



October 19, 2006

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Our airwaves have been filled with political ads as we prepare for the November elections. We write to you to encourage you to exercise the important privilege and responsibility we have as citizens by voting.

The Catholic Church does not endorse specific candidates. However, we do uphold important principles outlined by our bishops' conference in the document "Faithful Citizenship."

Issues to Consider

1. Protecting Human Life. Our foundational principle to protect the life and dignity of all human persons calls us to work to end abortion, euthanasia, destruction of human embryos, cloning, assisted suicide, intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks and the use of the death penalty. This principle leads us to seek peace, raise serious questions about the preemptive use of force.

2. Promoting Family Life. We defend marriage between a man and a woman, work for just wages and the protection of children. We support parental choice in education, responsible use of media, and technology and vigorous enforcement of existing pornography laws.

3. Pursuing Social Justice. We show God's special concern for the poor and vulnerable by supporting programs that create living wage jobs, make health care more affordable and accessible, provide income security for low and average wage workers at retirement, offer safe and affordable housing, protect family farmers and farm workers, and bring about just immigration reform. We seek public policies that work to end poverty, hunger and discrimination.

4. Practicing Global Solidarity. We work to alleviate poverty worldwide, strengthen barriers against the use of nuclear weapons and reduce the global arms trade, protect refugees and end conflicts around the globe. We bring our vision and values to the changing global economic structures.

We ask you to use these Christian principles to measure the various candidates and what they bring to the service of our government and society at large. We also ask that you consider the following rights and duties as a part of properly forming your conscience. Please pray, think and vote so that we as Christians will exercise the great privilege that is ours to participate in the democratic process and to uphold the values of Christ in our society.¹

¹ Prepared by Bishop Gregory Aymond, Bishop of Austin

Rights and Duties:

We, the Catholic Bishops of Texas, 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.

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*).

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.

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.²

² [Originally approved and released by the Kansas Catholic Conference with signatures of all the bishops.]

[Adopted, approved, and released by the Texas Catholic Conference with signatures of all the bishops of Texas.]