

Ten Points to Understand About the Issue of Pro-Abortion “Catholic” Politicians and Communion

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With Joe Biden coming into the White House in 2021, the issue of whether pro-abortion politicians who identify as Catholics should receive Communion came again to the forefront in America, and the US Bishops, in both of their semi-annual meetings that year, addressed the question.

Here are some of the key points to understand about this issue.

1. First, abortion is not just a “Catholic” issue and it’s not just a religious issue. It is the violent killing of a baby, and therefore is wrong no matter who is responsible for it or what their religious faith may be. Supporting abortion is not only against Catholic Faith; it’s against the meaning of public service, and against human decency and the principles of civilized society.
2. Jesus taught that we should not engage in worship of God if we are not reconciled with our neighbor. *“If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift”* (Mt. 5:23-14). Politicians who permit or expand the killing of unborn children are not reconciled with them.
3. The Catholic bishops and Popes have already taught for many years the duties of public officials to protect the unborn by law. St. John Paul II wrote in *“The Gospel of Life”* that the state that legalizes abortion becomes **“a tyrant state”** (EV #20) and the US Bishops wrote that public officials who support abortion should *“consider the consequences for their own spiritual well-being, as well as the scandal they risk by leading others into serious sin”* (*Living the Gospel of Life*, 1998, n.32).
4. Consistent with past teaching from US bishops and from the Vatican, the US bishops, in November of 2021, issued a document about the Eucharist which, among other things, reminded the faithful that receiving Communion is not just a personal matter but a public, community matter. It says you are in union with what the Church believes and how the believing community lives. Their document teaches that the Eucharist compels us – and especially those in public authority -- to recognize Christ in the unborn, whom it mentions twice, to reject abortion as an “infamy” (quoting the Second Vatican Council), and “to serve the human family by upholding human life and dignity.”
5. The bishops repeat in the document their own teaching, from 2006, that *“If a Catholic in his or her personal or professional life were knowingly and obstinately to ...repudiate [the Church’s] definitive teaching on moral issues, ... Reception of Holy Communion in such a situation would not accord with the nature of the Eucharistic celebration, so that he or she should refrain.”*
6. The bishops’ document quotes Canon 915 which says that those “obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to holy communion.”
7. It is neither the Pope nor the bishops’ conference who have the first responsibility to deal with pro-abortion Catholic politicians. As the new document says, it is, rather, *“the special responsibility of the diocesan bishop to work to remedy situations that involve public actions at variance with the visible communion of the Church and the moral law.”*

8. To deny a pro-abortion public official Communion is **not a judgment** on their soul or their internal relationship with God, but rather an action to protect the reputation of the Eucharist as a Sacrament of Unity, and to protect the faithful from scandal – that is, from taking a wrong path themselves because of a contradictory and confusing message about whether the Church really opposes abortion. The point is that this is a **public** person who is **known** to be in support of abortion. It has nothing to do with their private lives, with judgment, or with punishment.

9. Teaching and discipline are two different things. Many bishops have articulated the teaching, but they differ among themselves as to whether to impose any discipline on these politicians. Many prefer private dialogue with the politicians, which in itself is a good thing. The question remains, however: what is to be done when the politician either refuses dialog, or, despite protracted dialog, does not change and even increases his or her actions in favor of abortion?

10. Short of discipline, it would be helpful for bishops to publicly invite Catholic politicians to special teaching seminars about abortion and the Eucharist, about the moral law and the common good, and about why the right to life is the fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights. Meanwhile, individual members of the faithful can and should spread the bishops' teachings, and should exercise that form of discipline that is within their power to impose on pro-abortion politicians: **vote them out of office.**

Learn more at www.AbortionAndCommunion.org.