

The United States Conference of
Catholic Bishops
Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

Making Moral Choices

34. 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 relationship among moral goods. A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to subhuman living conditions, redefining marriage in ways that violate its essential meaning, or racist behavior, if the voter's intent is to support that position. In such cases, a Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in grave evil. At the same time, a voter should not use a candidate's opposition to an intrinsic evil to justify indifference or inattentiveness to other important moral issues involving human life and dignity.

35. There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position even on policies promoting an intrinsically evil act may reasonably decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil.

36. When all candidates hold a position that promotes an intrinsically evil act, the conscientious voter faces a dilemma. The voter may decide to take the extraordinary step of not voting for any candidate or, after careful deliberation, may decide to vote for the candidate deemed less likely to advance such a morally flawed position and more likely to pursue other authentic human goods.

37. In making these decisions, it is essential for Catholics to be guided by a well-formed conscience that recognizes that all issues do not carry the same moral weight and that the moral obligation to oppose policies promoting intrinsically evil acts has a special claim on our consciences and our actions. These decisions should take into account a candidate's commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue. In the end, this is a

decision to be made by each Catholic guided by a conscience formed by Catholic moral teaching. 38. It is important to be clear that the political choices faced by citizens not only have an impact on general peace and prosperity but also may affect the individual's salvation. Similarly, the kinds of laws and policies supported by public officials affect their spiritual well-being.

'...God can never be a purely private matter, without consequences for our relationships with others: it demands a public witness to our faith. Evidently, this is true for all the baptized, yet it is especially incumbent upon those who, by virtue of their social or political position, must make decisions regarding fundamental values, such as respect for human life, its defense from conception to natural death, the family built upon marriage between a man and a woman, the freedom to educate one's children and the promotion of the common good in all its forms. . . .'
(Sacramentum Caritatis, no. 83)

39. This calls for a heroic commitment on the part of Catholics who are politicians and other leaders in society. Having been entrusted with special responsibility for the common good, Catholic leaders must commit themselves to the pursuit of the virtues, especially courage, justice, temperance, and prudence. The culmination of these virtues is the strong public promotion of the dignity of every human person as made in the image of God in accord with the teachings of the Church, even when it conflicts with current public opinion. Catholic politicians and legislators must recognize their grave responsibility in society to support laws shaped by these fundamental human values and oppose laws and policies that violate life and dignity at any stage from conception to natural death. This is not to bring a "Catholic interest" to the political sphere, it is to insist that the truth of the dignity of the human person, as discovered by reason and confirmed by revelation, be at the forefront of all political considerations.