



A letter from Archbishop Aymond and U.S. bishops' reflection on forming consciences...

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

On Tuesday, Nov. 8, our nation will vote for the next President of the United States. We will see the names of the two candidates representing the nation's major political parties; yet I cannot recall any election in my lifetime producing more confusion, discomfort and even anger.

What's a Catholic to do?

Neither I nor any other bishop can tell you how to vote. It is rightfully your responsibility to form your own conscience and bring that with you into the voting booth. So the question then becomes, how does one form one's conscience?

First and foremost we must pray. We must pray for ourselves that we will make decisions with a well-formed conscience. We must pray for our nation and all of our elected leaders. As we exercise our right to vote as we are called to do, we must rely on our faith, our relationship with Jesus Christ and the moral wellspring of the Catholic Church.

Pope Francis has urged us not to throw up our hands and capitulate to the thought of not voting: "If indeed 'the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics,' the Church 'cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.'"

The U.S. bishops have done a very good job in offering a guide to help Catholics form their consciences. It is called "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship." We printed that document last month in the Clarion Herald, and it also is available on the archdiocesan website (<http://nolacatholic.org>).

There are several public policy goals that the bishops hope will guide Catholics in their voting: addressing the preeminent requirement to protect human life; protecting the fundamental understanding of marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman; achieving comprehensive immigration reform that offers a path to citizenship; helping families and children overcome poverty; ensuring full conscience protection and religious freedom; providing health care while respecting human life and dignity and religious freedom; opposing policies that reflect racism, hostility toward immigrants or religious bigotry; establishing moral limits on the use of military force; pursuing peace, protecting human rights and religious liberty and advancing economic justice and care for creation.

To that end, “Faithful Citizenship” has broken down the process of forming our consciences. It lists nine serious moral issues: the destruction of innocent human life through abortion; physician-assisted suicide; redefinition of marriage; excessive consumption of material goods; deadly attacks on Christians and other religious minorities; threats to religious freedom; economic policies that harm the poor; a broken immigration system; and wars, terror and violence around the world.

But how do we apply these principles in elections?

“Faithful Citizenship” tells us the “application of prudential judgment does not mean that all choices are equally valid.” The church has told us there are “some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. These intrinsically evil acts must always be rejected and never supported.”

The bishops make it clear, that “the direct and intentional destruction of human life from the moment of conception until natural death is always wrong and is not just one among many issues. It must always be opposed.” The bishops name other acts that can never be justified: human cloning, destructive human embryonic research and acts that “directly violate the sanctity and dignity of human life” such as genocide, torture and targeting non-combatants in war.

There are other serious moral issues that must be considered in forming our conscience: racism and unjust discrimination; the use of the death penalty; resorting to unjust war; environmental degradation; the use of torture; failing to respond to those who are hungry, have no shelter or lack medical care; pornography; human trafficking; redefining marriage; attacking religious liberty and unjust immigration policies.

So as you prepare to cast your vote, I encourage you to take the time to pray and reflect on these issues in question, and to research the candidates and their party platforms on the issues of moral significance for us as Catholics. If you cannot justify voting for any candidate, you must pray and follow your conscience.

May God bless you as you make your decision on Nov. 8, and may God bless America. We must bring our faith and a well-informed conscience into the voting booth.

May God’s wisdom guide us and enlighten us.

Sincerely in Christ,
Most Reverend Gregory M. Aymond
Archbishop of New Orleans