

## CONSCIENCE AND THE CATHOLIC VOTER

“In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”

*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, 13*

In the current environment of extraordinary polarization and having been prompted by many Catholics of good will for guidance in this election year, I am pleased to present to you “Conscience and the Catholic Voter,” a series of eight outlines with a view to the upcoming election, prepared by the Director of the Office for Life and Justice of Catholic Charities, Peter Range. These outlines are offered in a spirit of encouragement to provide insight into Catholic Social Teaching regarding issues of consequence in this year’s election. I am asking that these outlines together with this introduction be broadly distributed and be made available for placing in parishes bulletins and on parish and diocesan websites.

As these outlines examine the many life issues affecting the dignity of the human person in this upcoming election, we are committed to defending and protecting life in the full spectrum of areas of intense disagreement including Euthanasia, Religious Freedom, Marriage and Family, Human Trafficking, Immigration, Prisoners, Racism, Socialism and the Environment. That said, it is critical for Catholics to recall that the destruction of innocent human life through abortion is not simply one among many issues but the foundational and preeminent life issue facing our nation. “No human law can validly contradict the Commandment: “Thou shalt not kill.”” (USCCB, *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics [1998], no. 31*).

In this election year, there is no doubt that we are faced with a choice between two deeply flawed candidates, and that neither party perfectly aligns with our Gospel values. As Catholics, we do not cast votes based on whether we like or dislike the personality of the candidates; we do not cast votes based on whether the candidate does or does not have the same color of skin as us; we do not cast votes based on the age or gender of the candidates; we do not cast votes based on the political party a family has or has not endorsed in the past; we do not cast votes based on whether the person does or does not share our religious affiliation.

Instead, as Catholics, we need to ask ourselves which party platform, which evident actions and voting records of candidates are more closely aligned to what we hold to be true and just, and whether any of these are directly opposed to the consistent fundamental moral teachings of the Church. With the Democratic and Republican Conventions now in the rear view mirror, their candidates endorsed and their platforms published, it now falls to us to realize that, no matter whether we are affiliated with this or that political party or no party at all, it is our responsibility as Catholic citizens of our nation to exercise our civic duty to vote - for the sake of the common good of society - and that we do so with minds and hearts informed by what the Church herself teaches, not what this or that person says the Church teaches or what this or that person holds, mindful that ultimately we are called first to be citizens of heaven.

As Catholics, it is imperative that we form our consciences from the heart of the Church. I pray these outlines will aid in helping you to form your conscience through understanding Catholic teaching and I encourage you to approach these issues with prayer, charity and fidelity. Please share these outlines broadly in your parishes and schools and invite discussion using these documents. May the Lord guide us and our nation at this critical time.

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,



Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas