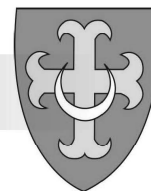


Informing Catholic Consciences



Compiled by the Diocese of Trenton
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The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in the United States does not endorse any candidate for political office whatsoever and does not endorse any political party. In its 2007 statement “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,” the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) states that “we bishops do not intend to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote” but, rather, “to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with God’s truth (paragraph 7).” The bishops continue, “In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation (paragraph 13).” Neither the USCCB nor the Diocese of Trenton provide, present or endorse a “voters’ guide” or a “scorecard of issues” with directions on how to vote. In an effort to help Catholics form and inform their consciences, however, we do attempt to present Catholic teaching on moral and social issues to the faithful clearly and consistently in accordance with the Gospel and the Church’s rich tradition regarding matters of faith and morals. Although by no means exhaustive, the following summary briefly attempts to do that.

☑ **Abortion, Euthanasia and Life Issues:** RCC teaches unqualified and absolute support for all human life in all its stages from conception to natural death. RCC considers abortion and euthanasia grave moral evils (see the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), paragraphs 2270 through 2283).

☑ **Death Penalty:** RCC teaches that “at the heart of the Catholic teaching on the death penalty is the belief that ‘human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end (CCC, paragraph 2258).’” In paragraphs 2266 and 2267, CCC goes on to teach that

The State’s effort to contain the spread of behaviors injurious to human rights and the fundamental rules of civil coexistence corresponds to the requirement of watching over the common good. Legitimate public authority has the right and duty to inflict penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime. The primary scope of the penalty is to redress the disorder caused by the offense. When his punishment is voluntarily accepted by the offender, it takes on the value of expiation. Moreover, punishment, in addition to preserving public order and the safety of persons, has a medicinal scope: as far as possible it should contribute to the correction of the offender (CCC, paragraph 2266).

The traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude, presupposing full ascertainment of the identity and responsibility of the offender, recourse to the death penalty, when this is the only practicable way to defend the lives of human beings effectively against the aggressor. “If, instead, bloodless means are sufficient to defend against the aggressor and to protect the safety of persons, public authority should limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person. Today, in fact, given the means at the State’s disposal to effectively repress crime by rendering inoffensive the one who has committed it, without depriving him definitively of the possibility of redeeming himself, cases of absolute necessity for suppression of the offender ‘today ... are very rare, if not practically non-existent.’” [John Paul II, encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, paragraph 56.] (CCC, paragraph 2267).

☑ **Same-sex Marriage:** RCC defines and teaches that marriage is a covenant of love between one man and one woman, which covenant is faithful and exclusive; fruitful and open to the transmission of life; and, forever or permanent (see CCC, paragraph 1601).

☑ **Immigration:** RCC teaches that all human beings have the right to migrate and to seek a better life for themselves and their families; that all families have the right to remain together; that all nations have the right to regulate and control their borders; that all nations should exercise their right to regulate and control their borders with justice and mercy. RCC supports comprehensive immigration reform in accordance with these rights (see CCC, paragraph 2241; see also, USCCB, “Strangers No Longer: Together



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on the Journey of Hope," 2003; see also, USCCB "Catholic Church's Position on Immigration Reform," www.usccb.org).

☑ **The Economy:** RCC supports pursuit of the "common good," economic justice for all as well as appropriate care and concern for the poor. RCC teaches that society is obliged to exercise justice in the use of the world's goods and to care for the poor in accordance with the Lord's command, "Love one another." RCC does not endorse any particular economic system but, in principle, opposes those which are contrary to the common good and economic justice for all or which prevent any individual's or individuals' legitimate right to provide for themselves and their own health and well-being and that of their families (see CCC, paragraphs 2426-2436; see also USCCB, "Economic Justice-Economy," www.usccb.org).

☑ **Education:** RCC teaches that parents have the right and obligation to educate their children, and USCCB supports parental choice and vouchers in accordance with that right and obligation.

☑ **Environmental Issues:** RCC teaches that all human beings have the right and obligation to be stewards of creation as a gift from God. The U.S. Catholic bishops have declared, "At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both 'the human environment' and the natural environment." (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001, p.1). Pope Benedict XVI called us to defend and safeguard creation. "In dialogue with Christians of various churches, we need to commit ourselves to caring for the created world, without squandering its resources, and sharing them in a cooperative way," he insisted (see USCCB, "Faithful Stewards of God's Creation: A Catholic Resource for Environmental Justice and Climate Change," www.usccb.org).



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☑ **Health Insurance:** RCC supports the right of all human beings to obtain health insurance but opposes any insurance provision which includes and/or requires support for contraception, abortion or abortifacients. The USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development established four criteria for fair and just health care reform: (1) a truly universal health policy with respect for human life and dignity; (2) access for all with a special concern for poor and inclusion of immigrants; (3) pursuing the common good and preserving pluralism including freedom of conscience and variety of options; and (4) restraining costs and applying them equitably across the spectrum of payers. USCCB identified the first three criteria as the moral principles essential to health care reform, a reform that the bishops have repeatedly identified as "a moral imperative and urgent national priority (see USCCB, "Health Care Reform," www.usccb.org).



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☑ **Drugs:** RCC supports society's right to regulate the indiscriminate use of alcohol, illicit drugs and prescription medications.

☑ **Religious Liberty:** RCC supports full freedom of religion (not simply worship) and opposes governmental determination of what constitutes or defines religion or religious faith and practice. "To be Catholic and American should mean not having to choose one over the other. Our allegiances are distinct, but they need not be contradictory, and should instead be complementary. That is the teaching of our Catholic faith, which obliges us to work together with fellow citizens for the common good of all who live in this land. That is the vision of our founding and our Constitution, which guarantees citizens of all religious faiths the right to contribute to our common life together (see USCCB, "Our First and Most Cherished Liberty, 2012;" see also "Religious Liberty," www.usccb.org).