

# VOTING IN GOOD CONSCIENCE: CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE VOTING BOOTH

## CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE CALL TO PARTICIPATION

Catholic social teaching is clear: Every person has a distinct right and responsibility to participate in community and pursue the common good. If we cannot build a society where all people can thrive together in community, justice cannot be achieved.

In a representative democracy like the United States, the call to participation also means voting. Catholics are called to grapple with the complexities of the two-party system and live out the values of Catholic social justice in the voting booth.

## BEING A CATHOLIC VOTER IN A WORLD OF PARTISAN POLITICS

"I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE OPPOSED TO ABORTION, THAT THAT MAKES YOU PRO-LIFE. IN FACT, I THINK IN MANY CASES, YOUR MORALITY IS DEEPLY LACKING IF ALL YOU WANT IS A CHILD BORN BUT NOT A CHILD FED, NOT A CHILD EDUCATED, NOT A CHILD HOUSED. AND WHY WOULD I THINK THAT YOU DON'T? BECAUSE YOU DON'T WANT ANY TAX MONEY TO GO THERE.

"THAT'S NOT PRO-LIFE. THAT'S PRO-BIRTH. WE NEED A MUCH BROADER CONVERSATION ON WHAT THE MORALITY OF PRO-LIFE IS."

—SISTER JOAN CHITTISTER, BENEDICTINE NUN, AUTHOR & SPEAKER

The hierarchy has preached that to be a Catholic voter, one must be aligned on a singular issue — in effect, defining “pro-life” as “anti-abortion.” It is no secret that in recent years, this has created the impression in the pews and in the media that Catholics fall within the same partisan political divide as the rest of the United States.

Even Pope Francis has lamented the singular focus of anti-abortion advocates, saying that “equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged” (*Gaudete et Exultate*, 101). It turns out, commitment to advancing the common good can be nuanced.

As Catholics for Choice, we know that a justice-minded view of the world requires looking beyond a particular party or a singular issue. We are Catholic voters based on a multitude of issues, seeking to center the needs of the most vulnerable and build a world where all can choose to live in safe, healthy communities. We do not live single-issue lives.

## SUPPORT FOR ABORTION ACCESS AS A CATHOLIC VOTER

---

It is possible — even common — to be a pro-choice Catholic voter. The stigma around abortion can make it hard for Catholics to talk about, and the hierarchy would like you to think that the majority opinion among Catholics is that abortion should be illegal. But that couldn't be further from the truth. In the United States, 1 in 4 abortion patients identifies as Catholic (Guttmacher 2016) and 75% of Catholics support legal abortion in at least some situations (Gallup 2018).

**Are you a voter in California, Michigan, Vermont, Nevada, Kentucky, or Montana?** While we believe that reproductive justice and Catholic social justice are on the ballot in every election because of what lawmakers can do to advance or restrict access once elected, these states have specific ballot initiatives this election that have massive implications for reproductive rights. We recommend the following votes:

**California: Vote YES on Proposition 1**, which would amend the state's constitution to support the right to choose abortion.

**Michigan: Vote YES on Proposition 3**, which would establish the right to reproductive freedom in the state's constitution.

**Vermont: Vote YES on Proposal 5**, which would add the right to reproductive autonomy to the state's constitution.

**Nevada: Vote YES on Question 1**, which would add the Equal Rights Amendment to the state's constitution.

**Kentucky: Vote NO on Constitutional Amendment 2**, which would add language banning abortion and the funding of abortion into the state's constitution.

**Montana: Vote NO on Legislative Referendum 131**, which would criminalize abortion providers with new "born-alive after an abortion" protocols, requiring them to provide futile medical care regardless of any parent's wishes or face criminal consequences.

Pro-choice Catholics don't just exist, we are the majority. But if you find yourself with discomfort around abortion or even some of the messaging that you have heard from parts of the pro-choice movement, you are not alone. Catholics for Choice fiercely supports abortion access, but part of why we created this voting guide was to help people of faith who believe abortion is a morally complex issue. When you go to cast your vote, you can reflect upon the full scope of politics today. Your participation as a Catholic voter does not need to boil down to one singular issue prescribed by the hierarchy.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS AS YOU HEAD INTO THE VOTING BOOTH

---

*We have prepared some reflection questions for you as you think about how to cast your vote.*

**How am I feeling heading into the voting booth (filling out my mail-in ballot, etc.)?** Am I enthusiastic about my vote or do I feel like I must choose between the lesser of two evils? Whose voices are influencing my decision?

**What are the issues weighing the most heavily on my heart?** How will my vote help dismantle the sinful structures of racism, white supremacy, patriarchy, economic inequality, and more? What needs is God calling me to respond to in this moment?

**How am I showing up as a Catholic in public life?** How does my role as a Catholic voter support or limit the religious liberty of others who don't share my faith?

**Which candidate do I trust to best represent my values?** Have they said anything about the issues I care most about? Do they have an actionable plan for advancing justice?

**Are there any issues on the ballot I should be aware of?** How can I center the needs of the most marginalized in determining how to vote?

**How will I vote to advance the common good?**

## CASTING YOUR VOTE

---

As Catholics, we have a right and responsibility to vote to advance the common good. We may feel like we are searching for the “perfect” choice, only to come up short. But we know that it is rare to find a perfect “aligns with all my values” candidate.

Our jobs, as Catholic voters, are to select the candidates who will help build the world we seek. That is a world where everyone can choose when, whether, and how to raise families; live in safe, healthy communities; and love their neighbor as themselves.