

How to Vote as a Catholic

How does a Catholic know if a candidate can earn their vote? Catholics must apply moral principles to real issues that are non-negotiable and cast their vote accordingly. Inside, you can find the non-negotiable issues and principles by which Catholics must vote.

“The Church's teaching is clear that a good end does not justify an immoral means. As we all seek to advance the common good—by defending the inviolable sanctity of human life from the moment of conception until natural death, by promoting religious freedom, by defending marriage, by feeding the hungry and housing the homeless, by welcoming the immigrant and protecting the environment—it is important to recognize that not all possible courses of action are morally acceptable. We have a responsibility to discern carefully which public policies are morally sound. Catholics may choose different ways to respond to compelling social problems, but we cannot differ on our moral obligation to help 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.”

Paragraph 20 from *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, USCCB.

The Church always encourages the LAY FAITHFUL to be actively involved in political life, however, FORBIDS THE CLERGY from being actively involved. CCEO (Code of Canon Law for Eastern Churches) 382-384 and CIC (for the Latin church) 285. Basic guidelines on the matter and the role of laity: CCC 2245-46 and *Gaudium et Spes*. This guide has been provided by the Eparchy of Parma by permission of Bishop Milan Lach, S.J. 10/2020

Issues that are non-negotiable for Catholics

All quotes are taken directly from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Respecting Human Life: Evil acts, by which human life is violated or disrespected, are listed below in order of importance and based on current issues in the United States:

1. Abortion and Euthanasia - “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person – among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.” (CCC 2270) and “ Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable.” (CCC 2277) Abortion and euthanasia directly take the life of an innocent human being and therefore are the most grave evils.

2. Embryonic Stem Cell Research and Human Cloning – “Research or experimentation on the human being cannot legitimate acts that are in themselves contrary to the dignity of persons and to the moral law. The subjects’ potential consent does not justify such acts. Experimentation on human beings is not morally legitimate if it exposes the subject’s life or physical and psychological integrity to disproportionate or avoidable risks. Experimentation on human beings does not conform to the dignity of the person if it takes place without the informed consent of the subject or those who legitimately speak for him.” (CCC 2295) Embryonic stem cell research and human cloning manipulate human life and directly interfere with God’s plan for human beings.

3. Same-sex Marriage – “Tradition has always declared that ‘homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.’ They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.” (CCC 2357) Same-sex Marriage violates God’s original plan for man and woman, beginning with the creation of Adam and Eve, and his plan for the structure of the family, upon which society is built.

Issues that are non-negotiable for Catholics – continued

Upholding Religious Freedom: “The right to religious liberty is neither a moral license to adhere to error, nor a supposed right to error, but rather a natural right of the human person to civil liberty, i.e., immunity, within just limits, from external constraint in religious matters by political authorities. This natural right ought to be acknowledged in the juridical order of society in such a way that it constitutes a civil right.” (CCC 2108) Without religious freedom, we are unable to worship God according to His will and teachings made present to us through the Catholic Church.

Upholding the Education of Children: “‘The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.’ The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable.” (CCC 2221) “As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise.” (CCC 2229) Government and schools must never interfere with the role of parents in educating their children. They are there to protect the freedoms of parents and their children and to support families in making the best decisions for their children.

Rejecting Socialism/Marxism: “The Church has rejected the totalitarian and atheistic ideologies associated in modern times with “communism” or “socialism.” (CCC 2425) “In work, the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature. The primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and its beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work. Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community.” (CCC 2428) “Everyone has the right of economic initiative; everyone should make legitimate use of his talents to contribute to the abundance that will benefit all and to harvest the just fruits of his labor.” (CCC 2429) The ideology of socialism/Marxism, when implemented, degrades the worker and create environments where individual autonomy is violated. It also allows the government to take a tyrannical role in the name of protecting citizens rather than upholding the rights of citizens.

Principles and applying them to the issues

1. Not all evils are equal (“Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity” - CCC 1854). For example, there are many ways that human life can be harmed but the most evil are those that directly take the life of another, such as abortion and euthanasia. Thus, if a candidate supports abortion but is against racism and promotes the protection of the environment, a Catholic cannot vote for this candidate because the candidate supports the more grave evil against human life (abortion>racism or hurting the environment).

2. It is a sin to vote for candidates who will advance grave evils (see the grave evil issues that our country is currently dealing with above, under *Issues*). (“There are concrete acts that it is always wrong to choose.” CCC 1761)

3. Catholics must vote for a candidate who does more good than evil and who intends only the good. Catholics can vote for a candidate if a) the intention of the vote is to advance good and mitigate evil and b) the good effects of the vote are proportionate to the evil effects. (“Intention is an element essential to the moral evaluation of an action. The end is the first goal of the intention and indicates the purpose pursued in the action. The intention is a movement of the will toward the end.” CCC 1752)

4. Catholics can’t vote for the lesser of two evils. Catholics can never do an action for the sake of evil, even if it is the lesser evil. When given a choice, Catholics are required to vote for a candidate who will mitigate the evil of the other candidate even if he/she holds problematic positions, which nonetheless are not as evil as his/her opponents. (“An evil action cannot be justified by reference to a good intention’ ... The end does not justify the means.” CCC 1759). For example, the reason you should vote for a candidate who doesn’t support abortion but supports racism, should not be for the reason that they support racism. Your reason for voting for this person can only be that the other candidate supports abortion and thus by voting for the one who doesn’t support abortion you would be trying to prevent the candidate who supports abortion from doing further harm. This should be your reason for voting this way, and not to vote based on the fact that racism is the lesser evil.

5. Catholics can vote for a candidate who will produce both good and evil effects. What Catholics must consider is the degree of evil or good a candidate will advance compared to the other candidates. (“The legitimate defense of persons and societies is not an exception to the prohibition against the murder of the innocent that constitutes intentional killing. ‘The act of self-defense can have a double effect: the preservation of one’s own life; and the killing of the aggressor. ... The one is intended, the other is not.’ CCC 2263)