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Voting as 'Faithful Citizens'

By Bishop Kevin Farrell and Bishop Kevin Vann

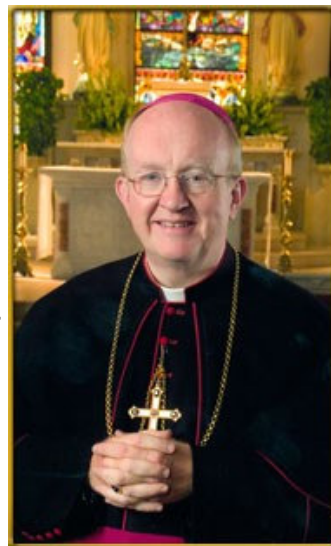


Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The month of October is Respect Life Month in our churches. It is a time in which we as Catholics are called to reflect upon the gift of life that has been entrusted to us by our Creator and to focus our attention on the many attacks against human life that exist in our culture today. This year, Respect Life Month takes on a more profound meaning as we face an election in our country where the protection of human life itself, particularly that of the unborn, is very much at stake. Therefore, as your Bishops, we wish to take this opportunity to provide clear guidance on the proper formation of conscience concerning voting as faithful

Catholics and to articulate the Church's clear and unambiguous teaching on life issues as they relate to other issues of concern.

The Church teaches that all Catholics should participate as "faithful citizens" in the public square, especially through our voice in the voting booth, and that we have the responsibility to treat the decision for whom we will vote for with profound moral seriousness. We must approach the right and duty to vote with a properly formed and informed conscience in accordance with the teachings of the Church. Last November, the Bishops of the United States issued a document entitled *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, in which we and our brother Bishops issued clear moral guidelines to aid the faithful in proper formation of conscience with regard to the many issues we face in our nation today. Through this joint statement to the faithful of Dallas and Fort Worth, we seek to briefly summarize the key points and dispel any confusion or misunderstanding that may be



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present among you concerning the teaching contained in the document, especially that which may have arisen from recent public misinterpretation concerning this teaching.

1. Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship clearly teaches that not all issues have the same moral equivalence. Some issues involve "intrinsic evils"; that is, they can never under any circumstance or condition be morally justified. Preeminent among these intrinsic evils are legalized abortion, the promotion of same sex unions and "marriages", repression of religious liberty, as well as public policies permitting euthanasia, racial discrimination or destructive human embryonic stem cell research. Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship clearly states: "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. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called 'intrinsically evil' actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia. In our nation, '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' (Living the Gospel of Life, no. 5). It is a mistake with grave moral consequences to treat the destruction of innocent human life merely as a matter of individual choice. A legal system that violates the basic right to life on the grounds of choice is fundamentally flawed." (22)

2. The destruction of the most innocent of human life through abortion and embryonic stem cell research not only undercuts the basic human right to life, but it also subverts and distorts the common good. As Pope John Paul II clearly states: "Disregard for the right to life, precisely because it leads to the killing of the person whom society exists to serve, is what most directly conflicts with the possibility of achieving the common good... It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop..." (The Gospel of Life, 72; 101)

3. Therefore, we cannot make more clear the seriousness of the overriding issue of abortion – while not the "only issue" – it is the defining moral issue, not only today, but of the last 35 years. Since the Roe v. Wade decision in 1973, more than 48 million innocent lives have been lost. Each year in our nation more than one million lives are lost through legalized abortion. Countless other lives are also lost through embryonic stem cell research. ...In the coming months our nation will once again elect our political leaders. This electoral cycle affords us an opportunity to promote the culture of life in our nation. As Catholics we are morally obligated to pray, to act, and to vote to abolish the evil of abortion in America, limiting it as much as we can until it is finally abolished.

4. As Catholics we are faced with a number of issues that are of concern and should be addressed, such as immigration reform, healthcare, the economy and its solvency, care and concern for the poor, and the war on terror. As Catholics we must be concerned about these issues and work to see that just solutions are brought about. There are many possible solutions to these issues and there can be reasonable debate among Catholics on how to best approach and solve them. These are matters of "prudential judgment." But let us be clear: issues of prudential judgment are not morally equivalent to issues involving intrinsic evils. No matter how right a given candidate is on any of these issues, it does not outweigh a candidate's unacceptable position in favor of an intrinsic evil such as abortion or the protection of "abortion rights."

As Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship states: "The direct and intentional destruction of innocent human life from the moment of conception until natural death is always wrong and is not just one issue among many. It must always be opposed." (28)

5. Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, in paragraphs 34-37, addresses the question of whether it is morally permissible for a Catholic to vote for a candidate who supports an intrinsic evil – even when the voter does not agree with the candidate's position on that evil. The only moral possibilities for a Catholic to be able to vote in good conscience for a candidate who supports this intrinsic evil are the following:

- a. If both candidates running for office support abortion or "abortion rights," a Catholic would be forced to then look at the other important issues and through their vote try to limit the evil done; or,
- b. If another intrinsic evil outweighs the evil of abortion. While this is sound moral reasoning, there are no "truly grave moral" or "proportionate" reasons, singularly or combined, that could outweigh the millions of innocent human lives that are directly killed by legal abortion each year.



To vote for a candidate who supports the intrinsic evil of abortion or "abortion rights" when there is a morally acceptable alternative would be to cooperate in the evil – and, therefore, morally impermissible.

6. In conclusion, as stated in Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, the decisions we make on these political and moral issues affect not only the general peace and prosperity of society at large, but also may affect each individual's salvation. As Catholics, we must treat our political choices with appropriate moral gravity and in doing so, realize our continuing and unavoidable obligation to be a voice for the voiceless unborn, whose

destruction by legal abortion is the preeminent intrinsic evil of our day. With knowledge of the Church's teaching on these grave matters, it is incumbent upon each of us as Catholics to educate ourselves on where the candidates running for office stand on these issues, particularly those involving intrinsic evils. May God bless you.

Faithfully in Christ,

Most Reverend Kevin J. Farrell
Bishop of Dallas

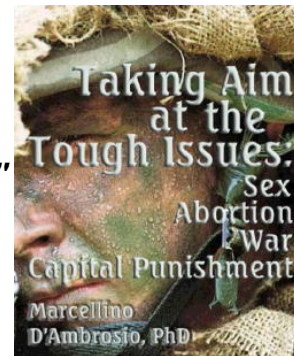
Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann
Bishop of Fort Worth

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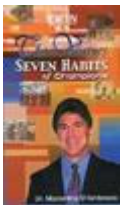
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