opening of the New Hope Store, in the heart of the city, helped to make this testimony more visible.

5 IMMIGRATION/REFUGEES

▶ Jesuit Refugee Service

JRS works in 56 countries worldwide and seeks to accompany, serve, and advocate the cause of refugees and other forcibly displaced people, that they may heal, learn and determine their own future.

6 POVERTY

▶ ANCOP USA

The social arm of Couples of Christ. Soon, ANCOP USA will be initiating more local expressions of our love for the poor, giving our members opportunity to work directly and in a more personal way with local families and communities needing help. Needless to mention, ANCOP USA's outreach programs in other countries will continue to need everyone's kind and generous support.

▶ Unbound

Unbound is an international nonprofit founded by lay Catholics grounded in the Gospel call to put the needs of the marginalized and vulnerable first. We build relationships of mutual respect and support that bridge cultural, religious and economic divides. We inspire confidence and offer opportunity and encouragement to children and families living on the margins of society. We create practical and trustworthy means for people to help others and nurture human connections that uplift us all.

giftoflife



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