



REFLECTIONS ON CHOOSING POLITICAL CANDIDATES

SACREDNESS OF HUMAN LIFE

"In *Rejoice and Be Glad* [Gaudete et Exsultate], Pope Francis writes: The call to holiness 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."

Introductory Letter, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, 2019

APPLYING A CONSISTENT MORAL FRAMEWORK

"Pope Francis has continued to draw attention to important issues such as migration, xenophobia, racism, abortion, global conflict, and care for creation. In the United States and around the world, many challenges demand our attention.

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

Introductory Letter, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, 2019



PRUDENTIAL DISCERNMENT

"The Church's teaching is clear that a good end does not justify an immoral means. As we all seek to advance the common good—by defending the inviolable sanctity of human life from the moment of conception until natural death, by promoting religious freedom, by defending marriage, by feeding the hungry and housing the homeless, by welcoming the immigrant and protecting the environment—it is important to recognize that not all possible courses of action are morally acceptable. We have a responsibility to discern carefully which public policies are morally sound. Catholics may choose different ways to respond to compelling social problems, but we cannot differ on our moral obligation to help build a more just and peaceful world through morally acceptable means, so that the weak and vulnerable are protected and human rights and dignity are defended."

#20 Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

SERVE AS MODELS OF CIVIL DIALOGUE

"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."

Introductory Letter, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, 2019

What is the candidate's commitment to protect all human life, from conception to natural death?

What is the candidate's commitment to addressing threats to marriage and family, as understood by the Church, as well as other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism and other unjust discrimination, the use of the death penalty, resorting to unjust war, the use of torture, war crimes, the failure to respond to those who are suffering from hunger or a lack of health care, or an unjust immigration policy?

How does the candidate measure up in both words and actions with the totality of Catholic Social Teaching?

What would be morally grave reasons to support and/or oppose a candidate? (Please refer to the U.S. Bishops document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, paragraphs 34 through 37).

What is my assessment of the candidate's personal integrity, governing philosophy, performance and ability to influence a given issue?

Has the candidate demonstrated sufficient competency to hold such an elected position?

**We encourage prayerful reflection upon reading the entire *Faithful Citizenship* statement which can be found at:
www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship**



A message on the upcoming election from Bishop Edward Malesic

Once again, we find ourselves in a very polarized election cycle with candidates that do not reflect the complete breadth of Catholic moral teaching. Yet, it is our solemn duty as citizens of our republic to cast a vote for the candidate who best supports the greatest ideals and moral teachings of our Catholic faith, the faith that we hold and practice as the means of our personal salvation and as a benefit for the common good of the pluralistic society in which we live.

In casting our ballot, whether for those already proposed by a particular party or for those we choose to write in, we must have properly formed consciences. A properly formed conscience comes through prayer, Scripture and studying the teaching of the Church that is promoted and protected by the apostles and their successors, the bishops. This well-formed conscience seeks to understand the truth and allows itself to be guided by the Holy Spirit. A well-formed conscience is devoted to doing God's will more than it is to supporting any particular political party.

As such, I wanted to write this letter to help you in forming your conscience in preparation for the vote that you will soon cast.

Our bishops have said, and I agree with them, that "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." (See the new introductory letter found in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, which can be found online at www.usccb.org.)

The consistent teaching of the Church regarding the intrinsic evil of abortion seeks to secure all other rights as well. We are not a "single issue" Church; there are other extremely important rights that we must defend, to be sure; but these additional rights flow from and are rooted in the fundamental right to life itself.

St. Pope John Paul II stated, "Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights – for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture – is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination." (*Christifideles laici*, No. 38)

Our bishops noted in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, "A Catholic voter cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, 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. . . . At the same time, a voter should not use a candidate's opposition to an intrinsic evil to justify indifference or inattentiveness to other important moral issues involving human life and dignity." (#34)

When we cast our vote, we must not remain indifferent to those positions and policies that would negatively impact religious freedoms, erode the traditional family, or make it difficult for the poor to access adequate education, housing and healthcare. We must carefully consider how to fix our broken immigration system, address the worldwide refugee crisis, preserve our natural resources, protect the environment and strive for humane solutions to global conflict and terrorism.

But, to be clear, although there are many causes our Church stands for and is vocal about, the right to life itself must be given our paramount consideration so that people can have the chance to secure all the other benefits that life can afford.

I humbly ask that you take my thoughts into consideration as you prepare to cast your ballot in the near future. Please ask the Holy Spirit to guide your decision, having before all else the desire to secure the common good for our nation and to do God's will in all things. I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me as we make our choice of civil leadership, hopefully with well-formed consciences. And, let us all pray for those who are running for election this cycle. May the Lord inspire them to be the best that they can be for all of us, for our nation and for our world.

May God bless you and those you love. I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus

The Most Reverend Edward C. Malesic, JCL
Bishop of the Diocese of Cleveland