



Our nation faces political challenges that demand urgent moral choices.

We are a nation at war; a country divided by race and ethnicity; a nation of immigrants struggling with immigration. We are an affluent society where too many live in poverty; part of a global community facing urgent threats to our environment. The US

Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) seeks to help Catholics form their consciences so they can make sound moral choices in addressing these challenges, but the responsibility to make political choices rests with each person.

Who in the Church Should Participate in Political Life?

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. Catholics need to become more involved: voting, running for office, working within political parties, and communicating concerns to elected officials.

How Does the Church Help Catholics to Address Political and Social Questions?

Catholic voters should use Catholic teaching to examine candidates' positions on issues and should consider candidates' integrity, philosophy, and performance. It is important for all citizens "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" (USCCB). Prudential judgment is needed to determine the best way to promote the common good. What we understand through human reason, faith helps us see more clearly.

Catholic Social Teaching in the Public Square—Seven Key Themes

The following themes of Catholic social teaching provide a moral framework for decisions in public life

- ✚ **The Right to Life and the Dignity of the Human Person** Human life is sacred. In our society, life is under direct attack from abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, and destruction of human embryos for research. We also oppose genocide, torture, unjust war, and the use of the death penalty. We must pursue peace and help overcome poverty, racism, and other conditions that demean human life.
- ✚ **Call to Family, Community, and Participation** The human person is both sacred and social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in families and in community. How our society is organized—in economics, politics, law and public policy—affects the well-being of individuals and of society. Every person has a right and a duty to participate in shaping society to promote the common good.
- ✚ **Rights and Responsibilities** Every human being has a right to life, and a right to access to those things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.
- ✚ **Special Concern for the Poor and Vulnerable** While the common good embraces all, those who are in greatest need deserve preferential concern. A moral test for society is how it treats the most vulnerable among us. We are called to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor.
- ✚ **Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers** The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Economic justice calls for decent work at a living wage, opportunities for legal status for immigrant workers, and the opportunity for ownership, enterprise, investment, participation in unions, and other forms of economic activity.
- ✚ **Solidarity** We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Our Catholic commitment to solidarity requires that we pursue justice, protect human rights, seek peace, and avoid the use of force except as a necessary last resort.
- ✚ **Caring for God's Creation** Care for the earth is a duty of our Catholic faith. We all are called to be stewards of God's creation and to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for vulnerable human beings now and in the future.

This brief document is a summary of the United States bishops' reflection *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* which is available free at www.faithfulcitizenship.org.