



A Summary...
Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship
A call to Political Responsibility
The Catholic Bishops of the United States
Issued by USCCB, November 14, 2007



A Summary of the Catholic Church's teaching on Faithful Citizenship?

We are called to practice Christ's commandment to "love one another" (Jn 13:34)
We are called to promote the well-being of all, to share our blessings with those most in need, to defend marriage, and to protect the lives and dignity of all especially the weak, the voiceless, and those without power.

My Brothers and Sisters - May the Grace & Peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you...

In the marketplace of ideas your vote is an important gift to be exercised. Catholics are still playing a game of catch-up with almost everyone in America in terms of unwrapping the gift and using it. Our voice is being drowned out! We are doing this ourselves!

The collective Catholic voice seems to be lost and falling on deaf ears. Jesus admonished those with ears to hear - and with eyes to see - and with a heart that should feel.

The rich heritage of faithful citizenship is found in the teaching of Vatican Council II's *Declaration on Religious Liberty (Dignitatis Humanae)*. This highlights the role of the church in the formation of conscience.

However, the church never intends to tell Catholics whom to vote for or against. The Catholic persona does not ever attempt to dictate your vote. God gave us all free will. The decisions about political life are complex and it requires the exercise of a well-formed conscious aided by prudence and prayer.

Politics in our country is a contest of powerful interests, partisan attacks, sound bytes and media hype. In any election year, there will be an endless amount of handouts and voter guides. The church encourages Catholics to be aware of those which are authorized by the church, to help form your conscience in these challenging times.

The Catholic Church calls for a different kind of political engagement: one shaped by moral convictions of well formed consciences and focused on the dignity of everyone. These principles are found in Scripture and Catholic moral and social teaching as well as in the hearts of all people of good will. We cannot and must not remain on the sides lines in the fight for justice.

Faithful Citizenship requires that you listen as your conscious is speaking! This is the voice of God resounding in the human heart revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good and right and moral – for the common good. We can not differ on our moral obligation to build a more just and peaceful world through morally acceptable means, and thus facilitate that the weak and vulnerable are protected and in our care.

Catholics are called to make practical judgments regarding good and evil in the political arena. As blessed Pope John Paul II taught in *Pacem in Terris, no. 11*)

“each of us has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for proper development of life; these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and, finally, the necessary social services.”

Thus, the church’s guidance on a host of social issues is an essential resource for Catholics as they determine whether their own moral judgments are consistent with the Gospel and church teaching.

Catholics often face difficult choices about how to vote. This is why it is so important to vote according to a well formed conscience that perceives the proper role relationship among moral goods.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his recent reflection on the Eucharist as ***“the sacrament of charity,”*** ***challenged us to adopt what he calls “a Eucharistic form of life.”*** This means the redeeming love we encounter in the Eucharist should shape our thoughts, words and decisions including those that pertain to social order. The Holy Father called for ***“Eucharistic Consistency”*** on the part of every member of the church; both the voters and those who are running for elected office.

Finally, Catholic Social teachings should always be a guide to point us in the right direction. This includes:

- Respect for the sacredness and dignity of each individual
- Call to Family, Community and Participation
- Rights & Responsibilities
- Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Caring for God’s Creation

In conclusion, building a world of respect for human life and dignity, where justice and peace prevail, requires more than just political commitment and your vote!

It requires the essential duty of every Catholic to speak and to pray the words of
“Peace on Earth and Good will to all.”

May we repeat these words in our homes, in villages and cities wherever people of goodwill may gather.

Bishop Thomas Wenski