

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP: CATHOLICS CARE; CATHOLICS VOTE.



Catholics Vote

Embracing As Catholics commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the opening of Vatican II, and in light of the upcoming elections, let us recall that Vatican II urged faithful Catholics to engage in working towards justice and peace and toward seeking liberty and justice for all — not divided by race, ethnicity and economic inequality. Why? Because Catholics care. Because the Catholic Church has a strong tradition of political participation and commitment to religious freedom. (cf *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 43, 75)

The current much ado about religious freedom is not simply a partisan statement of our times; it has been an issue for centuries. Practicing our faith in the public arena and engaging in politics is a religious freedom. “Civil law should fully recognize and protect the Church’s right, obligation, and opportunities to participate in society without being forced to abandon or ignore its central moral convictions. Our nation’s tradition of pluralism is enhanced, not threatened, when religious groups and people of faith bring their convictions and concerns into public life. Indeed, our Church’s teaching is in accord with the foundational values that have shaped our nation’s history: “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, Introduction).

What does caring look like? It does not simply look like identifying with one party over another or one interest group over the many others. Caring requires that Catholics seek to be educated about their faith. This work for justice requires that the mind and heart of Catholics be educated and formed to know and practice the whole faith, not just the parts we like.

“[Every person] is obliged to follow faithfully what he [or she] knows to be just and right” (USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, Sec. 17). Ignorance may be bliss but it is not an excuse. Catholics are asked to prayerfully reflect on Church teaching and the common good. “The work of justice requires that the mind and the heart of [Catholics be educated](#) and...practice the whole faith.”

We work for justice, peace and liberty for all because we seek the common good; these lie at the heart of the common good. In the Kingdom of God we are not in a position to decide who sits at the head of the table. (That is for God to decide.) None of us are better than another. We do not deserve better because of race, education, career or religious practice.

As Catholics seek to advance the common good, where everyone sits at the table, we must carefully discern which public policies are morally sound and will advance the common good. Not all issues are equally important. Not all issues carry the same moral weight. We cannot differ on our obligation to protect human life and dignity and help build through moral means a more just and peaceful world, but Catholics may choose different ways to respond to these social problems. The path we walk is for each individual and his or her well-formed conscience to decide. Voting is a decision made by each Catholic guided by a faithful conscience, because Catholics care.

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Americans fought (Revolutionary War), advocated (Suffragette Movement) and demonstrated (Civil Rights Movement) for the fundamental right to vote. While cherishing this right, Catholics are also reminded of their obligation to engage in public sphere and participate in “shaping the moral character of society. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* citizens are required to promote the common good through the exercise of their voting privilege (2240).

Many issues have captured our attention this election: the increasing local influence of Planned Parenthood, the real threat to religious freedom, the pervasiveness of climate change, and the deleterious effects of our unjust economy. As we Catholics cast our ballots, it is best to remember that we are pro-life, pro-family and pro-poor and we vote with a well-formed conscience. Catholics care and Catholics vote.



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