



2012

Issues for Catholic Voters

"It is also the duty of the laity to participate actively in political life, in a manner coherent with the teaching of the Church, bringing their well- founded reasoning and great ideals into the democratic debate, and into the search for a broad consensus among everyone who cares about the defense of life and freedom, the protection of truth and the good of the family, solidarity with the needy, and the vital search for the common good."

Benedict XVI to the Pontifical Council of the Laity
May 21, 2010

Introduction

Basic Principles

- Catholics are called by the Church to participate fully in the political process and, particularly, to vote on election day.
- Legislators are elected to serve and protect the common good, human dignity, and the natural rights of human persons.
- Catholic voters should have a clear understanding of the principles of Catholic moral and social teaching and how they apply to politics and public policy.

The Bishops and 'Faithful Citizenship'

- The U.S. bishops publish a document entitled, "Faithful Citizenship: A Guide to Political Participation" before each national election. In 2011, the USCCB Executive Committee added a "new introduction" to warn against repeating the confusion created during the 2008 campaign by those who misinterpreted the document.
- The "Introductory Note" speaks powerfully about our "clear obligation to oppose intrinsic evils which can never be justified" such as abortion, while noting that other political issues, though not equal in importance, "require action to pursue justice and promote the common good."
- "Faithful Citizenship" is best read in the context of "Living the Gospel of Life", the 1998 pastoral letter of the U.S. bishops.

Some Instances of Confusion

- Political issues can be divided between those that are "settled" because they involve rejecting an intrinsic evil and "prudential" because in applying general principles to specific situations a variety of valid conclusions can be drawn.
- Settled issues carry more weight for the Catholic voter than prudential issues, thus, they are not equal in importance.
- Prudential matters, however, do have great importance, and our moral judgement should be guided by the basic principles of Catholic social teaching such as the common good, human dignity, human rights, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the preferential option for the poor.



Settled Issues

Abortion

- Abortion is the foundational political issue because the right to life is the basis of all the other human rights and, thus, abortion directly contradicts the common good.
- It follows that a politician's position on abortion, among other settled issues, is what Catholic voters should consider first when casting their vote.
- There is no valid argument based upon Catholic theology or social teaching that justifies a Catholic supporting abortion for any purpose, such as population control or alleviating poverty.

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

- The ban against euthanasia and assisted suicide admits no exception.
- Declining extraordinary means of treatment is allowable as a prudential judgment.
- The growing acceptance of euthanasia and assisted suicide rests on the assumption that pain detracts from the value of life, but life itself is always good.

Fetal Stem Cells and Cloning

- Since science serves human ends, not its own, scientific research must always respect the moral law.
- Catholic teaching rejects any experimentation on fetal stem cells or human clones regardless of what therapeutic effect might be derived.
- Scientists have made significant progress using adult stem cells, to the point that they now offer both a moral alternative and better clinical results.

Marriage

- Marriage was instituted prior to the State and should be recognized by the State as something inviolate, necessary to the common good, and grounded in natural law.
- Prudential judgments about law and public policy should always seek to strengthen marriage and families.
- So-called same-sex marriages cannot be recognized by the Catholic Church, and civil unions are likely to undermine marriage and damage its foundational role in society.

Religious Liberty

- The desire for religious belief and practice is natural to the human person who is created in the image and likeness of God.
- Religious liberty, therefore, is a fundamental human right rooted in the dignity of the human person and is protected in our nation by the 1st Amendment.
- The U.S. bishops have declared that the HHS mandate requiring Catholic institutions to offer insurance coverage for contraception including abortifacients and sterilization is a clear violation of religious liberty.

Racism

- The intrinsic evils of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia have been exacerbated by globalization as the movement of peoples and the intermingling of cultures and multi-ethnicity have become commonplace.
- The Christian should never make racist claims or indulge in racist or discriminatory behaviour, but sadly that has not always been the case in practice nor has it been so in history.
- Solidarity must be based upon the unity of the human family, because all people, created in the image and likeness of God, have the same origin and are called to the same destiny.



Prudential Issues

Health Care

- Catholics should not be required to pay taxes that might subsidize abortion coverage in a universal health-care program.
- The good of achieving universal coverage does not outweigh the evil of allowing abortion funding under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA).
- Catholic health-care organizations must be free to perform their work with clear consciences.

Death Penalty

- The Church teaches that the death penalty is acceptable in principle but, when possible, should be avoided in practice.
- It is the responsibility of elected officials to ensure that penal systems and sentencing policies do, in fact, protect society from known aggressors.
- The practical elimination of the death penalty is based upon the strength and effectiveness of the penal system and the reliability of sentencing procedures.

War & Peace

- States have the right to engage in war in self-defense but should first exhaust all peaceful solutions.
- Just war is waged within defined moral boundaries with regard to its targets, goals, and its outcomes.
- Duly-elected political leaders of a nation have the responsibility of determining whether a war is just, and the Church may also speak to the subject.

Poverty

- The preferential option for the poor requires that authorities provide assistance to the poor and oppressed.
- The poor must have access to the education and job training necessary to compete in today's job market.
- Strong families that remain intact help keep their members from falling into poverty.

Immigration

- The Church affirms the basic human right of persons to emigrate from one nation to another for “just reasons,” such as economic well-being.
- At the same time, every state has the duty to protect its borders, regulate the flow of immigrants, and document their presence.
- The prudential challenge for our nation is simultaneously recognizing the right to emigrate for “just reasons” while protecting the common good by the reasonable control of our borders.

Education

- Parents—not the State—have the natural right to educate their children and in a curriculum consonant with their values.
- Government should restructure its educational funding to give families more choices about the education they desire for their children.
- Under no circumstance should government dictate to Catholic schools curriculum content or personnel and hiring practices.

Population

- Catholic teaching stipulates that abortion, sterilization, and contraception should not be part of our nation's public policy.
- Artificial contraception is unreliable, continues to lead to abortions, and has not by itself been able to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Abstinence programs supported by the Church have recently been successfully employed, most notably in Africa, to fight the plague of HIV/AIDS.

Judiciary

- Judges should be evaluated according to their judicial records and commitment to the limited judicial role, not attacked for their privately held religious views.
- Those who would nominate and confirm judicial activists disenfranchise the faithful Catholic voter.
- Catholic leaders have a duty to respect their constituents and their Church's traditional commitment to natural law when considering judicial appointees.

Economics

- The creation of wealth through the economy is necessary for the well-being of persons and families as well as a stable society.
- Government should create the conditions that support business and economic development.
- A healthy economy creates wages that generate tax revenue making possible government assistance to those in need.

Taxation

- Taxes should be fairly based upon one's ability to pay.
- Tax policy should not penalize marriage or the raising of children.
- Corporate taxes should not threaten the capacity to create and sustain jobs.

Environment

- The Church teaches that human persons are the stewards of the natural world and its resources over which God has made us stewards (Gen 1.26).
- We should look upon the natural world as a gift and treat it as such, just as we do our own lives and existence.
- The destruction of the environment and the overuse of natural resources is the product of unfettered production and consumption.

Recommended Reading

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship:

A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility (USCCB web site)

Catechism of the Catholic Church (Doubleday Religion)

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (USCCB Communications)

