

ELECTIONS 2006 & THE CATHOLIC VOTER

We Americans find ourselves once again in another election year. Even though this isn't a Presidential election, nonetheless, there are some very important decisions to be made. Catholics, like all other citizens, are bound by duty and responsibility to cast their vote. For the Catholic, however, that duty must be met in the context of the light of reason and faith as taught by the Catholic Church. The power of a single vote can be enormous and no vote should ever be cast without regard for its consequence and implications.

Ethical Principles and Individual Judgment

There are numerous political decisions that call for us to use our best judgment. Applying moral and ethical principles to decision making and utilizing good judgment first requires that we have an informed conscience. Good political moral judgment does not simply come intuitively. It comes from familiarity with and understanding of the Church's social teachings. Catholics can and will have legitimate differences of opinion about how to achieve worthy political goals, like the best means to legally defend all human life or the best means to improve immigration policy. The following are key themes in Catholic social teaching that all Catholics should be well familiar with:

Quotes from the USCCB Report

Major Catholic Statements on Public Life and Moral Issues

Faithful Citizen

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, each person's life and dignity must be respected, whether that person is an innocent unborn child in a mother's womb, whether that person worked in the World Trade Center or a market in Baghdad, or even whether that person is a convicted criminal on death row. We believe that every human life is sacred from conception to natural death.

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The human person is not only sacred, but social. The God-given institutions of marriage--a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman--and family are central and serve as the foundations for social life. Marriage and family should be supported and strengthened, not undermined. Every person has a right to participate in social, economic, and political life and a corresponding duty to work for the advancement of the common good and the well-being of all, especially the poor and weak.

Rights and Responsibilities

Every person has a fundamental right to life--the right that makes all other rights possible. Each person also has a right to the conditions for living a decent life—faith and family life, food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

The Church calls on all of us to embrace this preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, to embody it in our lives, and to work to have it shape public policies and priorities. A fundamental measure of our society is how we care for and stand with the poor and vulnerable.

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's act of creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers, owners, and others must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and choose to join a union, to economic initiative, and to ownership and private property. These rights must be exercised in ways that advance the common good.

Solidarity

We are one human family. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we be "sentinels of peace" in a world wounded by violence and conflict.

Caring for God's Creation

The world that God created has been entrusted to us. Our use of it must be directed by God's plan for creation, not simply for our own benefit. Our stewardship of the Earth is a form of participation in God's act of creating and sustaining the world. In our use of creation, we must be guided by a concern for generations to come. We show our respect for the Creator by our care for creation.

Common Good and the Role of Conscience

Fundamentally as Catholics we approach our political decision making focused on the interests of the common good and the dignity of the human person first and foremost. We come to understand the full meaning of service to the principles through the lens of both faith and reason. We believe that all people of good will can and should strive to build a society that places the best interests of all its people at center stage. We also recognize that others in a pluralistic society do not necessarily share our faith perspective.

As in all moral matters, one's conscience needs to be the guiding force in decision-making and selectively choosing one candidate over another. Conscience is that inner voice in all people that distinguishes right from wrong. All of us have the responsibility to become more familiar with the teachings of the Church on the moral and ethical issues of the day in order to properly form our consciences according to the light of what is true and good.

According to our conscience, we know that we must always choose good and avoid evil. Abortion, physician assisted suicide, and euthanasia are examples of choices that are always and everywhere wrong. We know that these actions and support of them run contrary to God's will for human society. It may be that no political candidate entirely reflects the Church's teaching on these and other important matters. In those cases, Catholic moral teaching recognizes that it is possible to choose a candidate who can be expected to the least harm when confronted with no other reasonable alternative. Voting is a right and responsibility we cannot forgo, even when confronted with moral dilemmas. Make every effort to educate yourself about the candidates and other issues in order to make the best judgment possible for our State and our nation.

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