

# focus

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MICHIGAN  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

## A Catholic Approach to Voting in the 2024 Election



### Before voting, put on the 'mind of Christ'

**Christ calls each person to be a light in the world.** As the general election approaches this fall, Catholics can be such a light by allowing the truths of the faith to inform their voting decisions.

It may be challenging for some to view the election with this mindset, as reflexive support for a particular party and the ongoing level of disappointment with the integrity and suitability of some candidates linger.

Still, representative democracy in the United States requires public officials to be responsive to the will of voters, who have the collective ability to influence candidates and issues through choices made at the ballot.

*Catholics can be a light to the nation and this state by allowing the faith to inform their voting decisions.*

In short, Catholics have an important role to play each election, including this year, to improve the moral fabric of the state and the nation.

In addition to selecting a presidential candidate, Michigan voters this year will fill one of the state's two U.S. Senate seats. Other significant races include Michigan's 14 congressional districts, all 110 seats in the state House of Representatives, and two justices of the Michigan Supreme Court. Voters should also remember the importance of local races and issues that impact counties, municipalities, and school districts.

Voting is sometimes described as a civic duty. Yet, Pope Francis has said that each person also has a "vocation as citizen,"<sup>1</sup> and so voting also takes on a moral dimension for Catholics.

This edition of **focus** is intended to help Catholics in Michigan embrace the vocation of a faithful citizen in the 2024 election and beyond. From one end of the state to another, all are encouraged to consider St. Paul's exhortation to "put on the mind of Christ"<sup>2</sup> before voting. ■

# Let Faith Inform Political Participation

**Living a life of faith in Jesus Christ is an ongoing process of transformation.** Look no further than the lives of the saints; men and women throughout history whose personal conversions produced abundant graces. The Lord is inviting saints and sinners alike to come closer to Him, and to be mindful of decisions and choices that impact others, including those in the broader community.

Moving closer to Christ leads one to discipleship, where Christians strive to live Gospel values with hope, peace, and joy each day of the week—no different on a Tuesday than after Mass on Sunday. Living as a disciple in today's culture takes effort and is sometimes challenging. The same can be said when stepping into the voting booth or filling out an absentee ballot.

The values, morals, and ethics with which Catholics carry themselves extend to civic participation and how candidates for office are judged. Those who commit to following the Lord seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit

*Catholic voters should be guided more by moral convictions than by attachments to a political party or interest group.*



to help inform their choices. Candidates are then elected, who go on to make decisions about our communities, state, and nation.

How does faith apply to politics? And, should it? The simple answer is: Yes. The Church and her teachings shed light on important truths about human nature, such as the dignity and sanctity of every human life, the obligation to protect and serve the most vulnerable, and the purposes of marriage and family. These truths are not solely religious beliefs but also universal principles that all people can come to recognize through natural reason.

Every election season, some who are skeptical of applying faith to political participation claim—mistakenly—that a separation of church and state forbids such an approach. The vision advanced by President Thomas Jefferson was not to prevent religious persons or groups from participating in American democracy, but to maintain a wall that prevents government from encroaching into individual conscience rights and the religious life of citizens.<sup>3</sup>

Freedom of conscience and free participation of believers in American public life was considered so essential (and remains as such) that religious liberty was enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution. For Catholics, the Church guides the faithful to exercise their right to free participation in the democratic process by engaging in a period of prayerful discernment and conscience formation prior to voting. ■

# Forming a Catholic Conscience



**For faith to inform one's participation in civic life, forming a Catholic conscience becomes an important and helpful first step.**

Conscience, as explained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, is the point of judgment where a person recognizes the moral quality of a particular act. Formed according to God's revelation and the teachings of the Church, conscience helps a person discern how to act in accordance with the truth.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than a mere feeling, or a green light to justify doing anything a person wants, conscience can be thought of as the voice of God within that invites a person to do good, to act justly, and to treat others with dignity and respect. Doing the right thing—particularly in tough situations—is a process that starts with internal listening, continues in prayer, and ends with rejecting an evil or a harmful outcome.

*A Catholic conscience, formed according to God's revelation and the teachings of the Church, helps individuals act according to the truth.*

A Catholic conscience is best formed through prayer and regular reception of the sacraments, along with reading Scripture and the spiritual and teaching resources handed down by the Church. It is important to recognize certain acts are incompatible with love of God and neighbor and are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These acts, called *intrinsic evils*, should always be rejected.<sup>5</sup>

As for how this concept applies to voting, consider the following teachings of the U.S. bishops from their document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*:

- 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.
- A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, racist behavior, assisted suicide, deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to subhuman living conditions, or redefining marriage in ways that violate its essential meaning, if the voter's intent is to support that position.
- 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.
- A candidate's position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter's support. Yet if a candidate's position on a single issue promotes an intrinsically evil act, such as legal abortion, redefining marriage in a way that denies its essential meaning, or racist behavior, a voter may legitimately disqualify a candidate from receiving support.
- These decisions should consider 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. ■

# What is the Catholic Perspective on the Issues?



**The social teachings proclaimed by the Church offer a refreshing vision of hope, because they are founded in God, who is the infinite source of all goodness and love.**<sup>6</sup> Accepting with prayer the Church's teachings will challenge longstanding voting habits and even historic loyalty to a particular party. However, a conscience formed by these teachings provides a cohesive and consistent perspective on current issues, where political choices are guided by faith, rather than by partisan stances.

To help summarize the Church's social tradition, the following nine advocacy principles help illustrate what the Church teaches and are meant to assist in evaluating candidate positions on policy issues.

Upon reflection, Catholic voters should ask themselves if the candidates for whom they are considering voting embody these principles, and if so, how.

## Upholding the Dignity of Human Life

The Church proclaims every human person is created in the image and likeness of God and that each person possesses inherent and inviolable human dignity, present from the moment of conception until natural death.


Defending human life from willful destruction is a pre-eminent issue, the bedrock principle for promoting the common good. It means that every person—regardless of his or her stage of life or condition—has a right to life, and to live in a dignified manner through the provision of his or her basic needs.

## Providing for the Poor and Vulnerable

Because of its special concern for the poor, the Church believes public policies must prioritize those who struggle to make ends meet, preserve the social safety net, and promote affordable housing, childcare, and decent jobs. The rights of workers should be supported, which includes the payment of just wages and the ability to organize and bargain collectively without reprisal.

## Protecting Religious Liberty and the Freedom to Serve

Catholics serve others, particularly those in need, by volunteering at and operating soup kitchens, health care facilities, refugee shelters, food pantries, pregnancy centers, and homeless shelters, among other service agencies. Such acts of charity are driven by Jesus's commandment to 'love thy neighbor' and to do so with fidelity to His teachings. Protecting religious liberty—the right to worship and to practice one's faith freely—means the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment must be maintained and protected in public life.



Continued

## What is the Catholic Perspective on the Issues?

### Supporting Students, Schools, and Parents

Parents are the primary educators of their children,<sup>7</sup> and so the Church believes parents have the right to direct their children's education in accordance with their convictions. This includes the right for parents to send their child to the school of their choice, and for the state to make those choices available to all.

### Strengthening Marriages and Families

Family built upon marriage is the central institution of social life,<sup>8</sup> thus the Church advocates for policies that support and strengthen both marriage and family life. This includes promoting marriage as the lifelong covenant between one man and one woman, as well as policies that safeguard the rights and welfare of children.

### Improving Access to Healthcare

The Church believes affordable and accessible health care is a fundamental human right<sup>9</sup> and must be extended to the poor, uninsured, unemployed, and other vulnerable populations.

### Pursuing Restorative Justice

To promote restorative justice, the Church supports efforts that include aiding crime victims and their families, assisting people leaving prison as they reintegrate into society, and strengthening relationships between police and the communities they serve.

### Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees

In recognizing the inherent dignity of migrants and refugees, the Church advocates for an immigration system that ensures humane treatment, protects families, and offers a path to citizenship, while also maintaining the integrity of our nation's borders and the rule of law.

### Caring for Creation and Preserving Natural Resources

The Church promotes responsible stewardship of the environment and the Earth's natural resources to honor God's gift of creation. This includes acknowledging and addressing the effects of climate change, with particular emphasis on protecting the people most affected by adverse climate conditions. ■

# A Final Note of Encouragement

It can be challenging to compare Catholic teaching with the positions espoused by candidates for office. Neither of the country's two major political party platforms adhere to the full range of Catholic teaching. Making these voting decisions is sometimes discouraging. But Catholics are called as disciples of Christ to be a light in the world and to guide others toward the righteous path.

While it is important to spend time researching the candidates and the issues, putting on the mind of Christ before voting also necessitates stepping away from the noise through the election cycle.

The Church and this **focus** publication cannot and will not tell individuals which presidential or Michigan-based candidate they should vote for. Such decisions are to be made after forming one's conscience based on the teachings of the Church and prayerful reflection of candidate positions. It is up to all Catholics and people of goodwill to do the best they can to make wise judgments about the candidates and the issues.

Everything else is in God's hands. ■

## How to Register and Be Ready to Vote in This Election

For more resources on faithful citizenship, visit MCC's 2024 election website at [cthl.cc/voting](https://cthl.cc/voting).



For more information about the upcoming Michigan election, including how to register to vote and to check voter registration status, how to find polling locations or obtain an absentee ballot, and how to see what is on the ballot, visit [cthl.cc/jlncp](https://cthl.cc/jlncp).



For a complete list of sources that were cited in this publication, and to read and share a digital version of **focus**, visit [cthl.cc/votecatholic](https://cthl.cc/votecatholic).



Does cable news political commentary or social media discourse help inform a Catholic perspective?

Take time away from media and spend time with Holy Scripture and the Blessed Sacrament. Turn off the TV and the podcast and listen in silence.

Pray often, letting faith inform political participation.

