

FAQs on Catholics and Voting



Why should my faith have any bearing on my vote?

Because we are baptized into Jesus Christ and share in the Eucharist, our mission is to serve God and neighbor, especially our neighbors who are most in need. All the decisions we make in life must be done in the light of that mission. Since the political world is where society makes the decisions that most significantly affect human dignity and the common good, casting votes is an essential way for us to serve our sisters and brothers.

How do I decide who to vote for?

Pope Francis has said that we should **study the issues, pray, and then vote with our consciences**. The United States Bishops' document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* talks in detail about the issues we are urged to consider before we vote. These include first of all those things which are serious threats to human life and dignity including **abortion, poverty, racism, the environmental crisis, migration, xenophobia, and global conflict**. We are also asked to consider things like **a candidate's commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue** and whether the candidate will have **respect for other people and the rule of law**. See below for more information on voting and for links to *Faithful Citizenship* as well as to the Diocese of Manchester's own pamphlet called *Five Principles for Voting as People of the Eucharist*. For those who would like to take a deeper dive into Church teaching on the fundamental issues, there is also a link to the Compendium of the *Social Doctrine of the Church*.

Will our pastors tell us who to vote for?

No. The Catholic Church teaches that decisions about voting are to be made by individual Catholics, using their well-formed consciences. No one - whether clergy, religious, or lay person - can tell you that there is one candidate in any election that you must vote for.

Doesn't the Constitution say that we are supposed to separate our faith from our politics?

No. Constitutions restrict what the government can do, not what citizens can do. Moreover, the United States and New Hampshire Constitutions both uphold the right to the free exercise of religious faith.

In addition, the issues presented in documents like *Faithful Citizenship* are not uniquely "Catholic" issues. Our Catholic faith is why we care about these issues, but people of all faiths or no faith also consider these issues to be critically important.

The fact that we Catholics see the world through the lens of faith as well as the lens of reason allows us to contribute to the body politic in a unique way. We offer a perspective that is based on the application of a consistent moral framework and on the lessons we have learned through our vast experience in serving 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. Our participation in the public square is an important way for us to serve the body politic.

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

The intentional taking of human life through abortion is always wrong, and we must always be opposed to it. As important as this principle is, however, it does not constitute the totality of everything that we are called to do in the public square. To be pro-life is to have eyes that are open to the need to lift up the dignity of each and every human person *in all circumstances*. For instance, while the way to address the needs of the poor may be a matter for principled debate, that does not make concern for the poor an "optional" issue, and it does not allow us to treat Gospel teaching in that regard as if it did not exist. The more we are consistently pro-life in all ways, the more convincing will be our pro-life advocacy in all ways.

What if all the candidates for an office hold positions that promote the destruction of innocent human life or similar fundamental violations of human dignity?

When all the candidates for an office hold positions that promote the destruction of innocent human life (such as abortion or physician-assisted suicide) or they support other fundamental violations of human dignity - sadly, a common occurrence in today's political world - the conscientious voter faces a dilemma. In such a case, 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 common good.