

# Bishops offer ways to apply Catholic values to voting

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"The answer to violence is not more violence." "Every child should have the opportunity to be born and to feel welcomed." "Make the needs of the poor a priority." "Safe and affordable housing should be available for all." "The United States should lead in contributing to sustainable development of poorer nations . . . ." "Food Stamps, the Special Nutrition Program for Women Children and Infants (WIC), and other nutrition programs need to be strong and effective."

Are these statements campaign slogans? No. These are statements from Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' official statement on political responsibility for Catholic voters.

The USCCB publishes Faithful Citizenship every four years, just in time for the presidential elections. But the teachings in Faithful Citizenship are not limited to presidential candidates. Rather, the bishops' statement presents a moral guide for all of our political debates and decisions, regardless of who is running for what.

Consistent with our faith, the bishops do not tell voters who to vote for or how they must vote. As the title suggests, the point of Faithful Citizenship is to guide Catholics as they form their own opinions on the candidates and the issues based on Catholic teaching and values. As anyone who has voted knows far too well, "Catholics often face difficult choices about how to vote. This is why it is so important to vote according to a well-formed conscience that perceives the proper relationship among moral goods," as the bishops state. Faithful Citizenship recognizes that a voter may need to choose between candidates who take morally flawed positions on one issue or another. The voter must decide whether to vote for the candidate who is less likely to pursue his or her morally flawed position and more likely to focus on other positions that promote the common good, or to not vote at all.

For Catholics, not voting is as serious a moral decision as choosing a candidate. We are obligated to participate in political life, not because government says we are, but because we agreed at our baptism to follow Christ and restore God's justice in our world. We do so, at least in part, by voting our faith, thereby trying to influence the political landscape to build "a more just and peaceful world through morally acceptable means, so that the weak and vulnerable are protected and human rights and dignity are defended."

That does not mean, however, that all Catholics will vote the same way. It should be clear from the statements we began with that it will be the very rare candidate who fully represents a Catholic voter and all of our areas of concern. Despite what political pundits might say, Catholics cannot be lumped into the broad categories of liberal or conservative, nor should we be led astray by interest groups who demand that Catholics vote a particular way. We must each decide for ourselves which candidates truly respect life and understand how all political issues, from abortion to taxes to energy policy, impact human dignity.

Choosing different candidates does not make one voter a better Catholic than another; it simply reflects the reality that there is often more than one solution to complex questions.

To more fully illustrate this point, we will continue to address specific political issues in this column as the election season progresses, using Faithful Citizenship as our guide. In the meantime, visit [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org) for a copy of the bishops' statement and other related resources. You may also want to join us for Catholic Advocacy Day at the Utah State Capitol Feb. 21 from 9 a.m. to noon. For more information, contact Jean Hill at 801-328-8641x 336.