



***Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship***  
**Considerations before heading to the polls**  
**A three-part series**

**Part 3: Applying a well-formed conscience in the voting booth and the public square**

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***"Conscience always requires serious attempts to make sound moral judgments based on the truths of our faith."***

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Bishops of the United States, USCCB, November 2007

Before casting our votes, we have a opportunity to exercise our consciences by carefully discerning which public policies are morally sound. A well-formed conscience recognizes that some courses of action are not acceptable.

We may choose different ways to respond to compelling social problems, but we cannot compromise basic principles or moral teaching. Choices that involve direct assaults on innocent human life and violations of human dignity are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor and can never be justified. Catholics must seek full protection for all human life from the moment of conception until natural death and have an obligation to oppose policies and actions that remove or limit this protection.

***"With this foundation, Catholics are better able to evaluate policy positions, party platforms, and candidates' promises and actions in light of the Gospel and the moral and social teaching of the Church in order to help build a better world."***

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With a well-formed conscience, Catholic voters must decide which candidate will best advocate and defend sound moral principles when in office. Through the lens of Catholic social teaching, we must first examine facts and background information of specific proposals and situations, deliberate over available alternatives, determine what is most fitting to a particular context, and then act decisively.

In particular, candidates' positions on significant moral issues should be carefully considered before casting our votes. Our Catholic teaching will not allow support for a candidate who takes a position in favor of an inherent wrongdoing, such as abortion or racism. Concurrently, a Catholic voter should not use a candidate's opposition to such an offense to justify indifference to other important moral issues involving human life and dignity. A position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter's support; however, it may legitimately lead a voter to disqualify a candidate from receiving support.

***"Because we are people of both faith and reason, it is appropriate and necessary for us to bring this essential truth about human life and dignity to the public square."***

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Our baptismal commitment calls us to follow Jesus Christ and to be a public witness to our faith in word and deed. A conscience formed in accord with Catholic teaching ignites the desire to love Christ with greater generosity and to give joyful witness to his Gospel. Speaking out and actively following the teachings of the Church takes courage, but in doing so, we are helping to shape the moral character of our society.

Open dialogue with political leaders and candidates is encouraged. In seeking to engage and persuade public officials, we should collaborate with others who share our positions on issues. By raising our voices together, we are better able to advance our moral principles. Even those who are ineligible to vote, especially our youth, have the right to have their voices heard on issues that affect their lives and the lives of others.

***"...participation in political life goes well beyond casting a vote in a particular election."***

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The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us, "As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life" (no. 1915). Catholics are encouraged to be active in the political process, particularly in these challenging times when so few stand by their moral convictions.

Public service is a worthy vocation and Catholic lay women and men are encouraged to run for office or work within a political party. Our participation should help transform the party to which we belong; we should not let the party transform us in such a way that we neglect or deny fundamental moral truths.

Catholics should continually undertake efforts to communicate their concerns and positions to elected officials. Florida Catholics can stay informed and take action on public policies of concern by joining the Florida Catholic Conference advocacy network at [www.flacathconf.org](http://www.flacathconf.org). Those who are already members can encourage others to join this effort to ensure that the voice of the Catholic faithful is heard by our lawmakers in Washington, DC and our state Capital.