



DOCESE OF KALAMAZOO

Supplement to “Letting Faith Form our Conscience”

Steps to help form conscience
in preparation for exercising our civic responsibility to vote:

- 1. *Pray:*** As the life of grace requires, we are to have daily contact and conversation with Almighty God, and so prayer is an indispensable part of forming one’s conscience. Genuine prayer opens our minds and hearts to know the Truth—what is of God and what is not.
- 2. *Examine Candidates and Issues:*** After prayerful consideration, look directly at policies being promoted by examining each candidates’ own words and actions from objective sources, not just based on political opponents’ statements. Platforms of political parties (usually heavily influenced by presidential candidates) need to be read and understood, as they chart the course a candidate or party intends to follow if elected. Consider the candidate’s actual influence and competence over the issues, as the influence of the President is not the same as the County Water Commissioner. It is important to remember that political ads, political analysis, political opinion pieces offer no guarantee of truth or accuracy regarding the candidate and issues, and it is important to examine the resources used and political slant of any news organization from which you get information. Finally, it should be kept in mind that third party candidates may have valuable positions to be considered. In all things, we must choose candidates and parties that reflect best the moral teachings of the Church.
- 3. *Discern according to Jesus’ Teaching:*** The Church’s teaching is, by definition, Jesus’ teaching, and is the only repository guaranteed by the Gift of the Holy Spirit, and therefore unchanging. As Catholics, we need to understand the teachings of the Church on all of the issues at play in the political realm, and weigh the issues according to what Christ teaches through the Church’s moral and social teaching. This includes understanding identifying issues that are morally intrinsically evil, assessing proportionality in voting the issues, and consideration of other moral issues (see below). It

would be helpful to seek out others who may have a greater knowledge of the moral teachings of the Church, who “think with the Church” and not the popular and political thinking in vogue at the moment.

4. **Charity Above All:** Our Lord always calls us to a life of virtue, and our political convictions and emotions are never to be allowed to compromise the charity we owe, even to those we dislike or who might hold very different positions. When discussing politics and speaking with others, especially those who do not agree with you, charity must always to guide what we say and how we treat others. As disciples of Jesus, we should never belittle others or treat them with less than their human dignity deserves.
5. **A Catholic Christian First:** As baptized Catholics, our existence is defined by our relationship with Christ in the Church, not by political or social groups or movements that are part of the “passing” world. For this reason, our faith must form and direct our decisions when voting. We must actively guard against the influence of any political party, activist group, or mass media on how to interpret Catholic teachings, and, subsequently, in dictating how to cast your vote.
6. **Vote your Conscience:** By conforming our minds and hearts to Jesus’ teaching in the Church, our consciences continue to be formed in a way pleasing to God. A well-formed conscience in this way provides the best basis for a conscientious and morally-sound participation in the elections process.

Intrinsic Evil – An act or intention that by its very nature is not in conformity with Divine Law. (Fr. John Hardon, *Modern Catholic Dictionary*; read more in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*)

Voting on these issues: One should never vote in direct support of an intrinsically evil issue. The only way to vote for a candidate who does support one of these intrinsically evil issues, is if the other candidate supports an intrinsically evil issue that is proportionately more grave. (see Proportionate Reasoning)

Voting Issues that are Intrinsic Evils: In order of importance, abortion, euthanasia, death penalty, embryonic research, human cloning, genocide, policies treating employees as a mere means to an end, policies that enshrine

racism, redefinition of marriage, torture, targeting of non-combatant's during war (see USCCB "Forming Consciences a Guide to Voting")

Other Moral Issues:

There are many moral issues the conscientious Catholic should be concerned about, these include: protection of the poor and vulnerable, just and compassionate immigration reform, dignity of work and rights of workers, religious liberty, and stewardship of God's creation. Within these moral issues there can be disagreements and variances in how best to implement these policies, and in what ways we can have the greatest and most long-lasting effects on these issues. While these issues do not hold the same weight as the intrinsically evil issues, they should play an important role in determining how we vote. When there are candidates that either do not support an intrinsic evil or have proportional intrinsic evil issues, these areas need to be weighted proportionally in order to determine the best candidate.

Proportionate Reasoning: When determining proportionate moral choices within multiple candidates, one must first make sure they are comparing levels of morality. To use proportionate reasoning the hierarchy of morality comes into play, starting with those moral issues that are intrinsic evils. Thus, an intrinsic evil always outweighs all other moral issues. For example, human cloning, always outweighs issues of how to handle immigration. Within the moral issues, proportionality mandates that when comparing the issues, we must consider: how many people are affected, future implications, and policy influence.

Intention and Character:

While the character of a candidate is important, we must avoid making rash judgments. Accusing someone of being a "racist", a "sexist", or any other accusation are frequently used in this current climate and are often used as political rhetoric. People's true characters are only known by those close to them. We must be careful to understand the lens through which candidates are portrayed. We need to focus more on objective evidence of how a candidate supports, or does not support, morally important issues.

Platforms for Presidential Candidates in Michigan:

Democrat Platform

<https://bit.ly/2GdHKIV>

Republican Platform (note the 2020 republican platform was voted to remain the same as 2016)

<https://bit.ly/34cymab>

Libertarian Platform

<https://www.lp.org/platform/>

US Taxpayer Party Platform

<https://www.ustpm.org/about-the-ustpm/ustpm-platform>

Green Party Platform

<https://www.gp.org/platform>

Natural Law Party

<https://www.natural-law.org/platform/index.html>