

# We Choose Life



## Pro-Life Office

of the Diocese of Covington

### Mission Statement

The Pro-Life Office of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, guided by our Bishop, promotes the sanctity and legal protection of human life from conception to natural death through prayer, pastoral care, public policy and education.

### Respect life

“What is urgently called for is a general mobilization of consciences and a united ethical effort to activate a great campaign in support of life. All together, we must build a new culture of life.”

— John Paul II, “The Gospel of Life”

Actively promoting respect for human life is the responsibility of every Catholic. In response to the “Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities” established by the U. S. Bishops in 1975, each parish is invited to form a parish Pro-Life Committee to organize respect-life activities that raise awareness and educate on behalf of life issues within the parish.

### Resources for Catholic voters

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

“Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,” [usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/](http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/)

“Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions,” [usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/](http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/)

# The Catholic voter: How to form a moral conscience

Father Nick Rottman

Messenger Contributor

Every election requires Catholics to weigh pros and cons fairly. No candidate is perfect, so which one is likely to do more harm than good?

Before Election Day we have the moral responsibility to study platforms and promises and to have serious conversations about the grave issues our local and federal representatives will face. Happily, the Church gives moral direction to the political process, to help Catholic voters advance the kingdom of God here in our country. Once again the American bishops are offering its teaching document

“Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” to assist Catholics, in whom “an authentic faith” should inspire, as Pope Francis said, “a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.” (“Evangelii Gaudium,” n. 183).

How do we go about changing the world and, more immediately, our own country? The bishops suggest a three-step process that every Catholic voter should undertake long before entering the voting booth:

- Look into your own heart.
- Study the principles of Catholic social teaching.
- Apply those principles to concrete moral and political issues.

For step 1, the bishops provide a beautiful and succinct review of moral theology and its practical application (paragraphs 17-39), reminding us of moral duties that we must exercise publicly. For instance:

- always follow a conscience formed in accordance with Church doctrine in voting and other political activities (par. 17);
- practice the virtue of prudence, since politics often has more than one “right way” (par. 20);
- understand and totally avoid intrinsic evils (par. 22); and
- when you cannot wholly overcome evil, work to limit it (par. 32).

For step 2, the bishops explain the four cardinal virtues of Catholic social teaching: the dignity of the human person, subsidiarity, the common good and solidarity (par. 44-56). Subsidiarity means meeting people’s true needs by working locally, on the lowest level possible, escalating only when necessary to fix a situation. Solidarity means recognizing our oneness as a human family. As our brother’s keeper (Gen. 4:9) we are called to be a neighbor to all we meet, no matter how different they may seem (Lk 10:29-37).

With these four principles in place, we are ready for step 3. The bishops invite us to consider 13 concrete political situations, ranging from individual human life to global solidarity (pars. 64-90). I will highlight just a few.

— Perhaps their strongest teaching is the first, in which the bishops condemn attacks on innocent human life, since “life itself [is] the most fundamental good and the condition for all others” (par. 64). That priority recalls the earlier discussion of well-formed consciences (par. 31): “This exercise of conscience begins with outright opposition to laws and other policies that violate human life or weaken its protection. Those who knowingly, willingly, and directly support public policies or legislation that undermine fundamental moral principles cooperate with evil.”

Strong words! What practices today directly attack human life and therefore must be opposed? The bishops point to abortion, cloning, destruction of human embryos for research (even for potential cures),

assisted suicide, euthanasia, genocide, torture and intentionally targeting noncombatants in war or terrorist attacks (par. 64).

Clearly, Catholics cannot support politicians who promote any of these evil actions. The bishops explain further (par. 42): “As Catholics we are not single-issue voters. A candidate’s position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter’s support. Yet if a candidate’s position on a single issue promotes an intrinsically evil act, such as legal abortion, redefining marriage in a way that denies its essential meaning, or racist

behavior, a voter may legitimately disqualify a candidate from receiving support.”

Along with life issues, the two other great problems in America today involve marriage and religious liberty, and the bishops address both with care. They note, for instance, the importance of speaking honestly about who we are (par. 70): “The institution of marriage is undermined by the ideology of ‘gender’ that dismisses sexual difference and the complementarity of the sexes and falsely presents ‘gender’ as nothing more than a social construct or psychological reality, which a person may choose at variance with his or her biological reality.” (see Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 224)

Likewise, the bishops decry assaults on religious liberty: “Government bodies should not require Catholic institutions to compromise their moral or religious convictions to participate in government health or human service programs.” (par. 76) Examples include recent mandates that adoption agencies place children with homosexual adults and that employers pay for abortifacients and sterilization within health insurance.

In short, where politics attacks life, marriage and religious liberty, we cannot compromise. Our vote must be used to counter, or at least limit, such morally evil positions.

The rest of the practical political, social and economic issues the bishops ask us to consider are less clear-cut. Does our current welfare system reward parental responsibility? Do the existing tax system, immigration policies or divorce laws help families stay together? What is the best way to assist immigrants? Is consumerism a moral lifestyle? Many such questions are asked but not answered, since the bishops’ role is to present ideals, while the laity’s role is to actualize them.

St. John Paul II said citizens are obliged “to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically and to choose their political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest.” (“Living the Gospel of Life,” no. 33) Let us then seriously consider, debate, research and pray over the words of our shepherds — then let your conscience be your guide.

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*‘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 the maximum determination.’*

— St. John Paul II (“Christifideles Laici,” n. 38)

### Prayer for a Catholic Voter

Gracious and loving God, let your spirit be with me today. Hear my prayers, and increase in me the will to follow your Son, Jesus. Help me to draw on the resources of my faith as I use the opportunities of our democracy to shape a society more respectful of the life, dignity and rights of the human person, especially the poor and vulnerable. I ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. **Amen.**

For more information about the Pro-Life Office or to be added to our e-mail newsgroups, visit us online at [www.covdio.org/prolife/](http://www.covdio.org/prolife/) or call (859) 392-1500.