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|  | **Election Year Politics:**  **Forming a Catholic Conscience -**  **Voting From a Catholic Perspective (Part 1)** | | |
| What’s the Point? | Building on the theme of the “common good” and rights and responsibilities from the previous sessions, this and the following lesson seek to educate the participants about their role first, in this session, by talking about conscience formation and second, in the next, by using the positions of the two primary presidential candidates, their party platforms and themes of Catholic social teaching that should be considered when selecting a presidential candidate. These sessions depend on current information to flesh out the discussion as such materials provided are merely for example, unless they are actually useful. | | |
| **Background Information** | ***Reference***   * ***CCC****: ¶ 2234-2246;* * **NAB** : *1 Tim 5-6;Gal 6:2-10; 2 Thes 3:6-15;* * [*Veritatis Splendor*](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html)Section II, *Conscience and Truth**54-68*   As the Body of Christ, the Common Good drives us as it drove Jesus. There is no other principle which informs our thinking; Life is our most precious commodity and must be protected AND promoted in everything we do. There is no compromise when it comes to this thinking. Now, we are not speaking in terms of the subtleties of Moral Theology here but in the way we base our thinking. What is the foundation of who we are? Are we Americans who just happen to be Catholic? No; we are Catholics in a world of Catholics. A world of suffering and privation. It is not just our fellow Catholic who experience this who are our concern but all humans. Every lesson we have had this year until now is the foundation and basis of this thinking.  For this reason we have to form our consciences, or to put it a different way, *con*form our consciences to Christ. As Paul says, we must “*put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.*” (*Rm* 13:14) When we think about it, we merely have to envision Jesus, as a human, who put his trust in God, and was forever striving to do God’s will. A well-formed conscience has three effects:   1. It reminds us always to do good and avoid evil. 2. It makes a ***judgment*** ***of reason*** about the good and evil of particular choices in a specific situation. This judgment is based in a universal understanding of good and evil and is directed solely toward the action not the person. 3. And finally, it bears witness after the fact to the good or evil that we have done.   But where do we get our conscience? It comes to us naturally. “*In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. (cf. Rom 2:14-16)* *Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths (Cf. Pius XII, Radio address on the correct formation of a Christian conscience in the young, March 23, 1952).*” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 16)  Okay, just how do we form our conscience? By seeking out the sources of that conscience and making them *rationally* understood, meaning that we use our head and our heart to listen. But this listening is not just a private, solo affair. By ourselves our judgment is flawed. Emotion and limited subjective experiences can color or cloud that judgment. We have to look outside of ourselves for the truths which inform our consciences.  So where do we find it? First step is to realize that Conscience is *not* itself the *source* of moral law; as it says above, God alone is that source. *“Conscience represents both the more general ability we have as human beings to know what is good and right and the concrete judgments we make in particular situations concerning what we should do or about what we have already done….Conscience is that inner sanctuary in which we listen to the voice of God…”* (U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults, p. 314) Consequentially we look in the places that God speaks to us: our Tradition. Naturally that includes Scripture first and foremost: “*Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit*” (*Dei Verbum*, 9) It also includes the Deposit of Faith, the teachings of the Church.  Finally we ask “to what purpose do we form our conscience?” That purpose is our salvation and the salvation of others. We seek that vision from the Book of Revelation: “*a new Jerusalem…**God’s dwelling…with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God].* *He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.*” (*Rev* 21:2-4) That is not a vision of the future for someone else to enjoy, but it is our future, the one we live in when we begin to form ourselves to Christ, to live the Commandments and the Beatitudes, to work for the Common Good.  The most important thing in this whole process is that we also realize it is not a one-time deal. Conscience formation is a life-long process, just as is any aspect of our salvation, *including* our salvation. We are not in the “once saved, always saved” camp but probably more the “once saved you have to work to keep it” camp. Nothing we can do can merit us salvation, but if we do not live the gift of it we received in our Baptism then we can be assured that we will not see the Kingdom, as Jesus himself tells us: “‘*Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,* *a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’*” (*Mt* 25:41-43) In the class on the Eucharist we asked “What have you done with your Eucharist?” but that question is true of every Sacrament we receive!  **The Point**  So what does all of that have to do with the election? One of the things we have to think about as Catholics is how to implement the two feet of social justice. We Americans live in a phenomenal country which affords us great power and ability to put feet on the ground to provide for the needs of others as well as the clout to persuade others to fix systemic problems. At the same time we live in a country which is sharply divided on how to provide both of those things, or even the need for such actions.  Our political system avails us the ability to engender change. Our ability to speak out, to operate within, and to change – those basic liberties guaranteed us – give us great power, a power we are obligated to exercise by the very conscience which drives us. To do less would not just be ‘un-American’ but, more importantly, would be ‘un-Catholic’.  It can seem though that our Conscience presents us with a bit of a quandary when we go to vote. Who is the best candidate? Which party promotes the ‘best’ platform? If no one is perfect then how do I decide? If no one is perfect then what is the point? “*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 takes a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, such as abortion or racism, 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.*” (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, 34)  On that count, we weigh the evils present in our world at this time and we vote as best our conscience can provide. We spend not just the few days before the election trying to gather information any more than we make up our mind before we start. We use our vote not just to make a statement but to make a difference. In the end it is not just the best candidate, but it is also the *candidate who wins*. We do not believe that any process of life is complete, until such time that that life is over, either through our own deaths or the eschatological end of the world. So it is with all things. No matter who gets elected, as human beings, utilizing a human institution there are mistakes of conscience which must be fraternally corrected. As it is for us, so it is for all things. Elation or disappointment does not drive our actions, conscience does. Our job is to continue to challenge, cajole, and advocate for the common good. | | |
| Materials Needed | * PowerPoint * Computer * Overhead projector * Laptop computer * Access to wireless internet | | |
| **Attention Grabber** | ***“We Are The Catholic Vote* (2 min)**  Play the movie found at <http://www.catholicvote.org/videos/videos> called *“We Are The Catholic Vote”*.  (Also, the older dated [Video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61wj4tJICcc).) | | |
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| **Outline** | **Prayer**: | *Matthew 6:26–34; Matthew 22:15–21 (Mark 12:13-17; and Luke 20:20-26).* | |
| **Presentation**: | *PowerPoint.* | |
| **Activity**: | *None* | |
| **Table Discussion**: | *Questions*. | |
| **Post Discussion:** | *None* | |
| **Closing Prayer**: | *Group Prayer/Petitions.* | |
| **Prayer** | **Introductory Prayer:** (**2 min,** after candle is lit…**)**    ***Matthew 6:26–34***  *Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they?* *Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span?* *Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin.* *But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?* *So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’* *All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.* *But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.* *Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil.*  ***Matthew 22:15–21 (Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26)***  *Then the Pharisees went off and plotted how they might entrap him in speech.* *They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion, for you do not regard a person’s status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?”* *Knowing their malice, Jesus said, “Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax.” Then they handed him the Roman coin.* *He said to them, “Whose image is this and whose inscription?” They replied, “Caesar’s.” At that he said to them, “Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”* | | |
| **Pre-discussion Presentation** | Presentation (15 min) | | |
|  | Forming our Conscience on the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching and Using That to Help Us to Be Good Citizens These opening passages from Scripture enforce the command to keep focus on God and salvation primary, and not be distracted by anxiety and worry, particularly in difficult times such as these. If we focus on God, then we do not turn to human institutions to be our savior. It is a sign of a lack of faith to put our hope anywhere but God. After that we must be diligent in our dealings with society.  SEE POWERPOINT | | |
| **Activity / Table Talk** | Table Discussion (35 min) | | |
|  | **BACKGROUND STATISTICS**:  As of 2012:   * There are about 70 Million Catholics in the US, the largest of any denomination or faith. * In the last Presidential election, the results were about 69 million for Obama to 60 million votes for McCain * Less than half of eligible voters went to the polls * Forty percent of people do not even register to vote * The US Congress convenes for two years and votes on about 1000 bills and resolutions (about 6500 are introduced). * The Huntsville City Council is elected for four years and votes on about 14,000 issues * Most of the issues affecting us in our daily lives are made at the local level. * If it were deemed a “religion” the largest in the USA would be Atheism/Agnostic. * The number of people who designate themselves as non-religious is growing; this means that the number of people who are neutral or antagonistic toward religious action and/or advocacy is also growing.  QUESTIONS: **EXERCISE**:  Can you name our:  President, Vice President and the challengers in the upcoming election Two elected senators and one representative to congress; Governor, Lt Governor, state senator and representative County Commissioner (your representative) City Council member School Board representative.  **ACTIVITY**:  **Teachers are urged to do prep work and study materials and be prepared to discuss their particular issue to enhance the table discussion and to prepare for next week and the recording of the candidate’s positions.** In preparation for next week, Each table will be provided with an issue that is relevant to Catholic social teaching. The group at each table will be requested to mark in large print on the paper provided each of the candidate’s positions on that issue. The research will provide the foundation for next week’s activity where the issue will be cited in large font at the top of the page and have a line drawn from top to bottom of the page to separate a summary of each candidate’s position. The summary of the Church’s the position should be in “bullets” format. These will be compared to similar bullets for each candidate. The candidates may be diametrically opposed or in agreement on such issues.When all groups are finished (after approximately 15 minutes), each group will be called individually to tape its paper to the wall and summarize the position of the Church on that particular issue. It will be important for the teachers to make sure that what is written is accurate and contains sufficient relevant information. In the discussion it is very important to properly represent positions of the candidates.Example issue assignments for: Freshmen1 – Right to Life  Freshmen2 – Environment  Sophomores1 - Immigration  Sophomores2 – Family/Marriage  Juniors1 - War  Juniors2 – Health care  Seniors – Housing  Use the Scriptures and the Catechism as well as any info on the bishop’s site.  Possible Scripture passages to examine:   * Dt 30:19 - * Psalm 139: 13-14 - * Dt 24:17-22 - * Zec 7:9-10 - * Lk 10:25-37 - * Jer 22:16 - * Mt 25:31-46 - * Jas 2:14-17 - * Lk 4:18 -   "In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do." (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,* 13*)*  Some additional thoughts/questions from Tom Reynolds:   1. We are to love God with our whole heart, whole soul and whole mind. If God is really first in our life, God should permeate everything we do. We have a representative government meaning elected officials act on our behalf. 2. If you were arrested for being a Catholic, would there be enough evidence to convict you? 3. Two biblical stories come to mind; the coin “give to Caesar what is Caesars and to God what is God’s (Mt 22;15-22; Mark 12:17; and Luke 20: 25) and Mt 4:1-17 “Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and ...” I'LL GIVE YOU ALL THAT YOUR EYES CAN SEE (Matthew 4:9; Luke 4: 5-8) 4. The reason God supports government is to keep evil in check. Money and power (Satan) corrupts people unless they are guided by a higher calling from God. 5. Before we condemn elected officials, we should examine our conscience and see if we are “corrupted” by apathy. Apathy is the main enemy. Not caring enough to learn about church teachings, candidates’ position on issues and keeping politicians accountable allows for deterioration of our “…One Nation under God…” Apathy is the first step toward Agnostic/Atheism. 6. The fall of every great empire started with moral deterioration. This includes Israel, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Spain, Great Britain, and Russia. Like everything human, the USA is headed the same way – someday it too will end. | |
| Post-Discussion Activity | ***Reminder* (1 min).** | | |
|  | The students will be reminded that next week we will be voting using ballots identical to those that will be used in the presidential election. They will need to be instructed to do “homework” by watching debates, reading magazines, examining the Bishop’s website and other Internet research comparing the positions of the candidates on various issues relevant to Catholic social teaching. | | |
| Closing | **Announcements and Prayer (5 min).** | | |
|  | **Group Prayer**  Intercessions  ***Prayer for Our Country***  God, bless our nation and make it true to the ideas of freedom and justice and brotherhood for all who make it great. Guard us from war, from fire and wind, from compromise, fear, and confusion. Be close to our president and our statesmen; give them vision and courage, as they ponder decisions affecting peace and the future of the world. Make me more deeply aware of my heritage; realizing not only my rights but also my duties and responsibilities as a citizen. Make this great land and all its people know clearly Your will, that they may fulfill the destiny ordained for us in the salvation of the nations, and the restoring of all things in Christ. Amen | | |
| Reminder | **\*\*\*\* REMEMBER IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING ATTENDANCE!!** This is a legal document! Please, write down on your attendance sheet the name of any teen at your table, whether they are on your roll or not. | | |
| Attachments | **Below:**   * *Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching* * Excerpt from *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (USCCB) * Verbiage from US House resolution honoring Catholic Schools week | | |

**Human Rights**

**Solidarity**

**Dignity of Work**

**Option for the Poor**

**Family/ Community Participation**

**Human Dignity**

**Care For Creation**

**Conscience is:**

* Who we are at the deepest level
* Prudent judgment of actions as compatible with the best of who we are
* Based on objective moral standards
* Always to be followed, if well-formed and certain
* Always a good, when well-formed, even if not always right

**Conscience is not:**

* Feeling guilty or a lack of guilt
* A good angel on one shoulder telling us what to do and a bad angel on another tempting us to do what is wrong
* Simply one’s subjective opinion or feeling
* Always certain; one can have a doubtful conscience
* Always right; one can at times follow one’s conscience and make a morally wrong decision

**Excerpt from** [***Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship***](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf) **(USCCB)**

“9. The Church’s obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith. It is a basic part of the mission we have received from Jesus Christ, who offers a vision of life revealed to us in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. To echo the teaching of the Second Vatican Council: Christ, the Word made flesh, in showing us the Father’s love, also shows us what it truly means to be human (see *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22). Christ’s love for us lets us see our human dignity in full clarity and compels us to love our neighbors as he has loved us. Christ, the Teacher, shows us what is true and good, that is, what is in accord with our human nature as free, intelligent beings created in God’s image and likeness and endowed by the Creator with dignity and rights.

10. What faith teaches about the dignity of the human person and about the sacredness of every human life helps us see more clearly the same truths that also come to us through the gift of human reason. At the center of these truths is respect for the dignity of every person. This is the core of Catholic moral and social teaching. Because we are people of both faith and reason, it is appropriate and necessary for us to bring this essential truth about human life and dignity to the public square. We are called to practice Christ’s commandment to “love one another” (Jn 13:34). We are also called to promote the well-being of all, to share our blessings with those most in need, to defend marriage, and to protect the lives and dignity of all, especially the weak, the vulnerable, the voiceless. In his first encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI explained that “charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as ‘social charity’” (no. 29).”

“17. The Church equips its members to address political and social questions by

helping them to develop a well-formed conscience. Catholics have a serious and lifelong obligation to form their consciences in accord with human reason and the teaching of the Church. Conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere “feeling” about what we should or should not do. Rather, conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil. Conscience always requires serious attempts to make sound moral judgments based on the truths of our faith. As stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right” (no. 1778).

18. The formation of conscience includes several elements. First, there is a desire to embrace goodness and truth. For Catholics this begins with a willingness and openness to seek the truth and what is right by studying Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church as contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is also important to examine the facts and background information about various choices. Finally, prayerful reflection is essential to discern the will of God. Catholics must also understand that if they fail to form their consciences they can make erroneous judgments.”

Why should we vote “Catholic?”

**Verbiage from US House resolution honoring Catholic Schools week**

Whereas the total Catholic school student enrollment for the 2009 to 2010 academic year was over 2,100,000 and the student-teacher ratio was 14 to 1;

Whereas nearly 30 percent of school children enrolled in Catholic schools are from minority backgrounds, and nearly 15 percent are non- Catholics;

Whereas Catholic schools produce students strongly dedicated to their faith, values, families, and communities by providing an intellectually stimulating environment rich in spiritual, character, and moral development;

Whereas the Catholic high school graduation rate is 99 percent, with 80 percent of graduates attending four-year colleges and 17 percent attending two-year colleges or technical schools;

Whereas in the 1972 pastoral message concerning Catholic education, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops stated, `Education is one of the most important ways by which the Church fulfills its commitment to the dignity of the person and building of community.

Community is central to education ministry, both as a necessary condition and an ardently desired goal. The educational efforts of the Church, therefore, must be directed to forming persons-in-community; for the education of the individual Christian is important not only to his solitary destiny, but also the destinies of the many communities in which he lives.';

Whereas Catholic schools are committed to community service, producing graduates who hold `helping others' as one of their core values;

Whereas Catholic schools provide a high level of service to the United States by giving students from all regions of the Nation and all socioeconomic backgrounds a strong academic and moral foundation;