

# PEACE AND JUSTICE



## Article – 4

*The following is an excerpt from: <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship-title>*

As Catholics, we are part of a community with a rich heritage that helps us consider the challenges in public life and contribute to greater justice and peace for all people. Part of that rich heritage on faithful citizenship is the teaching of Vatican Council II's *Declaration on Religious Liberty (Dignitatis Humanae)*. It says that "society itself may profit by the moral qualities of justice and peace which have their origin in [people's] faithfulness to God and to His holy will" (no. 6). The work for justice requires that the mind and the heart of Catholics be educated and formed to know and practice the whole faith. 5. This statement highlights the role of the Church in the formation of conscience and the corresponding moral responsibility of each Catholic to hear, receive, and act upon the Church's teaching in the lifelong task of forming his or her own conscience. Foremost amongst those teachings are the four basic principles of Catholic social doctrine: the dignity of the human person, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 160). With this foundation, Catholics are better able to evaluate policy positions, party platforms, and candidates' promises and actions in light of the Gospel and the moral and social teaching of the Church in order to help build a better world. 6. We seek to do this by addressing four questions: (1) Why does the Church teach about issues affecting public policy? (2) Who in the Church should participate in political life? (3) How does the Church help the Catholic faithful to speak about political and social questions? (4) What does the Church say about Catholic social teaching in the public square? 7. In this statement, we bishops do not intend to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote. Our purpose is to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with God's truth. We recognize that the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience, and that participation goes well beyond casting a vote in a particular election. 8. During election years, there may be many handouts and voter guides that are produced and distributed. We encourage Catholics to seek those resources authorized by their own bishops, their state Catholic conferences, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This statement is intended to reflect and complement, not substitute for, the ongoing teaching of bishops in our own dioceses and states. When using this document, it is important to remember that Church teaching is coherent and rests on a comprehensive vision of the dignity of the human person, a dignity that St. John Paul II described as "manifested in all its radiance when the person's origin and destiny are considered: created by God in his image and likeness as well as redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ, the person is called to be a 'child in the Son' and a living temple of the Spirit, destined for the eternal life of blessed communion with God" (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 37). Thus, the particular judgments of the document may fall at various points along the political spectrum, but the foundational principles that guide these teachings should not be ignored in any case nor used selectively in order to serve partisan interests. In light of these reflections and those of local bishops, we encourage Catholics throughout the United States to be active in the political process, particularly in these challenging times. *The Church's teachings concerning contingent situations are subject to new and further developments and can be open to discussion, yet we cannot help but be concrete-without presuming to enter into details-lest the great social principles remain mere generalities which challenge no one. . . . The Church's pastors, taking into account the contributions of the different sciences, have the right to offer opinions in all that affects people's lives, since the task of evangelization implies and demands the integral promotion of each human being.*

In Christ,  
Deacon Joe Fragale – [jfragale@stambroseonthehill.com](mailto:jfragale@stambroseonthehill.com)