A CONSCIENTIOUS VOTER'S DILEMMA. In light of the above, it is a correct judgment of conscience that we would commit moral evil if we were to vote for a candidate who takes a permissive stand on those actions that are intrinsically evil when there is a morally-acceptable alternative. What are we to do, though, when there is no such alternative?

Because we have a moral obligation to vote, deciding not to vote at all is not ordinarily an acceptable solution to this dilemma. So, when there is no choice of a candidate that avoids supporting intrinsically evil actions, especially elective abortion, we should vote in such a way as to allow the least harm to innocent human life and dignity. We would not be acting immorally therefore if we were to vote for a candidate who is not totally acceptable in order to defeat one who poses an even greater threat to human life and dignity.

VOTING IS A MORAL ACT. It involves duties and responsibilities. Our duty is to vote in keeping with a conscience properly formed by fundamental moral principles. As Bishops we are not telling Catholics which candidates they should vote for. Rather, we simply want to teach how we should form our consciences and consider the issues in light of these fundamental moral principles.

+ ***Joseph F. Naumann***
Archbishop of Kansas City in Kansas

+ ***Ronald M. Gilmore***
Bishop of Dodge City

+ ***Paul S. Coakley***
Bishop of Salina

+ ***Michael O. Jackels***
Bishop of Wichita

Kansas Catholic Conference

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6301 ANTIOCH • MERRIAM, KANSAS 66202 • 913-722-6633

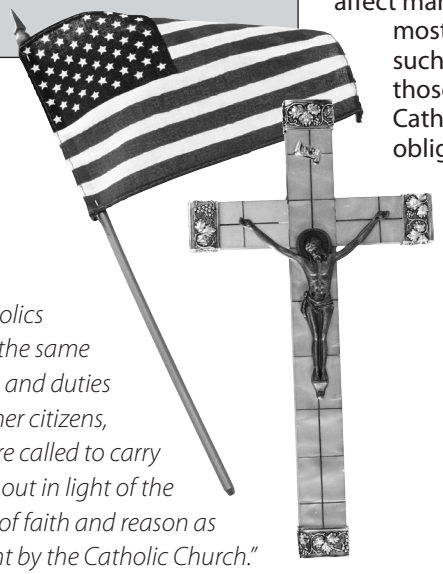
Moral Principles for Catholic Voters

We, the Catholic Bishops of Kansas, exercising our role as teachers, offer the following guidelines to help Catholics form their consciences on matters related to our most basic obligation of citizenship: voting. The following guidelines are intended for educational purposes only. We do not intend to endorse or oppose any particular candidate, political party, or political action committee. Rather, it is our hope that these guidelines will show how our Catholic faith and human reason shapes our thinking, choosing, and acting in daily life.

> *"Be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the approval of those who do good. For it is the will of God that by doing good you may silence the ignorance of foolish people. Be free, yet without using freedom as a pretext for evil, but as slaves of God. Give honor to all, love the community, fear God, honor the king."*
>
> 1 Peter 2:13-17

THE RIGHT AND DUTY TO VOTE. Catholics live in the world, but they should not live by worldly values that give too much importance to power, possessions, and pleasure as ends in themselves (*cf. 1 John* 2:16). Catholics have the same rights and duties as other citizens, but are called to carry them out in light of the truth of faith and reason as taught by the Catholic Church. For example, they are called to respect human authority and obey those who govern society "for the Lord's sake" (*1 Peter* 2:13-17).

In a democratic society citizens choose whom they vest with authority for the common good. A choice for one person over another for public office can significantly affect many lives, especially the lives of the most vulnerable persons in society, such as children in the womb and those who are terminally ill. Therefore, Catholic citizens have a serious moral obligation to exercise their right to vote, whether on the national, state or local level. The Second Vatican Council taught us that "all citizens are to bear in mind that it is both their right and duty to use their free vote to promote the common good" (*The Church in the Modern World 75*). What is more, we have a duty to vote guided by a well-formed conscience, and not simply on the basis of self-interest, party affiliation, or the personal charisma of any individual.



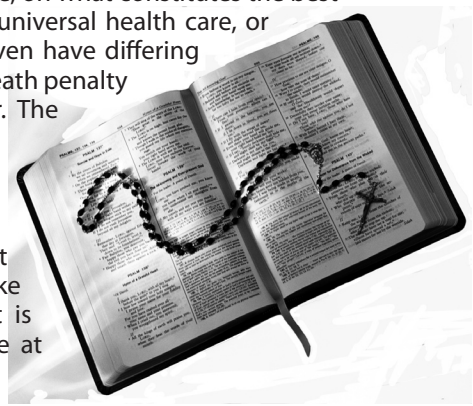
"Catholics have the same rights and duties as other citizens, but are called to carry them out in light of the truth of faith and reason as taught by the Catholic Church."

THE DUTY TO FORM AND FOLLOW ONE'S CONSCIENCE. We are conscientious voters when we are guided by our consciences. Conscience is a law "written" by God on our hearts that disposes us to love and to do good and avoid evil (cf. *Romans* 2:12-16). The conscience is like an inner voice that has the authority of the very voice of God. We have a serious duty to follow the guidance of conscience. To act against the judgment of conscience when it is certain about what is good and evil has the same seriousness as disobeying God. It is important to remember however that it is possible for our conscience to be certain and at the same time incorrect about what is good and evil.

For this reason, we have an equally serious duty to properly form or teach our conscience so that it can correctly judge what is good and evil. We are obliged to seek the truth and then to abide by it. We need to make this inquiry all throughout our lives, as we grow and as the questions we face change or become more complicated. In seeking the truth, Catholics receive important guidance from the teachings of the Catholic Church on matters pertaining to faith and morals. We rely on the help of the Holy Spirit to apply these teachings to particular questions. In addition, we seek sound advice from others who share our values and who are informed on the issues.

> *"All who sin outside the law will also perish without reference to it, and all who sin under the law will be judged in accordance with it. For it is not those who hear the law who are just in the sight of God; rather, those who observe the law will be justified. For when the Gentiles who do not have the law by nature observe the prescriptions of the law, they are a law for themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even defend them on the day when according to my gospel, God will judge people's hidden works through Christ Jesus."*
>
> Romans 2:12-16

PRUDENTIAL JUDGMENTS ON SOCIAL POLICY. In some moral matters the use of reason allows for a legitimate diversity in our prudential judgments. Catholic voters may differ, for example, on what constitutes the best immigration policy, how to provide universal health care, or affordable housing. Catholics may even have differing judgments on the state's use of the death penalty or the decision to wage a just war. The morality of such questions lies not in what is done (the moral object), but in the motive and circumstances. Therefore, because these prudential judgments do not involve a direct choice of something evil and take into consideration various goods, it is possible for Catholic voters to arrive at different, even opposing judgments.



Notwithstanding a possible diversity of prudential judgments, each of us should guide our decision-making on such issues by a fundamental respect for the dignity of every human person from the moment of conception to natural death. This is a non-negotiable principle. It is the foundation for both Catholic social teaching and of a just society. Respect for human dignity is the basis for the fundamental right to life. It is also the basis for the right to those things needed to live with dignity, for example, productive work and fair wages, food and shelter, education and health care, protection from harm, and the right to move from one country to another when these things are not available to us at home. Because of respect for the dignity of the human person, Catholics are obliged to come to the aid and defense of the defenseless, especially the poor. Another guiding principle is the defense and promotion of marriage as the unbreakable bond between one man and one woman. Society is only as healthy as is the institution of marriage and family.

Good and evil in the above-mentioned issues can be determined by the use of right reason. While it is true that the Church's teaching on these matters is clarified and strengthened by the light of the Gospel, throughout history persons of good will have understood these truths from reason alone, independent of the conviction of faith.

> *. . . each of us should guide our decision-making on such issues by a fundamental respect for the dignity of every human person from the moment of conception to natural death. This is a non-negotiable principle. It is the foundation for both Catholic social teaching and of a just society.*

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JUDGMENTS CONCERNING MORAL EVILS. A correct conscience recognizes that there are some choices that always involve doing evil and which can never be done even as a means to a good end. These choices include elective abortion, euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, the destruction of embryonic human beings in stem cell research, human cloning, and same-sex "marriage." Such acts are judged to be intrinsically evil, that is, evil in and of themselves, regardless of our motives or the circumstances. They constitute an attack against innocent human life, as well as marriage and family. Pope John Paul II warned that concern for the "right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture is false and illusory if *the right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination" (*Christifideles Laici* 38).

Other examples of choices that always involve doing evil would be racial discrimination and the production and use of pornography. These actions offend the fundamental dignity of the human person.

Concerning choices that are intrinsically evil, Catholics may not promote or even remain indifferent to them.