



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

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Introduction: *“Everyone living in this country is called to participate in public life and contribute to the common good.”* (CCC 1913-15)

“We bishops do not intend to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote. Our purpose is to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with God’s truth. We recognize that the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience ...”

A Well-Formed Conscience: *“This statement highlights the role of the Church in the formation of conscience and the 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. Foremost amongst those teachings are the four basic principles of Catholic social doctrine: the dignity of the human person, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity.”*

Catholic Social Teaching: *“The permanent principles of the Church’s social doctrine constitute the very heart of Catholic social teaching ... These principles [are] the expression of the whole truth about man known by reason and faith”*

Dignity of the Human Person: *“The dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Direct attacks on innocent persons are never morally acceptable, at any stage or in any condition.”*

The Common Good: *“The common good indicates ‘the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily’ (Gaudium et Spes, no. 26).”*

Solidarity: *“Solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity.”*

Subsidiarity: *“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.”*

Doing Good and Avoiding Evil: *“The Church fosters well-formed consciences not only by teaching moral truth but also by encouraging its members to develop the virtue of prudence ... Prudence enables us ‘to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it’ (CCC 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 decisively ... The Church’s teaching is clear that a good end does not justify an immoral means.”*

“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 are called “intrinsically evil” actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia ... Similarly, human cloning, destructive research on human embryos ... are also intrinsically evil. Other direct assaults on innocent human life, such as genocide, torture, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war, can never be justified. Nor can... racism ... or redefining marriage to deny its essential meaning, ever be justified.”

Voting: *“A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide ... 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.” ... “When all candidates hold a position that promotes an intrinsically evil act, the conscientious 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.”*

CATHOLIC VOTER ISSUES	CANDIDATES & POSITIONS			
Church Teaching*	Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
Protects innocent human life from moment of conception to natural death (CCC 2258, 2270) (<i>opposes</i> abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, embryonic stem cell research, cloning)				
Upholds the right and obligation of individuals and nations to defend innocent human life (CCC 2264-2265) (<i>opposes</i> murder, unjust war, and other <i>direct assaults</i> on innocent human life such as genocide, torture, and targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war)				
Promotes natural family and marriage as the union between a man and a woman (CCC 2202) (<i>opposes</i> same-sex and other re-definitions of marriage)				
Upholds parents' rights and responsibilities to care for their children in keeping with their moral and religious convictions; including the right to choose their school (CCC 2210-2211, 2229)				
Defends the right to exercise religious freedom publicly and privately along with freedom of conscience (which <i>must be informed</i>) (CCC 1776, 1782-1783)				
Protects the rights and dignity of workers and the poor (CCC 2428 - 2429) (<i>opposes</i> stealing, human trafficking, acts of racism, treating workers as mere means to an end, deliberately subjecting workers to subhuman living conditions, treating the poor as disposable, unjust migration)				
TOTAL "V" or SCORE				

* CCC - Catechism of the Catholic Church; examples of intrinsic evils to be *opposed* shown in parentheses

INSTRUCTIONS: For each elected office and eligible candidates on your ballot, use a copy of this check sheet to help you discern the best candidate in accordance with Catholic teaching.

- 1) Place check "v" marks or, as needed, score each individual candidate either High = 3, Medium = 2, Low = 1, or Opposed/No Support = 0 based on their stated and *demonstrated* level of support and alignment with Church teaching on each of the six major issues above (see Additional Resources).
- 2) Add up the candidate's number of check marks (or scores if used) for all six major issues and enter the sum in the "Total Score" box. *Pray, discern, and then vote accordingly.*

REMEMBER TO VOTE

ADDITIONAL VOTER RESOURCES

CHURCH TEACHING:

Catechism of the Catholic Church

<https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/>

USCCB “Faithful Citizenship” (2020 digital version):

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf>

CANDIDATE EVALUATION - In addition to the candidate’s official websites and actual voting records, the following may also be helpful:

Ballotopedia:

https://ballotpedia.org/Main_Page

Ballot Ready – Election Center:

<https://www.ballotready.org/ec/>

Catholic Vote – The LOOP – daily news in a minute

<https://catholicvote.org/looptoday/>

Catholic Vote - Catholic Accountability Project (CAP) - Catholic Politician “Scorecards”:

<https://www.catholicvote.org/>

<https://catholicvote.org/cap/>

<https://catholicvote.org/cap/scorecard/>

iVoter:

<https://ivoterguide.com/>

<https://ivoterguide.com/all-in-state/nc>

LIFE & ABORTION:

Christie, Steven A., M.D., J.D. 2022. Speaking for the Unborn: 30-Second Pro-Life Rebuttals to Pro-Choice Arguments. Emmaus Road Publishing, Steubenville, Ohio. 168 pp.