

focus

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MICHIGAN
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CONFERENCE

The Issues, The Candidates, and Your Vote 2018

On Tuesday, November 6, citizens registered to vote in the State of Michigan will participate in the General Election. This year's mid-term election is as critical as any other, with the outcome determining majority control in the Michigan Legislature, along with prominent positions in local, state-wide, and federal office. These offices include:

Local: probate judges, county commissioners, and various other local, township, and municipal representatives.
Statewide: Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, two state Supreme Court justices, 110 House of Representative seats, and 38 State Senate seats.

Federal: one of Michigan's U.S. Senate seats, and each of the 14 representatives in Michigan's Congressional delegation.

Additionally, at least three and perhaps up to five questions will appear on the statewide ballot that address a wide-range of policy issues. With a crowded ballot, a great deal of candidate information to sift through and, at times, vocal and bitter partisanship in the public realm, it might be tempting for busy and well-meaning Catholic voters to avoid

voting. However, the concept of *Faithful Citizenship* teaches that each person has the responsibility to participate in political life—with a well-formed conscience. Furthermore, the principles outlined in the U.S. bishops' election document, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, remind Catholics that they can help transform politics. This process is about more than polls, partisan rhetoric, and individual interests. Instead, the Church urges Catholics to participate with an eye toward moral principles and the common good.

The Catholic Church does not tell her flock for which candidates to vote, but does seek to share Catholic teaching on a range of issues present in the public square.¹ From there, it is the job of individual Catholics to weigh their choices and make decisions that advance the common good, in light of a well-formed conscience. At times, Catholics of goodwill may disagree on the best way to address or weigh a certain prudential issue; yet protecting the life and dignity of the human person and modeling respectful dialogue are not up for debate. The purpose of this **focus** is to offer thoughts and questions for reflection as Catholics prepare to cast their ballots in the November 6, 2018 General Election. ■

What is Conscience & How Does it Relate to Voting?

Within *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, a word that immediately jumps out is **conscience**. What is conscience, and what does it mean for Catholics to have one that is well-formed? The Church refers to conscience as a personal tool that helps people recognize the truth about God, the world, and how to live their lives. Conscience is not a

feeling, justification after the fact for an action, or the internalization of news and facts that fit only with one's existing political ideology. Instead, it is "the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth" of faith and reason and guiding individuals to do good and to avoid evil.² The Church teaches that the will of God and the truths of the

faith should be greater in the minds of Catholics than the latest societal pressures. In order to develop a conscience that is “well-formed,” Catholics are called to learn about Church teaching to inform their decisions. This is a lifelong process.

Closely tied to developing a well-formed conscience is the need for *prudence*, or “love choosing wisely between the things that help and those which hinder.”³ Prudence helps individuals consider the best option for achieving a certain outcome. While the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) writes that certain evils must always be opposed—such as abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, the death penalty, embryonic stem cell research, and racism—there may be other issues in which Catholics choose different ways to respond. Prudence is a key guidance in these decisions. In the end, all are called, despite their differences, “to build a more just and peaceful world through morally acceptable means” that remembers the vulnerable and protects human dignity.⁴ In the context of the 2018 election, conscience

formation can help voters weigh candidate positions and issues to best shape the direction of local, state, and national communities. The beauty of conscience—directed by prudence—is that it provides a moral framework with which to evaluate issues and candidates, as well as a guidance to use within regular family and community life. ■

¹ Faithful Citizenship: An Exploration of Sacred Scripture and Tradition, USCCB, 2008: <https://bit.ly/2msCsW9>

² Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2015: <https://bit.ly/1kHJsse> and Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1777, Second Edition, 1994: <https://bit.ly/1n0EzBx>

^{3,4} St. Augustine, De Morib. Eccl. Xv

Tips on Developing a Well-Formed Conscience

- Be open to seeking the truth.
- Study and reflect upon Catholic teaching.
- Examine the facts about voting choices.
- Pray about all decisions before voting.

Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

The themes of Catholic Social Teaching can be helpful in forming one’s conscience and preparing for voting.⁵ Within each principle, it is appropriate to reflect upon the role and level of government that should be involved in a given issue, as well as the personal responsibility Catholics have to uphold these teachings in their individual lives.

The Right to Life and the Dignity of the Human Person

Every human person has inherent value, from conception to natural death. The protection of this value should be a crucial priority in society. All institutions should be evaluated by the way they threaten or enhance human life.

Does the candidate promote life and oppose threats to its value, such as abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, the death penalty, and embryonic stem cell research?

How does the candidate plan to address issues of violence in society, including gun violence, sexual abuse, domestic violence, torture, and exploitation?



Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The institution of the family, based on marriage between one man and one woman, is the key building block in society. When the family thrives, communities thrive. Within communities, people have the right and duty to participate in society and to seek the common good.

Does the candidate support policies that protect the stability of marriages, families, and children?

Does the candidate advocate for economic policies that enhance and strengthen family life?

Rights and Responsibilities

Every person has the right to basic necessities: life, food, shelter, medical care, and religious freedom. At the same time, each has the responsibility to recognize and to protect the rights of others in society. These rights and responsibilities are needed for a healthy community.

Does the candidate support policies that allow for increased access to basic needs, such as affordable housing and health care?

Does the candidate support the right of individuals and institutions to operate in accordance with their deeply held religious beliefs?

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

How the most vulnerable are treated should be the basic moral test of any society, as their suffering is the suffering of the whole community. These individuals have a vital role to play in society and should have the opportunity to share in and contribute to the common good.

Does the candidate promote the protection of the vulnerable and equip people with the resources to become self-sufficient whenever possible?

How does the candidate seek to address barriers for those in poverty, such as a lack of transportation or quality educational options?



Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

Work promotes and helps to protect the inherent dignity of each individual. It is a way to participate in the world God has created and to grow as a person in community with others. As such, the economy should put people first, and society should protect the rights of workers.

Does the candidate support social and economic policies that foster the creation of jobs, with decent working conditions and just wages?

Does the candidate support services for those who were incarcerated, to help them become productive members of society upon release?

Solidarity

Each person is part of the larger human family, despite differences in race, ethnicity, income, or ideology. Jesus taught that all are called to love their neighbor as themselves. Individuals and communities can practice solidarity by seeking justice and promoting peace in the midst of conflict.

Does the candidate support immigration reform that offers a path to citizenship, treats workers fairly, and prevents family separation?

Does the candidate support policies that protect border integrity and address factors that compel people to leave their home countries?



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Caring for God's Creation

God created the Earth, as well as the people, animals, and plants that live upon it. As a result, all Catholics are called to be good stewards of creation and the gifts it provides, protecting human beings and the larger planet.

How will the candidate address environmental issues, especially their impact on the poor?

Does the candidate support policies that will protect the state's natural resources?

Why Does Voting Matter?

Voting matters because those elected have the opportunity “to transform the institutions and issues people care about, including the economic opportunity in their community, the availability of affordable housing, the safety of the roads and bridges on which they travel, or the way human dignity is upheld.”⁶ This upcoming election will determine judges who will decide cases in Michigan communities. It will select state and federal lawmakers who will be making tough decisions about where public dollars will be spent. It will choose the next governor who will have an influential role on the direction of the state. Additionally, the votes will determine what local building projects move forward or how various services are funded. The impact of political decisions is not just felt by those who follow the news but is constantly borne out in schools, workplaces, and homes. For example, activity in the last two state legislative sessions (2015–2016 and 2017–2018) shows the critical work that has come before the State Legislature.⁷ Michigan Catholic Conference has advocated for a number of measures that have become law during that period of time, including those that:

- Criminalize abortion coercion.
- Provide funding to promote alternatives to abortion.
- Protect the conscience rights of faith-based child placement providers.
- Enhance protections for domestic violence victims.
- Expand shared time instruction to kindergarten.
- Reimburse nonpublic schools for State health, safety, and welfare mandates.
- Expand the number of elderly and disabled homeowners that qualify for the Homestead Property Tax Credit.
- Help more low-income children purchase school clothing.

⁵ Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching, USCCB, accessed 7/19/18: <https://bit.ly/1lti9gt>

⁶ Elections—And Your Vote—Matter, MCC, 6/11/18: <https://bit.ly/2zeq7hJ>

⁷ Advocacy Report on the 98th Michigan Legislature, MCC, 1/1/17: <https://bit.ly/204gWDR>

Did you know?

In 2014, the state’s last gubernatorial race, only 41.6 percent of the voting age population participated in the election. *MCC encourages voters to make their voices heard during this election.*

- Allow the wrongly imprisoned to receive reentry services and to apply for compensation.
- Extend conditions by which foreign drivers can drive in Michigan with a foreign license.
- Require public posting of a human trafficking hotline.

MCC was also pleased to see a number of measures defeated over the recent years, including those that would have reinstated the death penalty, allowed for physician assisted suicide, eliminated the state Earned Income Tax Credit, and placed additional and unnecessary burdens on agencies who resettle refugees. Issues such as these are what can be at stake in an election. In preparation for voting, Catholics may consider the priorities on which candidates are focusing. If those individuals are elected, what have they promised to do? Taking the time to research, learn about the candidates, and vote through the entire ballot has a significant impact on Michigan families and communities. ■

Important Aspects to Consider Before Voting

- What has the candidate committed to do?
- What is the candidate’s character like?
- What has the candidate done previously?
- What is the candidate’s ability to influence a given issue?

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