

PEACE AND JUSTICE



Article – 10

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

Decisions about political life are complex and require the exercise of a well-formed conscience aided by prudence. This exercise of conscience begins with outright opposition to laws and other policies that violate human life or weaken its protection. Those who knowingly, willingly, and directly support public policies or legislation that undermine fundamental moral principles cooperate with evil.

32. Sometimes morally flawed laws already exist. In this situation, the process of framing legislation to protect life is subject to prudential judgment and "the art of the possible." At times this process may restore justice only partially or gradually. For example, St. John Paul II taught that when a government official who fully opposes abortion cannot succeed in completely overturning a pro-abortion law, he or she may work to improve protection for unborn human life, "limiting the harm done by such a law" and lessening its negative impact as much as possible (*Evangelium Vitae*, no. 73). Such incremental improvements in the law are acceptable as steps toward the full restoration of justice. However, Catholics must never abandon the moral requirement to seek full protection for all human life from the moment of conception until natural death.

33. Prudential judgment is also needed in applying moral principles to specific policy choices in areas such as armed conflict, housing, health care, immigration, and others. This does not mean that all choices are equally valid, or that our guidance and that of other Church leaders is just another political opinion or policy preference among many others. Rather, we urge Catholics to listen carefully to the Church's teachers when we apply Catholic social teaching to specific proposals and situations. The judgments and recommendations that we make as bishops on such specific issues do not carry the same moral authority as statements of universal moral teachings. Nevertheless, the Church's guidance on these matters is an essential resource for Catholics as they determine whether their own moral judgments are consistent with the Gospel and with Catholic teaching.

34. 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 favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to subhuman living conditions, redefining marriage in ways that violate its essential meaning, or racist behavior, 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.

In Christ,

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