



ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD
134 FARMINGTON AVENUE
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT
06105-3784

OFFICE OF
THE ARCHBISHOP

October 28, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

As Election Day approaches, various claims are made about the religious and moral aspects of voting. It seems that every four years the same questions arise with an increasing amount of tension and discord, mirroring the growing polarization of the country at large. Let me offer, as simply as I can, some fundamental Church teaching that I hope will be of help to you as a practicing Catholic in making your political choices.

I believe that the Catholic people do not expect the clergy to engage in partisan politics or tell them for whom to vote. The Church cannot attach herself to any party, candidate or political system. The Church has experienced both the favor and the displeasure of every kind of political system in the last 2000 years. Jesus said: “My kingdom is not of this world.”

That does not mean, however, that as believers we can be indifferent to the well-being of the country in which we live. Issues of good and evil, right and wrong, engage us not only individually but corporately as a nation. This necessarily involves political life and the political choices we make. Having a conscience applies not just to my individual actions, but also to my exercise of responsibility for the common good. I bear a share of moral responsibility for what happens as a result of my political choices.

I urge everyone to learn more about the social doctrine of the Church. That doctrine addresses political, economic, ethical and cultural questions as these relate to our participation in social life, to the role of authority, the importance of the common good, natural law, social justice and human solidarity. As the *U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults* points out: “All of the Church’s social teaching is rooted in the fundamental principle of the sacredness of human life and the fundamental dignity of every single individual.”

When it comes to specific issues regarding good and evil, right and wrong, there can be a legitimate difference of opinion—morally and politically—about how to remedy an evil or accomplish something good. In this very contentious and troubling election year the U.S. Bishops have offered the following moral guidance in their teaching document *Faithful Citizenship*:

34. Catholics often face difficult choices about how to vote. This is why it is so important to vote according to a well-formed conscience that perceives the proper relationship among moral goods. A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to subhuman living conditions,

redefining marriage in ways that violate its essential meaning, or racist behavior, if the voter's intent is to support that position. In such cases, a Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in grave evil. At the same time, a voter should not use a candidate's opposition to an intrinsic evil to justify indifference or inattentiveness to other important moral issues involving human life and dignity.

35. There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position even on policies promoting an intrinsically evil act may reasonably decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil.

36. When all candidates hold a position that promotes an intrinsically evil act, the conscientious voter faces a dilemma. The voter may decide to take the extraordinary step of not voting for any candidate or, after careful deliberation, may decide to vote for the candidate deemed less likely to advance such a morally flawed position and more likely to pursue other authentic human goods.

37. In making these decisions, it is essential for Catholics to be guided by a well-formed conscience that recognizes that all issues do not carry the same moral weight and that the moral obligation to oppose policies promoting intrinsically evil acts has a special claim on our consciences and our actions. 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.

It seems to me that an objective way to evaluate our choices from a moral point of view is to take a look at the platforms of the political parties, keeping in mind that not every candidate subscribes to everything in his or her party's platform. We must ask ourselves not only whether these platforms promote what we think is good, but in what ways, if any, do they condone or promote things which are intrinsically evil. This question is incumbent upon us as persons responsible to God and neighbor.

My purpose in writing this letter is not to tell you for whom to vote, but rather to clarify what the moral teaching of the Church is for voters anywhere in the world, and to explain the distinction of moral categories that apply in making an informed judgment of conscience.

We have an obligation to be good citizens by registering and voting, and also by praying now and on Election Day that whatever the outcome, God will bring forth good for our country. I ask that within the limits imposed by the pandemic every parish consider time for prayer for this intention before the Blessed Sacrament on Tuesday, November 3.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leonard P. Blair". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair
Archbishop of Hartford