



# Election Year

## questions + answers

**Voting is a profoundly important responsibility for each of us as Americans, and as Catholics. It is not only an act of citizenship, but also an expression of conscience. Applying the principles of our Catholic faith to our choices as voters can be a challenging task, but if we are to discharge the obligations of citizenship with integrity, we must strive to ensure that our votes reflect our deepest values.**

**Kansas' four Catholic bishops have prepared the following brochure to help clarify the implications of candidates' positions on issues of importance to Catholics. For more information, including a list of how state legislators voted on important bills, please visit [www.kseathconf.org](http://www.kseathconf.org).**

**Are all public policy issues  
equally important to  
Catholics?**

No. While most political issues have a moral dimension, there are a select number of issues currently being debated that directly involve matters of intrinsic moral evil: abortion, embryonic stem cell research, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and same-sex marriage. The unique gravity of these issues does not diminish the importance of other concerns, but it does require that Catholics give them precedence. As Cardinal Ratzinger explained before he became Pope Benedict XVI: "Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion and euthanasia...There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion and euthanasia."

**Does that mean Catholics  
can disagree over most other  
political issues?**

Yes. Unlike those previously mentioned public policies that allow actions which are intrinsically evil and which all Catholics are always morally obliged to oppose, most other issues require Catholics to exercise their own "prudential judgment" to determine what policies they believe will be best. In these cases, Catholics can ethically reach different conclusions, as long as their preferred approach is consistent with our beliefs as Catholics.

**Regarding immigration,  
where does the Church  
stand?**

The Church recognizes that Catholics have room to exercise prudential judgment in immigration policy, but she also reminds Catholic voters that important moral principles are at stake with respect to this issue. The Church summons all people to demonstrate respect for the law and recognizes the need for our nation to maintain control of its borders. At the same time, the Church also teaches the virtues of justice, compassion, and mercy, especially as they apply to people who have come mostly from impoverished circumstances to make a better life for themselves and their families. The Church believes that a solution can be reached that is faithful both to our Catholic principles and to the rule of law, and fair to those across the globe waiting to come to the United States legally.

**Does Kansas permit use of the death penalty?**

Yes. While no one has been executed in Kansas since 1965, there are ten individuals on “death row.” This year, the Kansas Senate came within one vote of passing legislation supported by Kansas’ Catholic bishops that would end the use of the death penalty in our state. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the death penalty should not be used if there are other means available to protect society, though there is room for the exercise of prudential judgment in determining whether available alternatives to the death penalty meet that test.

**Why did the Catholic Church, which has long supported reform of our nation’s health care system, oppose the health care legislation passed by Congress and signed by the President this spring?**

Because it opens the door to taxpayer financing of abortion, fails to respect conscience rights, and is deficient in its treatment of immigrants. The new law uses federal funds to subsidize health plans that cover abortions, a departure from 30 years of federal policy. Perhaps worse, the law will also force some Americans to pay directly for other people’s abortions even if they are morally opposed: each enrollee in plans that decide to cover abortion will be forced to pay a separate payment specifically for abortion, regardless of whether a particular person ever has an abortion.

**The courts now control many of the issues important to me, including the legality of abortion, so does it even matter if I vote?**

Yes. As we have just seen, elected officials still have significant influence over abortion policy even if the courts have taken ultimate control of the issue out of the hands of the democratic process. Aside from the fact that many races for elective office often come down to a small number of votes, elections matter in ways many citizens do not often consider. For instance, when the new governor of Kansas is elected, he will appoint the heads of state agencies that have tremendous influence over how our state’s abortion laws are enforced. The governor also appoints justices to the Kansas Supreme Court.

Kansas will also elect a new US senator this year who will be charged with voting on nominations to the US Supreme Court. Further down the ballot, mayors, city councils, county commissions, and school boards often decide upon local policies that have an important moral dimension. Moreover, gaining election to these posts often helps candidates position themselves for higher office.

Finally, many of our courts are themselves subject to elections this year. Among them, four Kansas Supreme Court justices will face a “retention election” in which voters will determine whether their service on the Court will continue for another term.

**Can I just show up on Election Day in November and vote?**

No. First of all, there are two election days: the primary election on August 3, and the general election on November 2. Both are important. Second, you have to register to vote before you can vote. The voter-registration deadline is October 18 for the general election. Visit <https://myvoteinfo.voteks.org/> to check your registration status.



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