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## DENVER CATHOLIC REGISTER

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### Archbishop's column



## Seven principles to use in the public square, both in and out of an election year

**What we claim to believe as Christians must inform all aspects of our lives.**

**by Most Rev. Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.**

In his comments to the 2006 Gospel of Life conference on Oct. 28, Archbishop Chaput outlined seven simple principles that Catholics should use to inform their actions in the public square — this year and every year, whether elections loom or not.

1. Relationships have consequences. If we claim to love someone or believe something, we should act accordingly. A married man should be faithful to his wife all the time, every day, in every way. In like manner, a baptized person should seek to be faithful to Jesus Christ all the time, every day, in every way.
2. Jesus gave us the Church as our mother and teacher. She speaks for Jesus Christ and teaches in His name. Therefore, we owe the same fidelity to the Church that we owe to Christ.
3. Jesus told us to “make disciples of all nations” and to be “leaven in the world.” The Epistle of James tells us to be “doers of [God’s] word, and not hearers only,” and that “faith without works is dead.” What we claim to believe as Christians, we need to then prove by our actions — in every aspect of our lives; our families, our friendships, our work and business dealings, and also in our political choices. Otherwise we’re just lying to ourselves and others.
4. Catholic teaching has two basic principles we should use in judging every public issue: First, does this issue advance the dignity of the individual human person; and second, does this issue promote the common good? We can never choose one of these principles to the exclusion of the other. We need to follow both. A public policy can’t truly serve the common good if it violates, or allows to be violated, the sanctity of someone’s fundamental human rights, from conception to natural death.
5. We should bring our faith to bear on all public issues. But not all public issues are equal. Many are important. But some, like the right to life itself, are foundational.
6. As Catholics, we need to think and vote according to our consciences. But a human “conscience” doesn’t suddenly happen out of thin air. It needs to be cultivated, grow and be formed in the light of truth, so that we can understand the difference between good and evil in a genuinely Christian way. Conscience is never simply a matter of personal opinion or preference. It’s not what we want to do, but what we know we should do because of God’s truth in our hearts. We discover that truth by thinking and praying seriously over what Christ’s Church teaches, and trying to conform our actions to her moral guidance.

7. Jesus tells us to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” That means we have a serious duty to respect and appropriately serve public authority. But Jesus doesn’t tell us how much actually belongs to Caesar — and in fact, all of the important things about our lives belong not to Caesar, but to God. God should always come first. When we seek first to be “faithful citizens” of our real and ultimate home — heaven — then we naturally become better citizens of this world, because we become sources of virtue and character and justice for the people around us, even when our message is unpopular. The more truly and faithfully we live as Catholics, the more truly and faithfully we serve our nation’s best ideals and deepest needs.