



Catholic Conference
of Illinois

ELECTION 2020

Weigh Your Conscience Before Casting Your Ballot

On November 3, 2020, all Americans eligible to vote will have the opportunity to shape our form of government for the next two years and beyond. In the midst of the commotion surrounding elections, especially presidential races, it is worth taking time to reflect on how fortunate we are to live in a country where we are able to choose our leaders.

Before casting our ballot, we have the obligation to reflect on the issues affecting our state and our nation. To help guide us on the particular issues of concern to the Catholic Church, we offer the following as a reminder.

Millions of dollars are spent trying to influence how you will cast your ballot, so it is up to each of us to both form and inform our conscience by recalling the heart of the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

What do we mean when we refer to “conscience”? According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.” (1777)

We also offer the following passages from documents issued by Pope Francis and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“(A) harmful ideological error is found in those who find suspect the social engagement of others, seeing it as superficial, worldly, secular, materialist, communist or populist. Or they relativize it, as if there are other more important matters, or the only thing that counts is one particular ethical issue or cause that they themselves defend. Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, 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. We cannot uphold an ideal of holiness that would ignore injustice in a world where some revel, spend with abandon and live only for the latest consumer goods, even as others look on from afar, living their entire lives in abject poverty.

“We often hear it said that, with respect to relativism and the flaws of our present world, the situation of migrants, for example, is a lesser issue. Some Catholics consider it a secondary issue compared to the “grave” bioethical questions. That a politician looking for votes might say such a thing is understandable, but not a Christian, for whom the only proper attitude is to stand in the shoes of those brothers and sisters of ours who risk their lives to offer a future to their children.”

Rejoice and Be Glad (Gaudete et exsultate)ⁱ

“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.”

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenshipⁱⁱ

ELECTION 2020

Page 2

This note will not tell you who to vote for, but it will help you to reflect on the issues and the person that can best promote the common good for each office. **We ask that you keep in mind the following questions that stem from the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching:**

- Does the candidate work to protect sacred human life from conception to natural death? Does the candidate oppose abortion, physician-assisted suicide, capital punishment, human cloning and racism?
- Does the candidate care for God's creation? Does the candidate support policies that protect the planet and understand the importance of our stewardship of the Earth?
- Does the candidate recognize traditional marriage and family as the central social institutions that must be supported?
- Does the candidate recognize that every person has a fundamental right to life and to those things required for human decency, including food, water, shelter, employment and health care?
- Does the candidate embrace all those in greatest need who deserve our preferential concerns, such as children, the disabled, the elderly, refugees, the unemployed and the poor?
- Does the candidate recognize policies that promote basic rights for workers, such as fair wages, workplace safety, collective bargaining, and the right to private property and economic initiatives?
- Does the candidate recognize that whatever our national, racial, ethnic or ideological differences, we are all our brothers' and sisters' keepers? We must all work to create unity through dialogue and a civil discourse that is respectful to others.

#####

The Catholic Conference of Illinois was created in 1969 to serve as the public policy voice of the Illinois bishops and the six dioceses of the state: Belleville, Chicago, Joliet, Peoria, Rockford and Springfield-in-Illinois.

¹ http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html

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