

AN ELECTION YEAR STATEMENT FROM THE ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF MICHIGAN

“**G**overnment is instituted for the common good; for the protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness of the people; and not for profit, honor, or private interest of any one man, family, or class of men” wrote John Adams in *Thoughts on Government* in 1776. Later that year, the Declaration of Independence announced to the world “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” The nation’s Founding Fathers created a government where all who reside in these United States are free to pursue the common good—they are free to speak, free to assemble peacefully, and free to worship God and practice their faith.

With these freedoms comes responsibility. Catholics are called to evaluate all matters, including politics, through the lens of faith, to participate in the public square, to engage the political process, and to allow Gospel values to transform our society into a more just and better world for all. In other words, **Catholics are called to be “Faithful Citizens.”**

Practicing Faithful Citizenship flows from a **well-formed conscience**. What do we mean when we refer to “conscience?” According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1777, “Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.”

When we act in harmony with our conscience, shunning evil for that which is good, we are bringing Gospel values to the public square. Our pluralistic nation has a rich history of welcoming various ideas and proposals from all sectors of society, including, and especially, religious groups. In this tradition, the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, brought to the public square by faith-filled Catholics, help to embolden our communities and to advance the common good.

Those primarily responsible for implementing the common good are the public officials whom we elect at the ballot box every two and four years. Public officials hold tremendous influence over public policies that affect us not only as citizens of this great state, but more importantly, as Catholics and people of faith. Issues of religious freedom, the right to life, protection of marriage and the family, the education of children, and how the poor, the vulnerable and immigrants are served confront elected officials at the State Capitol each day. These are the issues that we, too, as Catholics, must seriously evaluate when deciding for whom to vote this November.

We recognize that Catholics seek guidance from their church on matters of conscience. As teachers of the faith, we do not endorse candidates or political parties. However, as bishops of the church, we have a duty to help the Catholic faithful form their consciences based on Gospel values and the teachings of Jesus Christ. As Catholics, we must evaluate candidates' positions based on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in order to determine who best will guide our communities.

Yet not all issues carry equal moral weight. Catholics may disagree on practical policies that call for prudential judgment, such as how best to care for the poor, how to welcome the immigrant, or how to eradicate racism. There are other policies, however, that are intrinsically evil and can never be supported.

The right to life is a commandment of God, an inherent and a fundamental moral principle. It is indeed the first of the unalienable God-given rights recognized by our Founding Fathers in the Declaration of Independence. It is the primary right through which all other rights flow. The willful destruction of human life through abortion, human embryo experimentation, and assisted suicide represent intrinsically evil policies. A Catholic with a well-formed conscience would be guilty of formal cooperation in evil if they were to deliberately vote for a candidate precisely because of the candidate's permissive stance on these policies. On the difficult occasion where both candidates support an intrinsic evil, the conscientious voter may consider each candidates' integrity and commitments, and determine which would be less likely to advance such a morally flawed position and more likely to promote other authentic human goods.

By forming our consciences based on Gospel values and the teachings of Jesus Christ, we can bring to the public square our commitment to the common good. Elected officials in Lansing expect nothing less from us. As Catholics, we are urged to vote, to take part in conversations about political matters, to join political parties, and to use the Internet to learn more about candidates and their positions. Most importantly, all of us, as faithful citizens, are called to cast our vote through the lens of faith.

Let us pray to the Holy Spirit for wisdom and guidance as we prepare to elect our political leaders this year.

Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron
Archbishop of Detroit

Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda
Bishop of Gaylord

Most Reverend Earl A. Boyea
Bishop of Lansing

Most Reverend Walter A. Hurley
Bishop of Grand Rapids

Most Reverend Alexander K. Sample
Bishop of Marquette

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo

Most Reverend Joseph R. Cistone
Bishop of Saginaw