Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

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Good News/Bad News

- Greater interest in social issues as elections draw near.
- Greater interest in what the Church has to say but...
- There are dangers in a highly polarized and partisan environment.
- Too many Catholics start with partisan or ideological views, not Church teaching.
Linking faith to issues runs the risk of appearing partisan, alienating parishioners.

Failing to link faith to the major issues of our day makes faith seem irrelevant.
"One of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and the practice of their daily lives." (#43)

"At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task." (#4)

"By its nature and mission the Church is universal in that it is not committed to any one culture or to any political, economic or social system." (#42)
The Church in the World

- Partisanship!
- Campaign targets!
- Pundits!
- Polls!
- Polarized!
- Sound bites!

- Liturgy & Prayer
- Social Mission
- Church as safe and challenging space
- Family & Community Life
- Christian Education
Three Tasks:

Mission: Explore the role of the Church in the political process.

Message: Articulate the principles of the Church’s social teaching and briefly examine specific issues of concern.

Method: Suggest appropriate ways for parishes to encourage faithful citizenship.
What is the appropriate role of the Church in the public square?
Faithful Citizenship is NOT:

- A New Idea
- Partisan Politics
- The UCSA
- A Religious Voting Bloc
Woe to you who enact unjust statutes and who write oppressive decrees, depriving the needy of judgment and robbing my people's poor of their rights, Making widows their plunder, and orphans their prey!
"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."
In man’s inner dimension are rooted, in the final analysis, the commitment to justice and solidarity, to the building up of a social, economic and political life that corresponds to God’s plan

No. 40
...charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as “social charity”.  

*No. 29*
...that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness....

Declaration of Independence, 
July 4, 1776
Faithful Citizenship is NOT:

- A New Idea
- Partisan Politics
- The UCSA
- A Religious Voting Bloc
The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice...[T]he Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly... No. 28
Faithful Citizenship

In this statement, we bishops do not intend to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote. Our purpose is to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with God’s truth. We recognize that the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience, and that participation goes well beyond casting a vote in a particular election.

No. 7
Faithful Citizenship

As Catholics, we should be guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a political party or interest group. When necessary, our participation should help transform the party to which we belong; we should not let the party transform us in such a way that we neglect or deny fundamental moral truths. (No. 14)
Faithful Citizenship is NOT:

- A New Idea
- Partisan Politics
- The UCSA
- A Religious Voting Bloc
Separation of Church and State

Unfortunate phrase.
U.S. Constitution:
Prohibits establishing a religion.
Guarantees the free exercise of religion.
[The Church] “does not wish to exercise political power or eliminate the freedom of opinion of Catholics regarding contingent questions. Instead, it intends--as is its proper function--to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good.”
When the church calls the state to task, it does not want to introduce a Christian state. It simply wants to promote a human state.
Faithful Citizenship is NOT:

A New Idea
Partisan Politics
The UCSA
A Religious Voting Bloc
Faithful Citizenship

Although choices about how best to respond to these and other compelling threats to human life and dignity are matters for principled debate and decision, this does not make them optional concerns or permit Catholics to dismiss or ignore Church teaching on these important issues. No. 29
Faithful Citizenship IS:

- Avoiding Evil and Doing Good
- Forming Consciences and Fostering Prudence
- Encouraging Voting and active political engagement
Faithful Citizenship IS:

Avoiding Evil and Doing Good

Forming Consciences and Fostering Prudence.

Encouraging Voting and active political engagement.
There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. These intrinsically evil acts must always be rejected and never supported... (No. 22).

Opposition to intrinsically evil acts also prompts us to recognize our positive duty to contribute to the common good and act in solidarity with those in need. Both opposing evil and doing good are essential (No. 24).
“...the fact that only the negative commandments oblige always and under all circumstances does not mean that in the moral life prohibitions are more important than the obligation to do good indicated by the positive commandments.” No. 52
Living the Gospel of Life

We live the Gospel of life when we live in solidarity with the poor of the world, standing up for their lives and dignity. Yet abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others ...Direct abortion is never a morally tolerable option. It is always a grave act of violence against a woman and her unborn child.
Faithful Citizenship IS:

Avoiding Evil and Doing Good

Forming Consciences and Fostering Prudence.

Encouraging Voting and active political engagement.
Deus Caritas Est

The Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest. No. 28
Faithful Citizenship

...this begins with a willingness and openness to seek the truth and what is right by studying Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church as contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is also important to examine the facts and background information about various choices. Finally, prayerful reflection is essential to discern the will of God (No. 18).
Prudence enables us “to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1806). Prudence shapes and informs our ability to deliberate over available alternatives, to determine what is most fitting to a specific context, and to act decisively.
Difficult Choices

A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who takes a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, such as abortion or racism, if the voter’s intent is to support that position. No. 34

There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate’s unacceptable position may decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. No. 35
Prudential Judgment

These decisions should take into account a candidate’s commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue.

In the end, this is a decision to be made by each Catholic guided by a conscience formed by Catholic moral teaching. No. 37
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 a candidate’s position on a single issue that involves an intrinsic evil, such as support for legal abortion or the promotion of racism, may legitimately lead a voter to disqualify a candidate from receiving support. No. 42
Faithful Citizenship IS:

Avoiding Evil and Doing Good

Forming Consciences and Fostering Prudence.

Encouraging Voting and active political engagement.
...it is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. ... As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life.

Nos. 1913-1915
Faithful Citizenship

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in the political process is a moral obligation.

No. 13
The Message of Faithful Citizenship

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching
Especially its basic themes and principles.
Learning about and acting on Issues in light of Catholic Social Teaching
Catholic Social Teaching

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, & Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Dignity of Work & Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God’s creation
Catholic Social Teaching

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The Message of Faithful Citizenship

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching

Especially its basic themes and principles.

Learning about and acting on Issues in light of Catholic Social Teaching
Human Life

Abortion, euthanasia, cloning, destruction of human embryos
Genocide, torture, direct targeting of noncombatants in war and terrorist attacks
War and peace (preventive use of military force)
Nuclear, chemical, biological weapons
War in Iraq
Use of the death penalty
Family Life

- Marriage
- Family wages
- Right to choose education of children
- Protecting children and families from harmful media
Social Justice

Just wages, right to work, right to organize
Economic freedom and initiative
Reducing poverty
Rightful role of faith-based institutions
Social Security
Affordable health care and housing
Sustainable agriculture and food security
Immigration
Environment and climate change
Global Solidarity

U.S. leadership
Global poverty and underdevelopment
Humanize globalization
Religious Liberty and human rights
United Nations
Refugees
Regional Conflicts
Israel-Palestine
Iraq and Afghanistan
To Learn About Issues

Visit the Website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

www.usccb.org

Pro-life
Justice, Peace & Human Development
Education
Migration
The Method of Faithful Citizenship

Political, but not partisan.

Engaged, but not used.

Principled, but not ideological.

Clear and civil.
Suggestions and Resources for Parishes

www.faithfulcitizenship.org

Homily Suggestions
Ideas for Liturgists and Prayer Leaders
Ideas for Social Concerns and Respect
Life Committees
Educational materials for youth and adults
DOs and DON’Ts
And More
Do’s and Don’ts

**DO:**

Address the moral and human dimensions of public issues.

Share church teaching on human life, human rights, and justice and peace.

Apply Catholic values to legislation and public issues.

Conduct a non-partisan voter registration drive on church property.

Distribute unbiased candidate questionnaires covering issues of human life, justice, and peace that have been reviewed and approved by your diocesan attorney.

Check with your diocesan attorney if you have any
Do’s and Don’ts

DON’T:

Endorse or oppose candidates for political office.

Distribute partisan campaign literature under church auspices.

Arrange for groups to work for a candidate for public office.

Invite only selected candidates to address your church-sponsored group.

Conduct voter registration slanted toward one party.

Distribute a biased candidate survey.
Non-Partisan Voter Education

Excerpts from Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in bulletins

Distribute cards with seven themes of CST

Host discussion groups on CST using the video, *In the Footsteps of Jesus*

Sponsor an adult education session using the video, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*
Non-Partisan Voter Education

Distribute the brochure version of Faithful Citizenship.

Encourage small faith sharing groups to use adult education materials on CST and Faithful Citizenship.

Encourage youth to visit the youth section of www.faithfulcitizenship.org.
Protect the Parish’s Non-Partisanship

Don’t distribute materials from outside groups.

Bulletin Notice: We strongly urge all parishioners to register, to become informed of key issues, and to vote. The Church does not support or oppose any candidate, but seeks to focus attention on the moral and human dimension of issues. We do not authorize the distribution of partisan political materials on parish property.
Suggestions for Liturgies

Introductory comments
Choice of preface
General intercessions
Selection of music
Homily
Announcements after communion
Bulletin quotes from *Faithful Citizenship*
Suggestions for Homilists

Highlight the tradition
Connect to real life experiences
Promote participation in public life
Ask questions rather than providing answers
Avoid selective orthodoxy
Avoid partisanship
Tell people to vote, not how to vote
Specific Homily Suggestions

July 6, 2008 – Fourth of July weekend

September 21, 2008 – As summer ends and voters focus on the campaign

October 26, 2008 – Two weeks before the election

www.faithfulcitizenship.org
Three Tasks:

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Method: Suggest appropriate ways for parishes to encourage faithful citizenship.
The Church in the World

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- Attack ads!
- Polls!
- Polarized!
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- Liturgy & Prayer
- Church as safe and challenging space
- Social Mission
- Family & Community Life
- Christian Education
- Sound bites!
The Role of the Church

Fostering a renewed kind of politics:
Focused more on moral principles than on the latest polls
Focused more on the needs of the weak than on benefits for the strong
Focused more on the pursuit of the common good than on the demands of narrow interests
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