

Catholic Social Teaching and Elections

Introduction

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), in their calls to political responsibility over the last decade, have clearly articulated the critical importance of just policies that reflect the basic principle of Catholic social teaching. Their declarations, including their most recent statement, name the concept of a “consistent ethic of life,” the “Seamless Garment” of concern that covers every stage of life for all persons. Cardinal Bernardin gave voice to this concept in 1983: “Those who defend the right to life of the weakest must be equally visible in support of the quality of life of the powerless among us: the old and the young, the hungry and the homeless, the undocumented immigrant and the unemployed worker.”

The USCCB has reminded us that this election, and every election, should not focus on a single issue. They also tell us that it is not the Church’s place to endorse any specific candidate and have even issued a policy that no partisan campaigning or endorsements should take place in Catholic parishes and schools. Rather, they want people of faith to develop mature consciences by using all the principles of Catholic social teaching to guide deep reflection and careful evaluation of proposed policies.

They remind us that “As Catholics we are not single-issue voters,” (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 42), and that we need to reflect carefully because political choices are morally complex (ibid., 31). They acknowledge that “there may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate’s unacceptable position on one issue may decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons,” (ibid., 35) if they are doing so not just to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil, a position that echoes Pope Benedict XVI’s statement on voting.

“The right to life implies and is linked to other human rights ... All the life issues are connected, for erosion of respect for the life of any individual or group in society necessarily diminishes respect for all life. The moral imperative to respond to the needs of our neighbors—basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work—is universally binding on our consciences” (25).

United States Conference of
Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences
for Faithful Citizenship*

Reflection Guide

To assist us with our reflections on the moral complexities of the consistent ethic of life, the Bishops, in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship (FCFC)*, focus on a range of specific issues related to the main principles of Catholic social teaching. The following questions reflect these specific concerns as stated in *FCFC*. Please view each candidate's website to compare policies more in depth.

1. Human Life (*FCFC*, 64-67)

- What are the candidates and their parties' stand on respecting the life of unborn children?
- What are their proposed policies on euthanasia, human cloning, and embryo research?
- What are the candidates' and their parties' positions on torture?
- What are their and their parties' positions on the death penalty?
- What are their histories and proposals on opposing racism?
- What are the candidates and their parties' positions on the refugee crisis?
- What is their emphasis on overcoming poverty in the U.S. and what are their proposed policies for doing so?
- What is their emphasis on overcoming poverty in the global community and what are their proposed policies for doing so?

2. Subsidiarity and the Common Good (*FCFC*, 46-51)

- Do the candidates and their parties support both the right to life and the rights that flow from human dignity, including:
 - The right to food?
 - The right to adequate housing?
 - The right to education?
 - The right to employment?
 - The right to health care?
 - The right to freedom of religion?
 - The right to family life?
- Do they agree that rights have corresponding responsibilities?
- Do they propose ways to involve all citizens in actively shaping their communities and society?
- Do they support the concept that larger institutions have essential responsibilities when local institutions cannot adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, and advance the common good?

3. Promoting Peace (FCFC, 68-69)

- What are their and their parties' positions on war that does not meet the "just war" criteria?
- Are they committed to resolving disputes by peaceful means and only use armed conflict as a last resort?
- What is their stance on the preventive use of military force?
- How will the candidate reverse the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons?

4. Family Life (FCFC, 46-48)

- Do the candidates and their parties propose to defend and strengthen the family through policies and programs which respect families?
- Do they support the right for parents to choose their children's education?
- How are the rights of children in poverty upheld by each candidate's policies on adoption, welfare, and education?

5. Preferential Option for the Poor and Economic Justice (FCFC, 73-79, 85)

- How do they propose to address the needs of victims of injustice and oppression?
- How do they address the deepening disparities between the rich and those in poverty?
- How do they address the needs of those with disabilities? The terminally ill?
- What are their policies on support for the elderly, including regulation of nursing homes and support for Social Security?
- How do the candidates and their parties plan to support workers and those unemployed?
- What kind of specific job-creation policies do they propose?
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- Do they support decent and just wages, including adequate minimum wages?
- Are they committed to equal pay for women?
- Do they support the right of workers to join unions and do they support unions?
- What are their plans to regulate the economy so workers can have basic economic security and a basic quality of life?
- Do their agriculture policies prioritize food security for all?

6. Health Care (FCFC, 80)

- Do they support affordable and accessible health care for all people in the United States?
- Do they support measures to strengthen Medicare and Medicaid?
- What specific steps will the candidates take to assist those struggling with addiction or HIV/AIDS?

7. Migration (FCFC, 81)

- Do they embody the Church's call to "welcome the strangers among us" and do they support the Church's position regarding reforming U.S. immigration policy?
- Do they support worker protections and just wages for immigrant laborers?
- Do they support a path to citizenship for those fleeing violence and persecution?
- What are their plans to provide care for victims of trafficking and to address the root causes of human trafficking, both in the United States and abroad?

8. Promoting Justice and Countering Violence (FCFC, 84)

- Do the candidates oppose the death penalty?
- Do they support an overhaul of the current criminal justice system to create a justice system based on responsibility, rehabilitation, and restoration?
- What steps will the candidates take to improve relationships between the police and the communities they serve?

9. Care for God's Creation (FCFC, 86)

- Do the candidates and their parties have policies and proposals to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for human beings, especially for children at their most vulnerable stages of development?
- Do they recognize we have a moral obligation to protect the planet for all human life?
- Do they respect and protect all of creation?
- Do they seek to live simply and in harmony with creation and propose policies so all can do the same?

10. Global Solidarity (FCFC, 90)

- Do the candidates and their parties recognize the global dimensions of our responsibility to eradicate racism and to address the extreme poverty plaguing so much of the world?
- Do they support the Church's call to forgive the debts of the poorest countries?
- Do they support trade policies that will help poor countries?
- Do they promote peacemaking and see the use of force as only the last resort?