

Forming Consciences



Faithful Citizenship

A Call to Political
Responsibility from the
**Catholic Bishops
of the United States**
with Introductory Note



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Introductory Note

The Catholic Bishops of the United States are pleased to re-propose to our people *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, our teaching document on the political responsibility of Catholics. This statement, overwhelmingly adopted by the body of bishops in 2007, represents the continuing teaching of our Bishops' Conference and our guidance for Catholics in the exercise of their rights and duties as participants in our democracy. We urge our Catholic pastors and people to continue to use this important statement to help them form their consciences, to contribute to civil and respectful public dialogue, and to shape their choices in the coming election in the light of Catholic teaching.

The statement lifts up our dual heritage as both faithful Catholics and American citizens. We are members of a community of faith with a long tradition of teaching and action on human life, and dignity, marriage and family, justice and peace, care for creation, and the common good. As Americans, we are also blessed with religious liberty which safeguards our right to bring our principles and moral convictions into the public arena. These Constitutional freedoms need to be both exercised and protected, as some seek to mute the voices or limit the freedoms of religious believers and religious institutions. Catholics have the same rights and duties as others to participate fully in public life. The Church through its institutions must be free to carry out its mission and contribute to the common good without being pressured to sacrifice fundamental teachings and moral principles.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship is widely used to share Catholic teaching on the role of faith and conscience in political life. Although it has at times been misused to present an incomplete or distorted view of the demands of faith in politics, this statement remains a faithful and challenging call to discipleship in the world of politics. It does not offer a voters guide, scorecard of issues, or direction on how to vote. It applies Catholic moral principles to a range of important issues and warns against misguided appeals to "conscience" to ignore fundamental moral claims, to reduce Catholic moral concerns to one or two matters, or to justify choices simply to advance partisan, ideological, or personal interests. It does not offer a quantitative listing of issues for equal consideration, but outlines and makes important distinctions among moral issues acknowledging

faithful citizenship

that some involve the clear obligation to oppose intrinsic evils which can never be justified and that others require action to pursue justice and promote the common good. In short, it calls Catholics to form their consciences in the light of their Catholic faith and to bring our moral principles to the debate and decisions about candidates and issues.

The moral and human challenges outlined in the second half of *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* remain pressing national issues. In particular, our Conference is focused on several current and fundamental problems, some involving opposition to intrinsic evils and others raising serious moral questions:

- Continuing destruction of unborn children through abortion and other threats to the lives and dignity of others who are vulnerable, sick, or unwanted;
- Renewed efforts to force Catholic ministries—in health care, education, and social services—to violate their consciences or stop serving those in need;
- Intensifying efforts to redefine marriage and enact measures which undermine marriage as the permanent, faithful, and fruitful union of one man and one woman and a fundamental moral and social institution essential to the common good;
- An economic crisis which has devastated lives and livelihoods, increasing national and global unemployment, poverty, and hunger; increasing deficits and debt and the duty to respond in ways which protect those who are poor and vulnerable as well as future generations;
- The failure to repair a broken immigration system with comprehensive measures that promote true respect for law, protect the human rights and dignity of immigrants and refugees, recognize their contributions to our nation, keep families together, and advance the common good;
- Wars, terror, and violence which raise serious moral questions on the use of force and its human and moral costs in a dangerous world, particularly the absence of justice, security, and peace in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East.

In this coming election and beyond, we urge leaders and all Catholics to share the message of faithful citizenship and to use this document in forming their own



consciences, so we can act together to promote and protect human life and dignity, marriage and family, justice and peace in service to the common good. This kind of political responsibility is a requirement of our faith and our duty as citizens.

Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan
President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo
Chairman, Committee on
Pro-Life Activities

Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl
Chairman, Committee on Doctrine

Archbishop José H. Gomez
Chairman, Committee
on Migration

Bishop Stephen E. Blaire
Chairman, Committee on Domestic
Justice and Human Development

Bishop Thomas J. Curry
Chairman, Committee on
Catholic Education

Bishop Howard Hubbard
Chairman, Committee on International
Justice and Peace

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades
Chairman, Committee on Laity,
Marriage, Family Life, and Youth

Bishop Jaime Soto
Chairman, Committee on Cultural
Diversity in the Church

Bishop Gabino Zavala
Chairman, Committee
on Communications