



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WEEKLY

from
Americans for Freedom of Religion

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Our Duty to Vote

Tuesday is Election Day. As Catholic citizens, we have a duty to vote—and to vote *responsibly*. For even in an off-year election when most of us will be choosing only local officials, our votes will impact not just ourselves, but all with whom we live in our communities, villages, cities.

Our civic and Christian duty requires that we cast an *informed* vote: learning about the candidates, the offices they are aspiring to, the issues they will be confronting, and their governing philosophies and proposed responses to those issues.

As Catholics, we should also be informed about the principles of Catholic moral and social teaching, so we may discern how best to use our votes to advance those principles.

Which candidates, parties, philosophies, for example, do we believe will best advance the protection of innocent human life? Who do we see implementing a “preferential option for the poor” in a way that will help people *escape* poverty? Which approaches to immigration do we believe will balance the Gospel’s call to “welcome the stranger” with the need to alleviate the suffering visited upon migrants as well as Americans by uncontrolled border crossings?

Evaluating such issues in light of Catholic social teaching does *not* require adherence to a particular political party or ideology. As Vatican II observed, sincere Catholics will frequently, and legitimately, see a problem differently, and proffer different solutions. In such instances, they should “dialogue in a spirit of mutual charity,” focusing “above all in the common good.”¹

And we should engage in such dialogue not just with fellow Catholics, but in the larger public square. The documents of Vatican II also emphasize that it falls primarily to Catholic lay citizens to bring Gospel values to bear on the “earthly city.”² We do that by defending religious freedom, then *using* that freedom to advance the common good by contributing the principles of Catholic moral and social teaching to public policy deliberations, especially in matters bearing on human life, dignity, and justice.

¹ Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Dec. 7, 1965, No. 43.

² *Ibid.*