

"We need to participate for the common good. Sometimes we hear: a good Catholic is not interested in politics. This is not true: good Catholics immerse themselves in politics by offering the best of themselves so that the leader can govern."

-Pope Francis

VOTING FOR THE COMMON GOOD

*A Call to Political Responsibility
from the Diocese of Manchester*





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God has given each of us a mission “to ‘go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation’ (Mk 16:15)” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 181). Our relationship with God leads to the desire to build a world focused upon dignity, respect, justice, and peace. We are called to pursue the common good and make choices in political life based not on what will be most advantageous to us personally, but rather what is in the best interest of society as a whole. And when we think about society as a whole, we pay special attention to those who are in most need of our compassion and help.

We have a dual heritage as both faithful Catholics and American citizens. As Catholics, our baptismal commitment to bear public witness to the values of Jesus Christ requires our active participation in political life, keeping in mind the common good. And as Americans, we treasure our right to political participation and also have a civic obligation to vote and participate in public life. Here in New Hampshire, we have a heightened level of responsibility to participate in the political process because our state legislature — which is the largest in the country — and our first in the nation presidential primary give us unparalleled access to communicate with our elected officials.

Catholics, like all eligible citizens, have a serious moral obligation to vote, but we have work to do before we head into the voting booths. The Church does not tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote. Instead, the bishops of the United States have prepared resources to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with God’s truth. Conscience is not a mere “feeling” about what we should or should not do but instead requires serious attempts to make sound moral judgments based on the truths of our faith. The formation of conscience includes the desire to embrace goodness and truth and for Catholics, this begins by studying the Scripture and teachings of the Church. It also is important to examine the facts and background information about various choices. Finally, prayerful reflection is essential to discern the will of God.

The responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience, and that participation goes beyond casting a vote in a particular election. Catholics are called to participate in political life throughout the year to help promote the common good.

★ *What areas merit special concern for Catholic voters?*

The Catholic approach to faithful citizenship rests on moral principles found in sacred Scripture and Catholic moral and social teaching as well as in the hearts of all people of good will. The bishops of the United States have offered the following policy goals they hope will guide Catholics as they form their consciences and reflect on the moral dimensions of their public choices. With the summary of each goal, we suggest questions you may wish to bear in mind as you consider each issue.

1. The Dignity of the Human Person: It is fundamental to Catholic teaching that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and that every life is to be respected

from conception to natural death. In our society, human life is instead under direct attack from abortion. Other direct threats to the sanctity of human life include euthanasia and assisted suicide, human cloning, in vitro fertilization, and the destruction of human embryos for research. Catholic teaching about the dignity of human life also leads us to oppose torture, unjust war, and the indiscriminate use of drones for violent purposes; to prevent genocide and attacks against noncombatants; to oppose racism; to oppose human trafficking; and to overcome poverty and suffering. Nations are called to protect the right to life by seeking effective ways to combat evil and terror without resorting to armed conflicts except as a last resort after all peaceful means have failed. This teaching also calls Catholics to urge governments to end the use of the death penalty as a means of protecting

society from violent crime. **Where does the candidate stand on abortion, assisted suicide, the use of torture, human trafficking, the repeal of the death penalty, and other efforts to respect life from conception to natural death?**

2. Supporting Marriage and Families: The family — based upon marriage between a man and a woman — is the first and fundamental unit of society and a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. How we organize our society — in economics and politics, in law and policy — directly affects the common good and the capacity of individuals to develop their full potential. Every person and association has a right and a duty to participate actively in shaping society and to promote the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. **Does the candidate have a commitment to supporting marriage and family life?**

3. Immigration: We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions and requires us to take up the Scriptural call to welcome the stranger among us — including immigrants seeking work, a safe home, education for their children, and a decent life for their families. **Does the candidate support comprehensive immigration reform that offers a path to citizenship, treats immigrant workers fairly, prevents separation of families, maintains the integrity of our borders, respects the rule of law, and addresses the factors that compel people to leave their own countries?**

4. Poverty and Protecting the Most Vulnerable: While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern. Our concern for the poor and vulnerable includes all who are marginalized in our nation and beyond — unborn children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and terminally ill, victims of injustice and oppression, and immigrants. We are called to help children, families, and individuals overcome poverty through efforts such as the opportunity for good and dignified work at fair, living wages, while also helping to overcome widespread hunger and poverty around the world. **Does the candidate support policies that protect those who are most in need both in our nation and around the world?**

5. Conscience Protection and Religious Freedom: Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met. Freedom of conscience and the rights of individuals and institutions to exercise religious freedom publicly and privately need to be constantly defended. **What is the candidate's position on the rights of individuals and groups — including religious institutions and people of faith — to effectively participate in political life?**

6. Pursue Peace: The Gospel invites us to be peacemakers — to promote peace and pursue justice at home and abroad. We are called to seek peace in a world marred by violence and conflict. **What is the candidate's position on the promotion**

of peace at home and abroad? Is the candidate seeking a responsible and effective response for ending persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East and other parts of the world?

7. Caring for God's Creation: We have a duty to care for God's creation, or as Pope Francis refers to it, "our common home." Care for creation is a duty of our faith and a sign of our concern for all people, especially the poor who suffer the most devastating impact from attacks on the environment. **Does the candidate support policies that address pollution, climate change, lack of access to clean water, and efforts to protect the earth's resources?**

★ *There are a lot of issues to consider. Should I treat all of the issues equally when I am considering a candidate?*

One of the most beautiful and sometimes lesser known aspects of the Catholic faith is its social teaching — a rich tradition of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of the modern world. Taking in all of this information can be overwhelming and can lead us to treat all of the issues equally. But some issues are more important than others and should bear more weight when we vote. These important issues include abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, destructive research on embryos, genocide, torture, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war.

★ *If I am a Catholic, is abortion the only policy issue that should concern me?*

The direct and intentional taking of human life through abortion is always wrong and always must be opposed. But our opposition to the intentional taking of human life should open our eyes to the good we must do to lift up the dignity of each and every human person. Although choices about how best to respond to the needs of those living in poverty, for example, may be a matter for principled debate, this does not make concern for the poor an "optional" issue or permit Catholics to dismiss or ignore Church teaching on this or other issues. Even if every Catholic cannot be actively involved in every concern, we must support one another as our community of faith defends human life as it is threatened at every stage.

★ *Why doesn't the Diocese of Manchester endorse candidates or issue a score card of candidates?*

The Church does not tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote because the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience. While the Church highlights its social teaching and raises up issues of concern to Catholics, the ultimate decisions in the voting booth are to be made by individuals after researching the candidates, studying Church teaching on the issues, and prayerfully considering the options.

During an election year, handouts and voter guides often are produced and distributed. Catholics seeking information on Church teaching are encouraged to seek resources authorized by the Diocese of Manchester and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (see the additional resources section below for more information). The Diocese of Manchester does not produce a score card of candidates because a score card would be interpreted to be an endorsement or rejection of certain candidates. Voters reviewing score cards from other organizations are encouraged to examine whether the voting records include all of the issues Catholic voters should consider before voting.

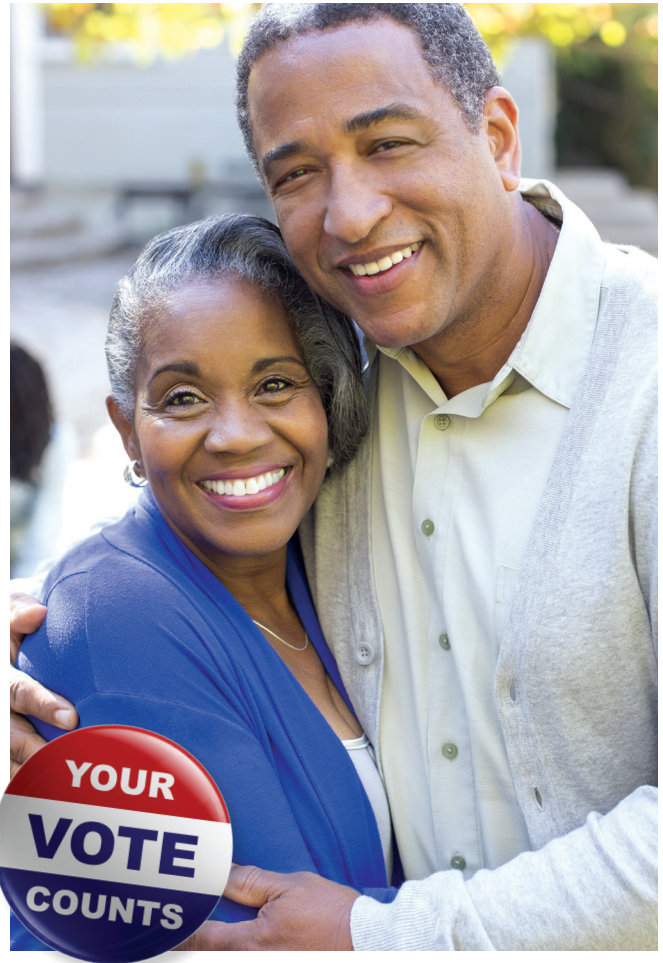
★ *What if all the candidates for an office hold a position that promotes the destruction of innocent human life?*

When all the candidates for an office hold a position that promotes the destruction of innocent human life, such as abortion or physician-assisted suicide, the conscientious voter faces a dilemma. The voter may decide to take the extraordinary step of not voting for any candidate for that particular office, but the individual should still evaluate candidates for other offices and vote on Election Day in other races where the voter does not face this same dilemma. Or, after careful deliberation, the voter may decide to vote for the candidate deemed less likely to advance the morally-flawed position and more likely to pursue other authentic efforts for the human good.

★ *I voted. Do I need to do anything else in order to fulfill my moral obligation to participate in political life?*

Yes! The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, “It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good” and that “As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life.” (nos. 1913-1915) Voting is only one type of activity in political life. Shaped by Gospel values and the commitment to the life and dignity of every human person from conception to natural death, Catholics are called to participate in political life by running for office, communicating their concerns to elected officials, or joining or forming a parish advocacy group. Even those who cannot vote have the right to have their voices heard on issues that affect their lives and the common good.

Some say Catholics should not be involved in policy issues, but the United States Constitution protects the right of individual believers and religious bodies to participate and speak out. The Catholic community brings to the public square a broad experience serving alongside those in need — caring for the sick, sheltering the homeless,



helping women who face difficult pregnancies, feeding the hungry, welcoming immigrants and refugees, and educating the young. And we bring a consistent moral framework for assessing issues that is drawn from basic human reason, illuminated by Scripture and the teaching of the Church. Our nation’s tradition of pluralism is enhanced, not threatened, when the voices of religious groups and people of faith join others in bringing their convictions and concerns into public life.

★ *Where can I get additional information about my Catholic faith and political life?*

- Additional information about public policy issues and faithful citizenship is available on the Diocese of Manchester website at www.catholicnh.org/vote. Visit this page to register for Catholic Citizenship News, the Diocese of Manchester newsletter on public issues.
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops provides resources and information for parish and school leaders, community leaders, families, youth, and all Catholics on its website at www.faithfulcitizenship.org.