

FORMING A GOOD CATHOLIC CONSCIENCE FOR VOTING

ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK

OFFICE OF PUBLIC POLICY

This information is offered to the people of the Archdiocese of New York, to help them in forming a good Catholic conscience in order to vote. It is not intended to express or imply endorsement or opposition to any candidate or party, but is a guide to those who wish to make good moral decisions in the voting booth. The principal source is the document issued by the United States Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (2015).

WHAT IS CONSCIENCE AND HOW DO WE FORM IT PROPERLY?

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. Rather, conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil." (*Faithful Citizenship* 17)

"The formation of conscience includes several elements. There is a desire to embrace goodness and truth. For Catholics this begins with a willingness and openness to seek the truth and what is right by studying Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church as contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In addition, prayerful reflection is essential to discern the will of God. Catholics must also understand that if they fail to form their consciences they can make erroneous judgments." (*Faithful Citizenship* 18)

"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, *The Participation of Catholics in Political Life* 4)

"The fact that much of our political rhetoric has become very negative and that political polarization seems to have grown should not dissuade us from the high calling to work for a world that allows everyone to thrive, a world in which all persons, all families, have what they need to fulfill their God-given destiny... While people of good will may sometimes choose different ways to apply and act on some of our principles, Catholics cannot ignore their inescapable moral challenges or simply dismiss the Church's guidance or policy directions that flow from these principles." (*Faithful Citizenship* 63)

WHAT PRINCIPLES DOES THE CHURCH WANT ME TO FOLLOW IN FORMING MY CONSCIENCE FOR VOTING?

The Bishops of the United States have outlined four principles from that are relevant to forming conscience for voting (*Faithful Citizenship* 43-56):

- **The Dignity of the Human Person** – "Human life is sacred. The dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Direct attacks on innocent persons are never morally acceptable, at any stage or in any condition". (44) These attacks include abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, cloning, in vitro fertilization, and the destruction of human embryos for research.
- **Subsidiarity** – "The family-based on marriage between a man and a woman-is the first and fundamental unit of society and is a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. It should be defended and strengthened, not redefined, undermined, or further distorted." (46)
- **The Common Good** – "Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible, and a right to access those things required for human decency-food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life. The right to exercise religious freedom publicly and privately by individuals and institutions along with freedom of conscience need to be constantly defended." (49) The common good also requires that the economy serve people, and that we care for God's creation. (50-51)
- **Solidarity** – "We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences... Loving our neighbor has global dimensions and requires us to eradicate racism and address the extreme poverty and disease plaguing so much of the world. Solidarity also includes the scriptural call to welcome the stranger among us... [A] special emphasis must be given to the Church's preferential option for the poor." (52, 54)