



2020 PASTORAL GUIDANCE FOR CATHOLIC VOTERS

The Diocese of Charlotte

CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	2
LETTER TO PRIESTS.....	3
THE HOLY SEE.....	7
THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS	17
Forming Consciences For Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility	17
Introductory Letter	18
The Full Document	20
MORE CONCISE RESOURCES.....	21
Forming Consciences For Faithful Citizenship Part III	22
Part I: Our Call As Catholic Citizens	24
Part II: Our Call As Catholic Citizens	29
Do’s And Don’ts	34
CONTEMPORARY ISSUES	36
Abortion	36
A Statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Thirtieth Anniversary of <i>Roe v. Wade</i>	36
Racism	36
A Pastoral Letter Against Racism.....	36
“Gender Theory” / “Gender Ideology”	36
Teaching Resource.....	36
Immigration	36
Parish Resource.....	36

PREFACE

Every election year the faithful seek guidance from the clergy as they evaluate candidates and issues, often turning to their pastors. In the modern age there are many vehicles of communication that facilitate primarily politically motivated organizations to disseminate “Catholic” voter guides. Such guides can be deceptive and misrepresent Catholic moral and social principles. For example, it has come to our attention that some parishioners are being unwittingly guided toward certain websites through ministries operating at their parishes. Such websites are the work of political advocacy groups that may distort the backgrounds and records of candidates and other facts. Although the groups behind these campaigns may include in the fine print that they do not claim to speak for Pope Francis, any individual bishop, or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, they nevertheless continue to confuse people who are sincerely looking for guidance from their bishops. In light of this confusion, and in response to the sincere requests of the lay faithful, the Presbyteral Council requested that the chancery send out guidance and helpful resources free of political and ideological bias. The lay faithful deserves nothing less. To this end, the following material is being sent to all parishes and missions in the Diocese of Charlotte. Having been approved by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith or by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), these materials authentically represent the magisterium of the Church. Please make these available to the faithful. All other voter guides not expressly approved by the Diocese of Charlotte or the USCCB are strictly prohibited and are not to be promoted directly or indirectly.

LETTER TO PRIESTS



October 16, 2020

Dear Monsignors and Fathers,

1. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. As we approach the November 3rd election, I am grateful that Catholics are fully engaged in the national conversation about the future of our country. This is an encouraging sign of the care and solicitude of the Catholic faithful for the common good. It is evidence of a generous response to the Church's call to social and political participation. This is also a time when the faithful are seeking guidance from you and other Church leadership on how to evaluate and weigh the relative importance of issues as they are deciding how to vote. Catholics often face difficult choices. In a society such as ours, it can be difficult to sort through the many considerations. I hope this letter will help you in your guidance of parishioners and constituents.

2. It is essential that Catholics properly understand the Church's social teachings in order to ensure that our witness in public life is coherent and consistent with the demands of the Gospel.¹ Specific guidance for Catholics engaged in voting and other political action is found in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* and in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*. I encourage all the Catholic faithful to study and apply the teachings of these documents as they prayerfully discern their political choices this year. The U.S. Bishops remind us that: "As citizens, we should be guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a political party or interest group. When necessary, our participation should help transform the party to which we belong; we should not let the party transform us in such a way that we neglect or deny fundamental moral truths or approve intrinsically evil acts."²

3. There are many moral concerns that Catholics bring to the public square, but not all concerns are equally fundamental or have the same weight.³ "This is why it is so important to vote

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2019), 8.

² *Ibid.*, 14.

³ "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 policies promoting intrinsically evil acts has a special claim on our consciences and our actions." *Forming Consciences*, 37.

according to a well-formed conscience that perceives the proper relationship among moral goods.”⁴ A well-formed Catholic conscience recognizes the special priority of opposing direct attacks on human life like abortion and euthanasia. Emphasizing these important issues, the U.S. bishops have stated clearly that in the hierarchy of social concerns, “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.”⁵

4. Saying that the threat of abortion is our “preeminent priority” means recognizing “the hard truth is that not all injustices in the world are ‘equal.’”⁶ As Archbishop José H. Gomez, the current president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has written: “Perhaps we can understand this better about issues in the past than we can with issues in the present. For instance, we would never want to describe slavery as just one of several problems in eighteenth and nineteenth-century American life. There are indeed ‘lesser’ evils. But that means there are also ‘greater’ evils — evils that are more serious than others and even some evils that are so grave that Christians are called to address them as a primary duty.”⁷ In the United States of America in the twenty-first century, abortion is an evil so grave that opposing it can indeed be called “a primary duty” of Christians.⁸

5. Recognizing that abortion is the preeminent threat to human life in our society does not in any way take away from our concern for all human life. As Catholics we are committed to caring for and defending human beings at all stages of life, recognizing that the lives of the unborn and the elderly, the sick, the poor, and the immigrant are “equally sacred.”⁹ However, this recognition of the fundamental equality of all human beings is different from the mistaken notion that all groups of human beings are equally under threat at this time in our nation’s history. In fact, unborn human beings face a unique and particularly grave threat in that a supposed right to directly kill them is protected by law and that this killing occurs on a massive scale. For these reasons, abortion “is not just one issue among many,” but must always be opposed.¹⁰

“In this context, 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.”
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Doctrinal Note on Some Questions regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life,” Vatican, November 24, 2002, p.4, accessed October 13, 2020, (https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20021124_politica_en.html).

⁴ *Forming Consciences*, 34.

⁵ *Forming Consciences*, Introductory Note.

⁶ Gomez, Jose H., foreword to Thomas J. Olmstead, *Catholics in the Public Square* (Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict Press, 2016).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ “Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection... In the case of an intrinsically unjust law, such as a law permitting abortion or euthanasia, it is therefore never licit to obey it, or to “take part in a propaganda campaign in favour of such a law, or vote for it.” John Paul II, encyclical letter *Evangelium vitae*, March 25, 1995: AAS 87 (1995), 73.

⁹ Francis, apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, March 19, 2018: AAS 110 (2018), 101.

¹⁰ “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.” *Forming Consciences*, 28.

6. Because Catholics have a grave obligation to oppose any law or political program which permits abortion or euthanasia, this normally requires us to refuse to vote for politicians who support legal abortion.¹¹ Occasionally, there may be circumstances in which a Catholic feels obliged to reluctantly vote for a candidate who supports abortion in order to avoid supporting another evil which is proportionately grave.¹² The key word here is “proportionate.” The U.S. bishops remind us that “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.”¹³ For example, it would not be permissible to vote for a candidate who supported slavery or segregation simply because the other candidate opposed a certain tax benefit or narrow government program. A voter who acted in this way would be treating two evils of very unequal gravity as if they were the same. In evaluating the moral positions of candidates, we must remember that abortion is particularly grave “because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed.”¹⁴ This suggests that an evil grave enough to justify voting for a candidate who supports legal abortion would also have to be a direct attack on human life with a comparable number of victims. In this context, it is important to remember that the number of victims of legal abortion in the United States approaches 900,000 per year.¹⁵

7. Voting is a decision of conscience. As Catholics, we have a responsibility to form our consciences according to the truth and not according to our private priorities. The U.S. bishops remind us that “Conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere ‘feeling’ about what we should or should not do.”¹⁶ Rather, a well-formed conscience leads us to make decisions based on the truth about the human person and the proper order of moral values.¹⁷ Our discernment of these values is guided by the authoritative teaching

¹¹ “In this context, 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.” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note*, 4).

¹² “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.” *Forming Consciences*, 34.

“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.” *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Introductory Note.

¹⁵ The Guttmacher Institute estimates that there were 862,320 abortions in the United States in 2017. See “Induced Abortion in the United States,” Guttmacher Institute September 2019 Fact Sheet, May 08, 2020, accessed October 13, 2020, (<https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-united-states>). North Carolina reported 27,581 abortions in 2018. See N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, “2018 North Carolina Reported Induced Abortions by County of Occurrence and Residence,” accessed October 13, 2020, (<https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/data/vital/pregnancies/2018/reportedabortionscounty.pdf>).

¹⁶ *Forming Consciences*, 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

of the Church.¹⁸ We are accountable to God’s law everywhere, including in the voting booth. Conscience also demands moral consistency in every area of our lives. We cannot be “personally opposed” to abortion or other intrinsic evils in our private life but refuse to oppose them in the public square.¹⁹ Such moral incoherence would eliminate Catholic witness in the world.²⁰ As the U.S. bishops remind us, our voting decisions may affect our eternal salvation.²¹

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "+ Peter J. Jugis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Peter J. Jugis
Bishop of Charlotte

¹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Citta Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), no.1785; *Forming Consciences*, 5.

¹⁹ “There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called ‘spiritual life’, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called ‘secular’ life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social responsibilities, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture... “ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note*, 6. Cf. Vatican Council II, decree on the apostolate of the laity *Apostolicam actuositatem*, November 18, 1965: AAS 58 (1966), 4.

²⁰ “The Church recognizes that while democracy is the best expression of the direct participation of citizens in political choices, it succeeds only to the extent that it is based on a correct understanding of the human person. Catholic involvement in political life cannot compromise on this principle, for otherwise the witness of the Christian faith in the world, as well as the unity and interior coherence of the faithful, would be non-existent.” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note*, 3.

²¹ *Forming Consciences*, 38.

THE HOLY SEE

CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

DOCTRINAL NOTE **on some questions regarding** **The Participation of Catholics in Political Life**

*The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, having received the opinion of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, has decided that it would be appropriate to publish the present **Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life**. This Note is directed to the Bishops of the Catholic Church and, in a particular way, to Catholic politicians and all lay members of the faithful called to participate in the political life of democratic societies.*

I. A constant teaching

1. The commitment of Christians in the world has found a variety of expressions in the course of the past 2000 years. One such expression has been Christian involvement in political life: Christians, as one Early Church writer stated, «play their full role as citizens».^[1] Among the saints, the Church venerates many men and women who served God through their generous commitment to politics and government. Among these, Saint Thomas More, who was proclaimed Patron of Statesmen and Politicians, gave witness by his martyrdom to «the inalienable dignity of the human conscience».^[2] **Though subjected to various forms of psychological pressure, Saint Thomas More refused to compromise, never forsaking the «constant fidelity to legitimate authority and institutions» which distinguished him; he taught by his life and his death that «man cannot be separated from God, nor politics from morality».**^[3]

It is commendable that in today's democratic societies, in a climate of true freedom, everyone is made a participant in directing the body politic.^[4] Such societies call for new and fuller forms of participation in public life by Christian and non-Christian citizens alike. Indeed, all can contribute, by voting in elections for lawmakers and government officials, and in other ways as well, to the development of political solutions and legislative choices which, in their opinion, will benefit the common good.^[5] The life of a democracy could not be productive without the active, responsible and generous involvement of everyone, «albeit in a diversity and complementarity of forms, levels, tasks, and responsibilities».^[6]

By fulfilling their civic duties, «guided by a Christian conscience»,^[7] in conformity with its values, the lay faithful exercise their proper task of infusing the temporal order with Christian values, all the while respecting the nature and rightful autonomy of that order,^[8] and cooperating with other citizens according to their particular competence and responsibility.^[9] The consequence of this fundamental teaching of the Second Vatican Council is that «the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in 'public life', that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically

and institutionally the common good». ^[10] This would include the promotion and defence of goods such as public order and peace, freedom and equality, respect for human life and for the environment, justice and solidarity.

The present Note does not seek to set out the entire teaching of the Church on this matter, which is summarized in its essentials in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, but intends only to recall some principles proper to the Christian conscience, which inspire the social and political involvement of Catholics in democratic societies. ^[11] The emergence of ambiguities or questionable positions in recent times, often because of the pressure of world events, has made it necessary to clarify some important elements of Church teaching in this area.

II. Central points in the current cultural and political debate

2. Civil society today is undergoing a complex cultural process as the end of an era brings with it a time of uncertainty in the face of something new. The great strides made in our time give evidence of humanity's progress in attaining conditions of life which are more in keeping with human dignity. The growth in the sense of responsibility towards countries still on the path of development is without doubt an important sign, illustrative of a greater sensitivity to the common good. At the same time, however, one cannot close one's eyes to the real dangers which certain tendencies in society are promoting through legislation, nor can one ignore the effects this will have on future generations.

A kind of cultural relativism exists today, evident in the conceptualization and defence of an ethical pluralism, which sanctions the decadence and disintegration of reason and the principles of the natural moral law. Furthermore, it is not unusual to hear the opinion expressed in the public sphere that such ethical pluralism is the very condition for democracy. ^[12] As a result, citizens claim complete autonomy with regard to their moral choices, and lawmakers maintain that they are respecting this freedom of choice by enacting laws which ignore the principles of natural ethics and yield to ephemeral cultural and moral trends, ^[13] as if every possible outlook on life were of equal value. At the same time, **the value of tolerance is disingenuously invoked when a large number of citizens, Catholics among them, are asked not to base their contribution to society and political life – through the legitimate means available to everyone in a democracy – on their particular understanding of the human person and the common good.** The history of the twentieth century demonstrates that those citizens were right who recognized the falsehood of relativism, and with it, the notion that there is no moral law rooted in the nature of the human person, which must govern our understanding of man, the common good and the state.

3. Such relativism, of course, has nothing to do with the legitimate freedom of Catholic citizens to choose among the various political opinions that are compatible with faith and the natural moral law, and to select, according to their own criteria, what best corresponds to the needs of the common good. Political freedom is not – and cannot be – based upon the relativistic idea that all conceptions of the human person's good have the same value and truth, but rather, on the fact that politics are concerned with very concrete realizations of the true human and social good in

given historical, geographic, economic, technological and cultural contexts. From the specificity of the task at hand and the variety of circumstances, a plurality of morally acceptable policies and solutions arises. It is not the Church's task to set forth specific political solutions – and even less to propose a single solution as the acceptable one – to temporal questions that God has left to the free and responsible judgment of each person. It is, however, the Church's right and duty to provide a moral judgment on temporal matters when this is required by faith or the moral law.^[14] If Christians must «recognize the legitimacy of differing points of view about the organization of worldly affairs»,^[15] they are also called to reject, as injurious to democratic life, a conception of pluralism that reflects moral relativism. **Democracy must be based on the true and solid foundation of non-negotiable ethical principles, which are the underpinning of life in society.**

On the level of concrete political action, there can generally be a plurality of political parties in which Catholics may exercise – especially through legislative assemblies – their right and duty to contribute to the public life of their country.^[16] This arises because of the contingent nature of certain choices regarding the ordering of society, the variety of strategies available for accomplishing or guaranteeing the same fundamental value, the possibility of different interpretations of the basic principles of political theory, and the technical complexity of many political problems. It should not be confused, however, with an ambiguous pluralism in the choice of moral principles or essential values. The legitimate plurality of temporal options is at the origin of the commitment of Catholics to politics and relates directly to Christian moral and social teaching. It is in the light of this teaching that lay Catholics must assess their participation in political life so as to be sure that it is marked by a coherent responsibility for temporal reality.

The Church recognizes that while democracy is the best expression of the direct participation of citizens in political choices, it succeeds only to the extent that it is based on a correct understanding of the human *person*.^[17] Catholic involvement in political life cannot compromise on this principle, for otherwise the witness of the Christian faith in the world, as well as the unity and interior coherence of the faithful, would be non-existent. The democratic structures on which the modern state is based would be quite fragile were its foundation not the centrality of the human person. It is respect for the person that makes democratic participation possible. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, the protection of «the rights of the person is, indeed, a necessary condition for citizens, individually and collectively, to play an active part in public life and administration».^[18]

4. The complex array of today's problems branches out from here, including some never faced by past generations. Scientific progress has resulted in advances that are unsettling for the consciences of men and women and call for solutions that respect ethical principles in a coherent and fundamental way. At the same time, legislative proposals are put forward which, heedless of the consequences for the existence and future of human beings with regard to the formation of culture and social behaviour, attack the very inviolability of human life. Catholics, in this difficult situation, have the right and the duty to recall society to a deeper understanding of human life and to the responsibility of everyone in this regard. John Paul II, continuing the constant teaching of the Church, has reiterated many times that **those who are directly involved in lawmaking bodies have a «grave and clear obligation to oppose» any law that attacks human life. For them, as for every Catholic, it is impossible to promote such laws or to vote for**

them.^[19] As John Paul II has taught in his Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae* regarding the situation in which it is not possible to overturn or completely repeal a law allowing abortion which is already in force or coming up for a vote, «an elected official, whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well known, could licitly support proposals aimed at *limiting the harm* done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality».^[20]

In this context, 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. Nor can a Catholic think of delegating his Christian responsibility to others; rather, the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives him this task, so that the truth about man and the world might be proclaimed and put into action.

When political activity comes up against moral principles that do not admit of exception, compromise or derogation, the Catholic commitment becomes more evident and laden with responsibility. In the face of *fundamental and inalienable ethical demands*, Christians must recognize that what is at stake is the essence of the moral law, which concerns the integral good of the human person. This is the case with laws concerning *abortion* and *euthanasia* (not to be confused with the decision to forgo *extraordinary treatments*, which is morally legitimate). Such laws must defend the basic right to life from conception to natural death. In the same way, it is necessary to recall the duty to respect and protect the rights of the *human embryo*. Analogously, the *family* needs to be safeguarded and promoted, based on monogamous marriage between a man and a woman, and protected in its unity and stability in the face of modern laws on divorce: in no way can other forms of cohabitation be placed on the same level as marriage, nor can they receive legal recognition as such. The same is true for the freedom of parents regarding the *education* of their children; it is an inalienable right recognized also by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. In the same way, one must consider *society's protection of minors* and freedom from *modern forms of slavery* (drug abuse and prostitution, for example). In addition, there is the right to *religious freedom* and the development of an *economy* that is at the service of the human person and of the common good, with respect for social justice, the principles of human solidarity and subsidiarity, according to which «the rights of all individuals, families, and organizations and their practical implementation must be acknowledged».^[21] Finally, the question of *peace* must be mentioned. Certain pacifistic and ideological visions tend at times to secularize the value of peace, while, in other cases, there is the problem of summary ethical judgments which forget the complexity of the issues involved. Peace is always «the work of justice and the effect of charity».^[22] It demands the absolute and radical rejection of violence and terrorism and requires a constant and vigilant commitment on the part of all political leaders.

III. Principles of Catholic doctrine on the autonomy of the temporal order and on pluralism.

5. While a plurality of methodologies reflective of different sensibilities and cultures can be legitimate in approaching such questions, no Catholic can appeal to the principle of pluralism or to the autonomy of lay involvement in political life to support policies affecting the common good which compromise or undermine fundamental ethical requirements. This is not a question of «confessional values» *per se*, because such ethical precepts are rooted in human nature itself and belong to the natural moral law. They do not require from those who defend them the profession of the Christian faith, although the Church's teaching confirms and defends them always and everywhere as part of her service to the truth about man and about the common good of civil society. Moreover, it cannot be denied that politics must refer to principles of absolute value precisely because these are at the service of the dignity of the human person and of true human progress.

6. The appeal often made to «*the rightful autonomy of the participation of lay Catholics*» in politics needs to be clarified. Promoting the common good of society, according to one's conscience, has nothing to do with «confessionalism» or religious intolerance. For Catholic moral doctrine, the rightful autonomy of the political or civil sphere from that of religion and the Church – *but not from that of morality* – is a value that has been attained and recognized by the Catholic Church and belongs to inheritance of contemporary civilization.^[23] John Paul II has warned many times of the dangers which follow from confusion between the religious and political spheres. «Extremely sensitive situations arise when a specifically religious norm becomes or tends to become the law of a state without due consideration for the distinction between the domains proper to religion and to political society. In practice, the identification of religious law with civil law can stifle religious freedom, even going so far as to restrict or deny other inalienable human rights».^[24] All the faithful are well aware that specifically religious activities (such as the profession of faith, worship, administration of sacraments, theological doctrines, interchange between religious authorities and the members of religions) are outside the state's responsibility. The state must not interfere, nor in any way require or prohibit these activities, except when it is a question of public order. The recognition of civil and political rights, as well as the allocation of public services may not be made dependent upon citizens' religious convictions or activities.

The right and duty of Catholics and all citizens to seek the truth with sincerity and to promote and defend, by legitimate means, moral truths concerning society, justice, freedom, respect for human life and the other rights of the person, is something quite different. The fact that some of these truths may also be taught by the Church does not lessen the political legitimacy or the rightful «autonomy» of the contribution of those citizens who are committed to them, irrespective of the role that reasoned inquiry or confirmation by the Christian faith may have played in recognizing such truths. Such «autonomy» refers first of all to the attitude of the person who respects the truths that derive from natural knowledge regarding man's life in society, even if such truths may also be taught by a specific religion, because truth is one. It would be a mistake to confuse the proper *autonomy* exercised by Catholics in political life with the claim of a principle that prescind from the moral and social teaching of the Church.

By its interventions in this area, the Church's Magisterium does not wish to exercise political power or eliminate the freedom of opinion of Catholics regarding contingent questions. Instead, it intends – as is its proper function – to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good. The social doctrine of the Church is not an intrusion into the government of individual countries. **It is a question of the lay Catholic's duty to be morally coherent, found within one's conscience, which is one and indivisible. «There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called 'spiritual life', with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called 'secular' life,** that is, life in a family, at work, in social responsibilities, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. The branch, engrafted to the vine which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. In fact, every area of the lay faithful's lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the 'places in time' where the love of Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of the Father and service of others. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility – as, for example, skill and solidarity in work, love and dedication in the family and the education of children, service to society and public life and the promotion of truth in the area of culture – are the occasions ordained by providence for a 'continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity' (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, 4)». ^[25] Living and acting in conformity with one's own conscience on questions of politics is not slavish acceptance of positions alien to politics or some kind of confessionalism, but rather the way in which Christians offer their concrete contribution so that, through political life, society will become more just and more consistent with the dignity of the human person.

In democratic societies, all proposals are freely discussed and examined. Those who, on the basis of respect for individual conscience, would view the moral duty of Christians to act according to their conscience as something that disqualifies them from political life, denying the legitimacy of their political involvement following from their convictions about the common good, would be guilty of a form of intolerant *secularism*. Such a position would seek to deny not only any engagement of Christianity in public or political life, but even the possibility of natural ethics itself. Were this the case, the road would be open to moral anarchy, which would be anything but legitimate pluralism. The oppression of the weak by the strong would be the obvious consequence. The marginalization of Christianity, moreover, would not bode well for the future of society or for consensus among peoples; indeed, it would threaten the very spiritual and cultural foundations of civilization. ^[26]

IV. Considerations regarding particular aspects

7. In recent years, there have been cases within some organizations founded on Catholic principles, in which support has been given to political forces or movements with positions contrary to the moral and social teaching of the Church on fundamental ethical questions. Such activities, in contradiction to basic principles of Christian conscience, are not compatible with membership in organizations or associations which define themselves as Catholic. Similarly, some Catholic periodicals in certain countries have expressed perspectives on political choices

that have been ambiguous or incorrect, by misinterpreting the idea of the political autonomy enjoyed by Catholics and by not taking into consideration the principles mentioned above.

Faith in Jesus Christ, who is «the way, the truth, and the life»(*Jn* 14:6), calls Christians to exert a greater effort in building a culture which, inspired by the Gospel, will reclaim the values and contents of the Catholic Tradition. The presentation of the fruits of the spiritual, intellectual and moral heritage of Catholicism in terms understandable to modern culture is a task of great urgency today, in order to avoid also a kind of Catholic cultural diaspora. Furthermore, the cultural achievements and mature experience of Catholics in political life in various countries, especially since the Second World War, do not permit any kind of ‘inferiority complex’ in comparison with political programs which recent history has revealed to be weak or totally ruinous. It is insufficient and reductive to think that the commitment of Catholics in society can be limited to a simple transformation of structures, because if at the basic level there is no culture capable of receiving, justifying and putting into practice positions deriving from faith and morals, the changes will always rest on a weak foundation.

Christian faith has never presumed to impose a rigid framework on social and political questions, conscious that the historical dimension requires men and women to live in imperfect situations, which are also susceptible to rapid change. For this reason, Christians must reject political positions and activities inspired by a utopian perspective which, turning the tradition of Biblical faith into a kind of prophetic vision without God, makes ill use of religion by directing consciences towards a hope which is merely earthly and which empties or reinterprets the Christian striving towards eternal life.

At the same time, the Church teaches that authentic freedom does not exist without the truth. «Truth and freedom either go together hand in hand or together they perish in misery».^[27] **In a society in which truth is neither mentioned nor sought, every form of authentic exercise of freedom will be weakened, opening the way to libertine and individualistic distortions and undermining the protection of the good of the human person and of the entire society.**

8. In this regard, it is helpful to recall a truth which today is often not perceived or formulated correctly in public opinion: the right to freedom of conscience and, in a special way, to **religious freedom, taught in the Declaration *Dignitatis humanae* of the Second Vatican Council, is based on the ontological dignity of the human person and not on a non-existent equality among religions or cultural systems of human creation.**^[28] Reflecting on this question, Paul VI taught that «in no way does the Council base this right to religious freedom on the fact that all religions and all teachings, including those that are erroneous, would have more or less equal value; it is based rather on the dignity of the human person, which demands that he not be subjected to external limitations which tend to constrain the conscience in its search for the true religion or in adhering to it».^[29] The teaching on freedom of conscience and on religious freedom does not therefore contradict the condemnation of indifferentism and religious relativism by Catholic doctrine;^[30] on the contrary, it is fully in accord with it.

V. Conclusion

9. The principles contained in the present *Note* are intended to shed light on one of the most important aspects of the unity of Christian life: coherence between faith and life, Gospel and culture, as recalled by the Second Vatican Council. The Council exhorted Christians «to fulfill their duties faithfully in the spirit of the Gospel. It is a mistake to think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities; this is to forget that by our faith we are bound all the more to fulfill these responsibilities according to the vocation of each... **May Christians...be proud of the opportunity to carry out their earthly activity in such a way as to integrate human, domestic, professional, scientific and technical enterprises with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are ordered to the glory of God**».^[31]

The Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II, in the Audience of November 21, 2002, approved the present Note, adopted in the Plenary Session of this Congregation, and ordered its publication.

Rome, from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, November 24, 2002, the Solemnity of Christ the King.

✠ Joseph Card. RATZINGER
Prefect

✠ Tarcisio BERTONE, S.D.B.
Archbishop Emeritus of Vercelli
Secretary

^[1] *Letter to Diognetus*, 5,5; Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2240.

^[2] John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Proclaiming Saint Thomas More Patron of Statesmen and Politicians*, 1: AAS 93 (2001), 76.

^[3] *Ibid.*, 4.

^[4] Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 31; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1915.

^[5] Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 75.

^[6] John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles laici*, 42: AAS 81 (1989), 472. The present doctrinal *Note* refers to the involvement in political life of lay members of the faithful. The Bishops of the Church have the right and the duty to set out the moral principles relating to the social order; «Nevertheless active participation in political parties is reserved to the lay faithful» (*ibid.*, 60). Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* (March 31, 1994), 33.

^[7] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 76.

^[8] Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 36.

^[9] Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 7; Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 36; Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 31 and 43.

^[10] John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 42.

^[11] In the last two centuries, the Papal Magisterium has spoken on the principal questions regarding the social and political order. Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Diuturnum illud*: ASS 14 (1881–1882), 4 ff; Encyclical Letter *Immortale Dei*: ASS 18 (1885–1886), 162ff; Encyclical Letter *Libertas præstantissimum*: ASS 20 (1887–1888), 593ff; Encyclical Letter *Rerum novarum*: ASS 23 (1890–1891), 643ff; Benedict XV, Encyclical Letter *Pacem Dei munus pulcherrimum*: AAS 12 (1920), 209ff; Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo anno*: AAS 23 (1931), 190ff; Encyclical Letter *Mit brennender Sorge*: AAS 29 (1937), 145–167; Encyclical Letter *Divini Redemptoris*: AAS 29 (1937), 78ff; Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Summi Pontificatus*: AAS 31 (1939), 423ff; *Radiomessaggi natalizi 1941–1944*; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 401–464; Encyclical Letter *Pacem in terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 257–304; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum progressio*: AAS 59 (1967), 257–299; Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens*: AAS 63 (1971), 401–441.

^[12] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, 46: AAS 83 (1991); Encyclical Letter *Veritatis splendor*, 101: AAS 85 (1993), 1212–1213; *Discourse to the Italian Parliament*, 5: *L'Osservatore Romano* (November 15, 2002).

^[13] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, 22: AAS 87 (1995), 425–426.

^[14] Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 76.

^[15] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 75.

^[16] Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 43 and 75.

^[17] Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 25.

^[18] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 73.

^[19] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, 73.

^[20] *Ibid.*

^[21] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 75.

^[22] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2304.

^[23] Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 76.

^[24] John Paul II, *Message for the 1991 World Day of Peace*: «If you want peace, respect the conscience of every person», 4: AAS 83 (1991), 414–415.

^[25] John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 59.

^[26] Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See: L'Osservatore Romano* (January 11, 2002).

^[27] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, 90: AAS 91 (1999), 75.

^[28] Cf. Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Dignitatis humanae*, 1: «This Sacred Council begins by professing that God himself has made known to the human race how men by serving him can be saved and reach the state of the blessed. We believe that this one true religion subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church». This does not lessen the sincere respect that the Church has for the various religious traditions, recognizing in them «elements of truth and goodness». See also, Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 16; Decree *Ad gentes*, 11; Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 2; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 55: AAS 83 (1991), 302–304; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, 2, 8, 21: AAS 92 (2000), 742–765.

^[29] Paul VI, *Address to the Sacred College and to the Roman Prelature: in Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, 14 (1976), 1088–1089.

^[30] Cf. Pius IX, Encyclical Letter *Quanta cura*: ASS 3 (1867), 162; Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Immortale Dei*: ASS 18 (1885), 170–171; Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quas primas*: AAS 17 (1925), 604–605; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2108; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, 22.

^[31] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 43; see also John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 59.

THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Forming Consciences For Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility

The document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility* from the Catholic Bishops of the United States and its Introductory Note were developed by the chairmen, in consultation with the membership, of the Committees on Catholic Education, Communications, Cultural Diversity in the Church, Doctrine, Domestic Justice and Human Development, Evangelization and Catechesis, International Justice and Peace, Migration, Pro-Life Activities; the Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage; and the Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It was approved by the full body of bishops at its November 2015 General Meeting. It has been directed for publication by the undersigned.

Msgr. Ronny E. Jenkins

General Secretary, USCCB

Introductory Letter

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.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

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.”³

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,⁴ 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.⁵

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.

The Full Document

The full document may be found here:

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship-title>

MORE CONCISE RESOURCES

In this section you will find four concise and easy to read resources. The first is Part III of Forming Consciences For Faithful Citizenship formatted for 'at-a-glance' reading. The remaining three resources are taken from the USCCB website. Additional USCCB resources can be found here:

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

Forming Consciences For Faithful Citizenship Part III

FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

Goals for Political Life: Challenges for Citizens, Candidates, and Public Officials

U.S. CATHOLIC BISHOPS

OUR FOCUS

As Catholics, we are led to raise questions for political life other than those that concentrate on individual, material well-being. Our focus is not on party affiliation, ideology, economics, or even competence and capacity to perform duties, as important as such issues are. Rather, we focus on what protects or threatens the dignity of every human life.

OUR CHALLENGE

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. Not all issues are equal; these ten goals address matters of different moral weight and urgency. Some involve intrinsically evil acts, which can never be approved. Others involve affirmative obligations to seek the common good. These and similar goals can help voters and candidates act on ethical principles rather than particular interests and partisan allegiances. We hope Catholics will ask candidates how they intend to help our nation pursue these important goals:

PUBLIC POLICY GOALS

PROTECT THE WEAKEST

Address the **PREEMINENT REQUIREMENT** to protect the weakest in our midst—innocent unborn children—by restricting and bringing to an end the destruction of unborn children through **ABORTION** and providing women in crisis pregnancies the supports they need to make a decision for life.

Keep our nation from turning to violence to address fundamental problems—a million abortions each year to deal with unwanted pregnancies, **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 imprudent resort to **WAR** to address international disputes.

SUPPORT FOR FAMILY LIFE

Protect the fundamental understanding of **MARRIAGE** as the life-long and faithful union of one man and one woman and as the central institution of society; promote the complementarity of the sexes and reject **FALSE "GENDER" IDEOLOGIES**; and 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.

Continue reading



FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

Goals for Political Life: Challenges for Citizens, Candidates, and Public Officials

IMMIGRATION REFORM

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.

ASSISTANCE FOR THE VULNERABLE

Help families and children overcome **POVERTY**: ensuring 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 areas of development assistance, debt relief, and international trade.

PROVIDE HEALTH CARE

Provide **HEALTH CARE** while **RESPECTING HUMAN LIFE**, human **DIGNITY**, and **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM** in our health care system.

OPPOSE UNJUST DISCRIMINATION

Continue to oppose policies that reflect **PREJUDICE**, hostility toward immigrants, **RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY**, and other forms of **UNJUST DISCRIMINATION**.

PURSUE THE COMMON GOOD

Encourage families, community groups, economic structures, and government to work together to overcome poverty, pursue the **COMMON GOOD**, and **CARE FOR CREATION**, with full respect for individuals and groups and their right to address social needs in accord with their basic moral and **RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS**.

END PERSECUTION

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.

The above text constitutes Part III of *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. For more information please visit: www.usccb.org.

"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."

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

Part I: Our Call As Catholic Citizens

The following resources can be found at:

(English)

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/The-Challenge-of-Forming-Consciences-for-Faithful-Citizenship-Part-1.pdf>

(Spanish)

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/The-Challenge-of-Forming-Consciences-for-Faithful-Citizenship-Part-1-Spanish.pdf>

The above resources are displayed in the following pages.

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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El reto de formar la conciencia para ser ciudadanos fieles



Parte I de II: Nuestro llamado como ciudadanos católicos

Este breve documento es la Primera parte de un resumen de la reflexión de los obispos de los Estados Unidos, *Formando la conciencia para ser ciudadanos fieles*, que complementa la enseñanza de los obispos en las diócesis y las conferencias estatales de obispos católicos.

Formando la conciencia para ser ciudadanos fieles es el documento de enseñanza de los Obispos Católicos de los Estados Unidos sobre la responsabilidad política de los católicos. Brinda orientación a todos los que buscan ejercer sus derechos y obligaciones como ciudadanos. Como católicos, llevamos la riqueza de nuestra fe al ámbito público. Nos basamos tanto en la fe como en la razón al buscar afirmar la dignidad de la persona humana y el bien común.

Todos los que viven en este país están llamados a participar en la vida pública y contribuir al bien común.¹ En "*Alegraos y regocijaos*" [*Gaudete et exsultate*], el Papa Francisco escribe:

"Tu identificación con Cristo y sus deseos, implica el empeño por construir, con El, ese reino de amor, justicia y paz para todos... No te santificarás sin entregarte en cuerpo y alma para dar lo mejor de ti en ese empeño."²

Como católicos, somos parte de una comunidad con profundas enseñanzas que nos ayudan a considerar los retos en la vida pública, contribuir a una mayor justicia y paz para todas las personas, y evaluar las posturas políticas, los programas de los partidos políticos y las promesas y acciones de los candidatos a la luz del Evangelio para ayudar a construir un mundo mejor.

¿POR QUÉ ENSEÑA LA IGLESIA SOBRE CUESTIONES QUE AFECTAN A LA POLÍTICA PÚBLICA?

La obligación de la Iglesia de participar en la formación del carácter moral de la sociedad es un requisito de nuestra fe, una parte de la misión que hemos recibido de Jesucristo. Como personas de fe y como seres racionales, los católicos estamos llamados a llevar la verdad a la vida política y practicar el mandamiento de Cristo de "que se amen los unos a los otros" (Jn 13:34).

La Constitución de los Estados Unidos protege el derecho de cada creyente y de cada institución religiosa a anunciar y vivir su fe sin interferencias gubernamentales, favoritismos o discriminación. La ley civil debería reconocer y proteger el derecho y la responsabilidad de la Iglesia de participar en la sociedad sin abandonar sus convicciones morales. La tradición pluralista de nuestra nación se ve reforzada, y no amenazada, cuando los grupos religiosos y las personas de fe llevan sus convicciones a la vida pública. La comunidad católica aporta al diálogo político un marco moral coherente y amplia experiencia de servicio a los necesitados.

¿QUIÉN EN LA IGLESIA DEBERÍA PARTICIPAR EN LA VIDA POLÍTICA?

En la tradición católica, ser ciudadanos responsables es una virtud, y la participación en la vida política es una obligación moral. Como ciudadanos deberíamos ser guiados más por nuestras convicciones morales que por nuestro apego a un partido político o grupo con intereses especiales. En el ambiente de hoy en día, los católicos pueden sentirse desamparados políticamente, percibiendo que ningún partido político y muy pocos candidatos comparten plenamente nuestro compromiso integral con la vida y dignidad humanas. Esto no debe desanimarnos. Por el contrario, hace más urgente nuestra obligación de actuar. Los

laicos católicos necesitan actuar según los principios morales de la Iglesia e involucrarse más: presentándose como candidatos, trabajando dentro de los partidos políticos y transmitiendo sus preocupaciones a quienes ocupan funciones públicas. Incluso quienes no pueden votar deben hacer oír sus voces respecto a cuestiones que afectan su vida y el bien común. Ser ciudadanos fieles es una responsabilidad permanente, no un deber sólo durante los años de elecciones.

¿CÓMO PUEDE LA DOCTRINA SOCIAL CATÓLICA AYUDAR A GUIAR NUESTRA PARTICIPACIÓN?

En palabras del papa Francisco, "para avanzar en esta construcción de un pueblo en paz, justicia y fraternidad, hay cuatro principios relacionados con tensiones bipolares propias de toda realidad social. Brotan de los grandes postulados de la Doctrina Social de la Iglesia, los cuales constituyen 'el primer y fundamental parámetro de referencia para la interpretación y la valoración de los fenómenos sociales'".³ Los cuatro principios son la dignidad de la persona humana, el bien común, la subsidiariedad y la solidaridad. Tomados en conjunto, estos principios proporcionan un marco moral para la participación católica en el fomento de lo que hemos denominado una "ética uniforme hacia la vida" (*Vivir el Evangelio de la Vida*, no. 23).

Entendida correctamente, esta ética ni trata todas las cuestiones como equivalentes moralmente ni reduce la doctrina católica a una o dos cuestiones. Ancla el compromiso católico de defender la vida humana y otros derechos humanos, desde la concepción hasta la muerte natural, a la obligación moral fundamental de respetar la dignidad de cada persona como hijo o hija de Dios.

Los votantes católicos deberían usar la doctrina católica para examinar las posiciones de los candidatos respecto a las cuestiones, y deberían considerar la integridad, filosofía y desempeño de los candidatos. Es importante que todos los ciudadanos "vayan más allá de la política partidista, que analicen las promesas de la campañas con un ojo crítico y que escojan sus dirigentes políticos según su principio, no su afiliación política o el interés propio" (*Vivir el Evangelio de la Vida*, no. 34). El siguiente resumen de los cuatro principios resalta varios temas de la doctrina social católica para una consideración especial: **derechos humanos y responsabilidades, respeto por el trabajo y los derechos de los trabajadores, cuidado de la creación de Dios y la opción preferencial por los pobres y vulnerables.**⁴

La dignidad de la persona humana

La vida humana es sagrada porque cada persona es creada a imagen y semejanza de Dios. Hay una rica y multifacética doctrina católica sobre la dignidad humana que se resume en el *Compendio de la doctrina social de la Iglesia*. Cada persona "debe ser comprendida siempre en su irrepetible e insuprimible singularidad... Esto impone, ante todo, no sólo la exigencia del simple respeto por parte de todos, y especialmente de las instituciones políticas y sociales y de sus responsables, en relación a cada hombre de este mundo, sino que además, y en mayor medida, comporta que el primer compromiso de cada uno hacia el otro, y sobre todo de estas mismas instituciones, se debe situar en la promoción del desarrollo integral de la persona" (no. 131). Continúa el *Compendio*, "El respeto de la dignidad humana no puede absolutamente prescindir

de la obediencia al principio de ‘considerar al prójimo como otro yo, cuidando en primer lugar de su vida y de los medios necesarios para vivirla dignamente’ (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 27). Es preciso que todos los programas sociales, científicos y culturales, estén presididos por la conciencia del primado de cada ser humano”.⁵

Subsidiariedad

Es imposible promover la dignidad de la persona si no se cuidan la familia, los grupos, las asociaciones, las realidades territoriales locales, en suma, aquellas comunidades de tipo económico, social, cultural, recreativo, profesional, político a las que las personas dan vida espontáneamente y que hacen posible su efectivo crecimiento social.⁶ La familia, fundada en el matrimonio entre un hombre y una mujer, es la unidad fundamental de la sociedad. Este santuario para la creación y crianza de los niños no debe ser redefinido, socavado o descuidado. Apoyar a las familias debe ser una prioridad de las políticas económicas y sociales. La forma en que nuestra sociedad se organiza —en la economía y la política, en la legislación y en las políticas públicas— afecta el bienestar de los individuos y de la sociedad. Cada persona y cada asociación tienen el derecho y el deber de participar en la formación de la sociedad para promover el bienestar de los individuos y el bien común.

El principio de subsidiariedad nos recuerda que las instituciones más grandes de la sociedad no deberían abrumar o interferir con las instituciones más pequeñas o de carácter local; sin embargo, las instituciones más grandes tienen responsabilidades esenciales cuando las instituciones más locales no pueden adecuadamente proteger la dignidad humana, responder a las necesidades humanas y promover el bien común.⁷

El bien común

El bien común está compuesto por “el conjunto de condiciones de la vida social que hacen posible a las asociaciones y a cada uno de sus miembros el logro más pleno y más fácil de la propia perfección”.⁸

La dignidad humana es respetada y el bien común promovido sólo si se protegen los derechos humanos y se cumplen las responsabilidades básicas. Cada ser humano tiene el derecho a la vida, el derecho a la libertad religiosa y el derecho a tener acceso a aquellas cosas que requiere la decencia humana: alimento y albergue, educación y trabajo, cuidado médico y vivienda. A estos derechos les corresponden obligaciones y responsabilidades, para con los demás, nuestras familias y la sociedad en general.

La economía debe estar al servicio de la gente y no al contrario. Un sistema económico debe servir a la dignidad de la persona humana y al bien común mediante el respeto de la dignidad del trabajo y la protección de los derechos de los trabajadores. La justicia económica exige un trabajo decente con salarios justos y dignos, un programa de legalización amplio y justo que ofrezca un camino a la ciudadanía a los trabajadores inmigrantes, y la oportunidad para que todas las personas trabajen juntas por el bien común a través de su trabajo, propiedad, iniciativa, inversión, participación en sindicatos y otras formas de actividad económica. Los trabajadores también tienen responsabilidades: realizar el trabajo que corresponde a un salario justo, tratar con respeto a los empleadores y compañeros de trabajo y llevar a cabo su trabajo de tal manera que contribuya al bien común. Los trabajadores, los empleadores y los sindicatos deberían no sólo promover sus propios intereses, sino también trabajar juntos para promover la justicia económica y el bienestar de todos.

Tenemos el deber de cuidar la creación de Dios, o como el papa Francisco se refiere a ella en *Laudato Si'*, “nuestra casa común”.⁹ Todos estamos llamados a cuidar responsablemente de la creación de Dios y asegurar un ambiente seguro y hospitalario para los seres humanos vulnerables ahora y en el futuro. El papa Francisco, en coherencia con San Juan Pablo II y con el papa Benedicto XVI (Mensajes para la Jornada Mundial de la Paz en 1990 y 2010), ha destacado la contaminación, el cambio climático, la falta de acceso al agua potable y la pérdida de biodiversidad como retos particulares. El papa Francisco habla de una “deuda ecológica” (no. 51) contraída por los países más ricos con las naciones en desarrollo. Y nos llama a todos a una “conversión ecológica” (no. 219), “que implica dejar brotar todas las consecuencias de [nuestro] encuentro con Jesucristo en las relaciones con el mundo

que [nos] rodea”.¹⁰ De hecho, esta preocupación por la “ecología natural” es una parte indispensable de la “ecología humana” más amplia, que abarca no sólo las dimensiones materiales, sino también las morales y sociales.

Solidaridad

La solidaridad es “la *determinación firme y perseverante* de empeñarse por el bien común; es decir, por el bien de todos y cada uno, para que todos seamos verdaderamente responsables *de todos*”. Se encuentra en “la entrega por el bien del prójimo, que está dispuesto a ‘perdersé’, en sentido evangélico, por el otro en lugar de explotarlo, y a ‘servirlo’ en lugar de oprimirlo para el propio provecho”.¹¹

Somos una sola familia humana, independientemente de nuestras diferencias nacionales, raciales, étnicas, económicas e ideológicas. Nuestro compromiso católico con la solidaridad requiere de nosotros buscar la justicia, eliminar el racismo, poner fin a la trata de personas, proteger los derechos humanos, buscar la paz y evitar el uso de la fuerza excepto como un último recurso necesario.

De manera especial nuestra solidaridad debe expresarse en la **opción preferencial por los pobres y vulnerables**. Una prueba moral para la sociedad es la forma en que tratamos a los más débiles entre nosotros: los no nacidos, los que lidian con discapacidades o enfermedades terminales, los pobres y los marginados.

CONCLUSIÓN

A la luz de la doctrina católica, los obispos repiten vigorosamente su llamado a un tipo renovado de política que se enfoque en los principios morales, la promoción de la vida y dignidad humanas y la búsqueda del bien común. La participación política en este espíritu refleja no sólo la doctrina social de nuestra Iglesia, sino las mejores tradiciones de nuestra nación.

Notas

1. *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica*, nos. 1913-15.
2. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 25.
3. *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 221.
4. Estos principios se han extraído de una rica tradición descrita en mayor profundidad en el *Compendio de la doctrina social de la Iglesia*, del Consejo Pontificio “Justicia y Paz” (Bogotá, Colombia: CELAM, 2006), no. 160. Para obtener más información sobre estos principios, véase *Formando la conciencia para ser ciudadanos fieles*, 2016, nos. 40ss.
5. *Compendio de la doctrina social de la Iglesia*, no. 132. Este resumen representa solamente algunos aspectos destacados de la exposición más completa sobre la persona humana en el *Compendio de la doctrina social de la Iglesia*. Para una exposición más completa, véanse especialmente los nos. 124-159, donde se tratan muchos otros aspectos importantes de la dignidad humana.
6. *Compendio de la doctrina social de la Iglesia*, no. 185.
7. *Centesimus Annus*, no. 48; *Dignitatis Humanae*, nos. 4-6.
8. *Compendio de la doctrina social de la Iglesia*, no. 164.
9. *Laudato Si'*, no. 77.
10. *Laudato Si'*, no. 217.
11. *Compendio de la doctrina social de la Iglesia*, no. 193 (Véase Mt 10:40-42, 20:25; Mc 10:42-45; Lc 22:25-27).

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Part II: Our Call As Catholic Citizens

The following resources can be found at:

(English)

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/The-Challenge-of-Forming-Consciences-for-Faithful-Citizenship-Part-2.pdf>

(Spanish)

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/The-Challenge-of-Forming-Consciences-for-Faithful-Citizenship-Part-2-Spanish.pdf>

The above resources are displayed in the following pages.

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."² 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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El reto de formar la conciencia para ser ciudadanos fieles



Parte II de II: Tomar decisiones morales y aplicar nuestros principios

Este breve documento es la Segunda parte de un resumen de la reflexión de los obispos de los Estados Unidos *Formando la conciencia para ser ciudadanos fieles*, que complementa la enseñanza de los obispos en las diócesis y las conferencias estatales de obispos católicos.

La Primera parte del resumen de la reflexión de los obispos de los Estados Unidos *Formando la conciencia para ser ciudadanos fieles*, examinó los principios básicos que subyacen a la participación católica en el ámbito político. La Segunda parte es un examen del proceso por el cual estos principios se aplican al acto de votar y tomar posiciones sobre cuestiones políticas. Comienza con la consideración general de la naturaleza de la conciencia y el papel de la prudencia. La aplicación de un juicio prudencial no significa que todas las opciones sean válidas por igual, o que la orientación de los obispos y la de otros líderes de la Iglesia sea simplemente otra opción política o que sea una preferencia política entre otras muchas. Más bien, exhortamos a los católicos a que escuchen cuidadosamente a los maestros de la Iglesia cuando aplican la doctrina social católica a propuestas y situaciones específicas.

¿CÓMO AYUDA LA IGLESIA A LOS FIELES CATÓLICOS A HABLAR DE LAS CUESTIONES POLÍTICAS Y SOCIALES?

Una conciencia bien formada

La Iglesia prepara a sus miembros para abordar las cuestiones políticas ayudándolos a desarrollar una conciencia bien formada. “La conciencia moral es un juicio de la razón por el que la persona humana reconoce la cualidad moral de un acto concreto . . . [Cada ser humano] está obligado a seguir fielmente lo que sabe que es justo y recto” (*Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica*, no. 1778). Los católicos tenemos la obligación permanente de formar nuestra conciencia de acuerdo con la razón humana, iluminada por la enseñanza de Cristo tal como viene a nosotros a través de la Iglesia.

La virtud de la prudencia

La Iglesia también anima a los católicos a desarrollar la virtud de la prudencia, que nos posibilita “discernir en toda circunstancia nuestro verdadero bien y a elegir los medios rectos para realizarlo” (*Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica*, no. 1806). La prudencia forma e informa nuestra capacidad para deliberar sobre las alternativas disponibles, identificar cuál es la más adecuada en un contexto específico y actuar decisivamente. La prudencia debe ir acompañada de la valentía, que nos llama a actuar. Al buscar el avance del bien común, los católicos debemos discernir cuidadosamente qué políticas públicas son moralmente sólidas. A veces los católicos pueden elegir diferentes formas de responder a los problemas sociales, pero no podemos alejarnos de nuestra obligación de proteger la vida y dignidad humanas y ayudar a construir, a través de medios morales, un mundo más justo y pacífico.

Hacer el bien y evitar el mal

Hay cosas que nunca debemos hacer, ni como individuos ni como sociedad, porque estas son siempre incompatibles con el amor a Dios y al prójimo. Estos actos intrínsecamente malos siempre

se deben rechazar y nunca apoyar. Un ejemplo claro es quitar intencionadamente la vida de un ser humano inocente, como en el aborto provocado. Del mismo modo, la clonación humana, la investigación destructiva de embriones humanos y otros actos que violan directamente la santidad y dignidad de la vida humana, como el genocidio, la tortura y atentar contra los no combatientes en actos terroristas o de guerra, jamás pueden ser justificados. Las violaciones de la dignidad humana, tales como los actos de racismo, tratar a los trabajadores como meros medios para un fin, someter deliberadamente a los trabajadores a condiciones de vida infrahumanas, tratar a los pobres como objetos desechables, o redefinir el matrimonio para negar su significado esencial, tampoco pueden ser jamás justificadas.

La oposición a actos intrínsecamente malos también nos mueve a reconocer nuestro deber positivo de contribuir al bien común y de actuar solidariamente para con los necesitados. Tanto oponerse al mal como hacer el bien son esenciales. Como dijo San Juan Pablo II, “El hecho de que solamente los mandamientos negativos obliguen siempre y en toda circunstancia, no significa que, en la vida moral, las prohibiciones sean más importantes que el compromiso de hacer el bien, como indican los mandamientos positivos”.¹ El derecho básico a la vida implica y está ligado a otros derechos humanos, tales como el derecho a los bienes que toda persona necesita para vivir y desarrollarse, como el alimento, la vivienda, el cuidado médico, la educación y un trabajo digno.

Evitar dos tentaciones

Dos tentaciones en la vida pública pueden distorsionar la defensa que hace la Iglesia de la vida y dignidad humanas: La primera es una equivalencia moral que no hace distinciones éticas entre las diferentes clases de cuestiones que tratan la vida y dignidad humanas. La destrucción directa e intencionada de la vida de personas inocentes, desde el momento de la concepción hasta la muerte natural, es siempre mala y no es simplemente una cuestión entre muchas otras. Siempre debe ser rechazada. La segunda es el uso indebido de estas distinciones morales necesarias como una manera de rechazar o ignorar otras amenazas serias a la vida y dignidad humanas. El racismo y otras discriminaciones injustas; el uso de la pena de muerte; recurrir a una guerra injusta; la degradación del medio ambiente; el uso de la tortura; los crímenes de guerra; la pornografía; la trata de personas; la redefinición del matrimonio civil; la falta de acción para responder a los que sufren a causa del hambre o la falta de cuidado sanitario o de vivienda; la puesta en peligro de la libertad religiosa; o políticas inmigratorias injustas son todas ellas cuestiones morales serias que retan a nuestra conciencia y requieren que actuemos.

Tomar decisiones morales

Los obispos no dicen a los católicos cómo votar; la responsabilidad de tomar decisiones políticas recae en cada persona y su conciencia bien formada, apoyada por la prudencia. Este ejercicio de la conciencia comienza con oponerse siempre a las políticas que violan la vida humana o debilitan su protección.

Cuando ya existen leyes moralmente defectuosas, se necesita un juicio prudencial para determinar cómo hacer lo que es posible para restablecer la justicia —aunque sea parcial o gradualmente— sin abandonar nunca un compromiso moral con la plena protección de toda la vida humana desde la concepción hasta la muerte natural (véase San Juan Pablo II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 73).

El juicio prudencial también es necesario para determinar la mejor manera de promover el bien común en áreas tales como la vivienda, el cuidado médico y la inmigración. Cuando los líderes de la Iglesia formulan juicios sobre cómo aplicar la doctrina católica a políticas específicas, esto puede no tener la misma autoridad vinculante que los principios morales universales, pero no puede ser descartado como una opinión política entre otras. Estas aplicaciones morales deben informar las conciencias y guiar las acciones de los católicos.

Como católicos, no votamos basándonos en una sola cuestión. La posición de un candidato respecto a una sola cuestión no es suficiente para garantizar el apoyo del votante. Sin embargo, la posición de un candidato respecto a una sola cuestión relacionada con un mal intrínseco, como el apoyo al aborto legal o la promoción del racismo, puede llevar legítimamente al votante a descalificar a un candidato y no darle su apoyo.

¿QUÉ POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS DEBEN PREOCUPAR MÁS A LOS CATÓLICOS?

Como católicos, estamos llamados a plantear preguntas sobre la vida política que vayan más allá de las que se concentran en el bienestar material individual. Nos enfocamos más ampliamente en lo que protege o amenaza la dignidad humana de cada vida humana. La doctrina católica reta a los votantes y a los candidatos, a los ciudadanos y a los funcionarios públicos a considerar las dimensiones morales y éticas de las cuestiones de política pública. A la luz de los principios éticos, nosotros, los obispos, ofrecemos los siguientes objetivos políticos que esperamos guiarán a los católicos a medida que estos formen su conciencia y reflexionen sobre las dimensiones morales de sus opciones públicas:

- Tratar el requisito supremo de proteger la **vida humana** restringiendo y poniendo fin a la destrucción de los niños no nacidos mediante el aborto provocado y proporcionando a las mujeres en crisis de embarazo los apoyos que necesiten. Poner fin a las siguientes prácticas: el uso de la eutanasia y el suicidio asistido para tratar el peso de la enfermedad y la incapacidad; la destrucción de embriones humanos en nombre de la ciencia; el uso de la pena de muerte para combatir el crimen; y recurrir imprudentemente a la guerra para tratar disputas internacionales.
- Proteger el concepto fundamental del **matrimonio** como la unión fiel y para toda la vida de un hombre y una mujer y como la institución central de la sociedad; promover la complementariedad de los sexos y rechazar las falsas ideologías de “género”; y ofrecer un mejor apoyo a la vida familiar moral, social y económicamente, de manera que nuestra nación ayude a los padres de familia a criar a sus hijos inculcando en ellos el respeto a la vida, valores morales sólidos y una ética de corresponsabilidad y responsabilidad.
- Conseguir una **reforma migratoria** comprensiva que ofrezca un camino a la ciudadanía, trate a los trabajadores inmigrantes con justicia, impida la separación de las familias, mantenga la integridad de nuestras fronteras, respete el estado de derecho y se preocupe por los factores que fuerzan a las personas a abandonar sus países de origen.

- Ayudar a las familias y a los niños a salir de la **pobreza**, asegurando el acceso y opciones a la **educación**, así como un puesto de trabajo con salarios justos que permitan vivir y asistencia adecuada para los más vulnerables de nuestra nación, a la vez que también se ayuda a derrotar el hambre y la pobreza tan extendidos por el mundo, especialmente en las áreas de asistencia al desarrollo, alivio de la deuda externa y el comercio internacional.
- Asegurar la plena protección de la libertad de conciencia y la **libertad religiosa** de las personas y grupos para responder a las necesidades sociales, y así posibilitar que las familias, grupos comunitarios, estructuras económicas y gobiernos trabajen juntos para superar la pobreza, buscar el bien común y cuidar de la creación.
- Proveer **cuidado médico** a la vez que se respeta la vida humana, la dignidad humana y la libertad religiosa en nuestro sistema de salud.
- Continuar oponiéndose a políticas que reflejan racismo, hostilidad hacia los inmigrantes, intolerancia religiosa y otras formas de **discriminación injusta**.
- Establecer y cumplir con los límites morales concernientes al uso de la **fuerza militar** —examinando con qué propósitos se puede usar, bajo qué autoridad y qué costo humano conllevará— con miras especialmente a buscar una respuesta responsable y eficaz para poner fin a la persecución de los cristianos y otras minorías religiosas en el Medio Oriente y otras partes del mundo.
- Unirse a otros en **todo el mundo** para buscar la paz, proteger los derechos humanos y la libertad religiosa, y progresar en la justicia económica y en el cuidado de la creación.

Notas

1. *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 52.

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Do's And Don'ts

Please keep in mind the following regarding political activity, restrictions and the exercising of our civic rights and duties.

Under federal law, parishes and other non-profit, IRS-designated section 501(c)(3) church organizations are prohibited from participating in political campaign activity.²² Certain political activities that are entirely appropriate for individuals may not be undertaken by church organizations or their representatives.²³ (Note: There is a misperception that President Trump removed this restriction – commonly known as the Johnson Amendment – by executive order in 2017. That order only limited enforcement of the law.)

For quick reference, please review the USCCB's complete list of [Do's and Don'ts Guidelines During Election Season](#) and a list of more [detailed guidance](#) regarding political activity provided by the USCCB Office of General Counsel. An abbreviated list of “Do's and Don'ts” for those acting on behalf of the non-profit entity are as follows:

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR PARISHES/MINISTRIES

DO:

- Address the moral and human dimensions of public issues.
- Share church teaching on human life, human rights, and justice and peace.
- Apply Catholic values to legislation and public issues.
- Conduct a non-partisan voter registration drive on church property.
- Distribute unbiased candidate questionnaires covering issues of human life, justice, and peace that have been reviewed and approved by your diocesan attorney.
- Check with the diocese's attorney if you have any questions about what is appropriate.

DON'T:

- Endorse or oppose candidates for political office.
- Distribute partisan campaign literature under church auspices.
- Arrange for groups to work for a candidate for public office.

²² 501(c)(3) prohibits the tax-exempt organization, not individuals, from participation or intervention in a political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate.

²³ The law requires that, when acting in your individual capacity, that you “do not in any way utilize the organization's financial resources, facilities or personnel, and clearly and unambiguously indicate that the actions taken or statements made are those of the individuals and not the organization.”

- Invite only selected candidates to address your church-sponsored group.
- Conduct voter registration slanted toward one party.
- Distribute a biased candidate survey.

This guidance is also reiterated in the diocese's Code of Ethics:

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Abortion

A Statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Thirtieth Anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*

A Matter of the Heart: On the 30th Anniversary of Roe vs. Wade

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/abortion/a-matter-of-the-heart-on-the-30th-anniversary-of-roe-vs-wade>

Racism

A Pastoral Letter Against Racism

Open Wide Our Hearts

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/open-wide-our-hearts.pdf>

“Gender Theory” / “Gender Ideology”

Teaching Resource

USCCB Select Teaching Resources

https://www.usccb.org/resources/Gender-Ideology-Select-Teaching-Resources_0.pdf

Immigration

Parish Resource

Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/catholic-teaching-on-immigration-and-the-movement-of-peoples>