



FLORIDA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
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Catholic Bishops of Florida Election Year Statement

Vote with a properly formed conscience in order to defend human life and protect dignity
September 15, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As citizens of the United States, we have a duty to participate in framing the debate of public issues and the selection of those who occupy positions of civic leadership. As Catholics, we are called to carry the values of the Gospel and the sacredness of human life into the public square. These dual responsibilities to faith and citizenship are at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic in a free and democratic nation.

Participation in elections requires careful discernment and prudential judgment in light of moral principles and values of our faith. As faithful citizens, our decisions in the voting booth should respect the interests of all, particularly those members of our society who are weak and marginalized, often without a voice of their own. When we register to vote, we willingly accept the task of becoming educated on the issues and candidates and voting with a properly formed conscience.

Conscience is more than a voice within calling us to follow what is considered acceptable behavior for the day. It provides a constant moral foundation that guides our thoughts and actions from the very simple to the most complex. We have a duty to fully form our conscience and increase its sensitivity to how the issues before us address human life and dignity, protect and promote the welfare of our most vulnerable and serve the common good.

Making a decision about a candidate can be very difficult, but a well-formed conscience aided by the virtue of prudence will guide us. As Catholics, we are not single-issue voters, but at the same time we recognize that all issues do not carry the same moral weight. Some issues involve acts that are always wrong, and we are morally obligated to oppose them. We must never abandon the moral requirement to seek full protection for all human life. A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who takes a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, such as the direct and intentional

destruction of innocent human life, if the voter's intent is to support that position. There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position may decide to vote for that candidate, but this would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, and not to overlook a fundamental moral evil in order to advance a narrow interest or partisan preference.

Catholics are challenged to use the resources of our faith and the opportunities of our democracy to defend human life and to work for a more peaceful and just society. Before casting our votes, we are responsible to: (1) become familiar with sacred scripture and moral and social doctrine of the Church; (2) obtain accurate information on issues without relying strictly on party affiliation or campaign advertisements; (3) consult the Candidate Questionnaire Project (www.informedcatholicvoter.com) and encourage candidates to clarify their positions on key issues; (4) actively participate in discussions with others, especially our family and those close to us; and (5) seek wisdom through prayer and reflection.

May the Holy Spirit guide us as we make our voting decisions.

Archbishop John C. Favalora
Archdiocese of Miami

Bishop Victor Galeone
Diocese of St. Augustine

Bishop Robert N. Lynch
Diocese of St. Petersburg

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski
Diocese of Orlando

Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ
Diocese of Pensacola/Tallahassee

Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito
Diocese of Palm Beach

Bishop Frank J. Dewane
Diocese of Venice

Auxiliary Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
Archdiocese of Miami

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