

Casting our votes FOR THE COMMON GOOD



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The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits the denial of the right of citizens 18 years of age or older to vote on account of age. The amendment was proposed on March 23, 1971, and ratified on July 1, 1971, in a remarkable time span of only 100 days. The Vietnam War was raging, and the thought was that if you were old enough to fight and die for your country, you are old enough to vote.

I was among the earliest beneficiaries of this amendment. I voted in 1972, the first time that those under 21 were allowed to vote in a presidential election. Since I was away at college, I applied for absentee ballots and received a huge packet of paper ballots in the mail for voting on various local and state issues and for candidates at all levels of government.

Since 1972, I have never missed voting in a presidential election. I vote in nearly every election. I encourage every person to do the same! We have a duty to participate in public life and contribute to the common good. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1913-15)

How should Catholics prepare to vote? Responsibly! We need a well-formed conscience. And having formed it, we are obliged to follow what we know to be just and right. (CCC, 1778) We also need to cultivate, through God's grace, the virtue of prudence, which enables us to discern what is good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of attaining it. (CCC, 1806) Prudence is needed in choosing between various approaches to policy issues. The protection of human life (especially regarding abortion and euthanasia), immigration reform, safeguarding religious freedom, working to end systematic and institutionalized racism, and reducing poverty readily come to mind during this presidential election year.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' teaching document regarding the political responsibility of Catholics is entitled *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. This document is a great resource to draw upon before casting your ballot; it was updated last year to reflect the teachings of Pope Francis as well as address recent developments in domestic and foreign policy. The document does not tell us for whom we are to vote; the Catholic Church does not endorse candidates. It is about conscience formation. And it reminds us that we must take into account many issues, such as those mentioned above.



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In its new introductory letter, the bishops state: "The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed. At the same time, we cannot dismiss or ignore other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism, the environmental crisis, poverty and the death penalty."

Forming Consciences goes on to say: "As Catholics we are not single-issue voters. A candidate's position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter's support. Yet if a candidate's position on a single issue promotes an intrinsically evil act, such as legal abortion, redefining marriage in a way that denies its essential meaning, or racist behavior, a voter may legitimately disqualify a candidate from receiving support." (42)

The bishops also acknowledge that "There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position even on policies promoting an intrinsically evil act may reasonably decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil." (35) This year especially, we Catholics face difficult choices about how to vote!

I have reviewed the platforms of the Democratic and Republican parties. The 2020 Republican platform is unchanged from 2016; it is 67 pages long. The 2020 Democratic platform is new; it is 92 pages long. I recommend that you look at these documents before casting your vote. The party platforms are easily found by Googling "Republican/Democratic party platform 2020."

Elections are not the only time that we can contribute to the common good of our local community, state and nation. We must bring our Catholic faith and morals to bear upon the workplace, the classroom, the marketplace and civic life. In doing so, may we seek to follow God's plan and work with Christ to advance the kingdom of God in our midst. †



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RESOURCES FOR CATHOLIC VOTERS:

- [MICATHOLIC.ORG/ADVOCACY/2020-ELECTION](https://www.micatholic.org/advocacy/2020-election)
- [USCCB.ORG/RESOURCES/FORMING-CONSCIENCES-FAITHFUL-CITIZENSHIP-PDF](https://www.usccb.org/resources/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship-pdf)