

# Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

## As Catholics and as citizens we recall the following:

- Responsible citizenship is a virtue and one way we live our lives as Catholics.
- The Church does not tell us whom to vote for or what political party to join.
- The role of the Church is to help Catholics form their consciences in accord with God's truth.
- "Conscience is a judgment of practical reason that helps us to recognize and seek what is good and reject what is evil."  
(CCC 1778, 1796)
- Forming our consciences is an ongoing process.

## Seven Steps to Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship:

- 1 When examining any issue or situation, we must begin by being **open to the truth and to what is right**.
- 2 We must study **Sacred Scripture and the authoritative teachings of the Church**.
- 3 We must **examine the facts** and background information from **reliable sources**.
- 4 We must **prayerfully reflect** to discern the will of God.
- 5 The **prudent advice** and **good example** of others supports and enlightens our conscience.
- 6 The gifts of the **Holy Spirit** help us develop our conscience.
- 7 Regular **examination of conscience** is important to help us to see the world through eyes of faith.

## Not all issues have the same moral weight.

- There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. They are deemed **intrinsic evils** and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia.
- Similarly, direct threats to the sanctity and dignity of human life, such as human cloning and destructive research on human embryos, must always be opposed.
- Other **direct assaults on innocent human life** and violations of human dignity, such as genocide, torture, racism, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war, can never be justified.

**Let us see the world through the eyes of faith and not judge the faith through the eyes of the world.**

## From the Heart of the Church

"The Church recognizes that while democracy is the best expression of the direct participation of citizens in political choices, it succeeds only to the extent that it is based upon a correct understanding of the human person."

"The Church's Magisterium does not wish to exercise political power or to eliminate the freedom of opinion of Catholics regarding contingent questions. Instead it intends – as its proper function – to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good."

*Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith  
Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*

"The Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as a greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest."

*Deus Caritas Est Encyclical  
Pope Benedict XVI*

**During election years, many handouts, voter guides, videos and emails are produced and distributed. Not all are reliable sources. We encourage Catholics to utilize resources authorized by our Bishop, the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference of Bishops and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.**

Log on to [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org) for more information.

**Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship**, produced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, applies Catholic moral principles to a range of important issues. The document warns against misguided appeals to “conscience” to ignore fundamental moral claims, to reduce Catholic moral concerns to one or two matters, or to justify choices simply to advance partisan, ideological, or personal interests.

It outlines and makes important **distinctions among moral issues**, acknowledging that some involve the clear obligation to oppose intrinsic evils which can never be justified, and that others require action to pursue justice and promote the common good. In particular, our Catholic Bishops focused on **several current and fundamental problems**, some of which involve opposition to intrinsic evils and others raising serious moral questions:

- Continuing **destruction of unborn children** through abortion and other threats to the lives and dignity of others who are vulnerable, sick, or unwanted;
- Renewed efforts to force Catholic ministries—in health care, education, and social services—to **violate their consciences** or stop serving those in need;
- Intensifying efforts to **redefine marriage** and enact measures which undermine marriage as the permanent, faithful, and fruitful union of one man and one woman and a fundamental moral and social institution essential to the common good;
- **An economic crisis** which has devastated lives and livelihoods, increasing national and global unemployment, poverty, and hunger; increasing deficits and debt and the duty to respond in ways which protect those who are poor and vulnerable, as well as future generations;
- The failure to repair a **broken immigration system** with comprehensive measures that promote true respect for law, protect the human rights and dignity of immigrants, victims of human trafficking and refugees, recognize their contributions to our nation, keep families together, and advance the common good;
- **Wars, terror, and violence** which raise serious moral questions on the use of force and its human and moral costs in a dangerous world, particularly the absence of justice, security, and peace in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East.



Produced by the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Department for Human Dignity  
Source: USCCB Faithful Citizenship

