

1. VOTE!

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “*Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory ... to exercise the right to vote*” (2240).

The US Bishops have written, “*Every voice matters in the public forum. Every vote counts.*” (LGL n. 34).

Therefore,

- a) Make sure you are properly registered to vote. At www.priestsforlife.org/states, you will find voter registration deadlines. If you have moved since the last election, contact your local Board of Elections to verify what your polling place is!
- b) Vote in the Primaries, to help get the right candidates on the ballot in the first place. See www.priestsforlife.org/states for primary dates.
- c) Absentee Ballots. If you know you will be out of town on Election Day or otherwise unable able to get to the polls, don't let that make you lose your vote! Obtain an absentee ballot right away!
- d) Early Voting. If your state allows early voting (see www.priestsforlife.org/states), then even if you are going to be in town on Election Day, you can vote within a specific period of time before Election Day. By all means, do so! Waiting till Election Day risks missing your vote in case of illness, car trouble, bad weather, unexpected family or work obligations, or just forgetfulness.
- e) Pray for wisdom as you make your voting decision!

2. KNOW THE CANDIDATES

In the voting booth, it's terrible to feel like you're guessing who the best candidates are.

Know for sure ahead of time where the candidates stand! It is a moral obligation to do your homework now to learn about the candidates!

Visit candidates' websites, call campaign headquarters, and read candidates' literature. Also, candidates

who are already legislators have a public voting record. Learn more at www.priestsforlife.org/legislation.

3. REJECT THE DISQUALIFIED

Suppose a candidate came forward and said, “I support terrorism.” Would you say, “I disagree with you on terrorism, but what's your health care plan?”

Of course not. Rather, you would immediately consider that candidate as disqualified from public office. His position, allowing the killing of the public, is radically inconsistent with public service.

So it is with abortion. Abortion is no less violent than terrorism. Support for abortion is enough for us to decide not to vote for such a person.

Saint John Paul II wrote: “*Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights -- for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture -- is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination*” (1988, *Christifideles Laici*, n. 38).

It is “false and illusory” because if government can take away rights from some humans, then those rights aren't human rights at all. Such a politician is saying that rights like health care only belong to some humans, not to others.

If a politician cannot respect the life of a little baby, how is he supposed to respect yours?

4. DISTINGUISH POLICY FROM PRINCIPLE

There are many issues, but some are more important than others. The US Bishops make this clear in *Living the Gospel of Life* when they explain that the right to life is like the foundation of a house. It holds up every other issue, because it is the principle at the heart and core of every effort for justice and peace.

Most disagreements between candidates and political platforms do not have to do with principle, but rather

with policy. For example, it is a basic principle that people have a right to the safety of their own lives and possessions. That's why we have to fight crime. We don't see candidates campaigning on opposite sides of that principle, with some saying, “Fight Crime” and other defending “The Right to Crime.” Instead, they agree on the principle, but disagree on the best policies to implement the principle. The policy doesn't break the principle.

But when a policy dispute involves questioning whether people deserve that protection in the first place, the policy is the principle. To allow abortion, which is the killing of a human child, is to break the principle that every human life is sacred and deserves protection.

When a policy breaks the very founding principle of government, that is more than an ordinary political disagreement; it's a disagreement about what kind of government we have.

5. WEIGH OTHER ISSUES PROPERLY

There are many issues that have to be considered in elections, but as we have already seen, not all have equal weight. Once voters have disqualified those candidates who violate fundamental principles, they need to look at the wide spectrum of issues affecting the proper care of human life and promotion of human dignity. The US Bishops mention these issues in *Living the Gospel of Life* as well as in their various versions of “Faithful Citizenship” documents. Both list the various issues in the context of some being more fundamental than others.

Living the Gospel of Life declares, “*Any politics of human life must work to resist the violence of war and the scandal of capital punishment... [and] seriously address issues of racism, poverty, hunger, employment, education, housing, and health care... But being 'right' in such matters can never excuse a wrong choice regarding direct attacks on innocent human life. Indeed, the failure to protect and defend life in its most vulnerable stages renders suspect any claims to the 'rightness' of positions in other matters affecting the poorest and least powerful of the human community. If we understand*

the human person as the “temple of the Holy Spirit” -- the living house of God -- then these latter issues fall logically into place as the crossbeams and walls of that house. All direct attacks on innocent human life, such as abortion and euthanasia, strike at the house's foundation. These directly and immediately violate the human person's most fundamental right the right to life. Neglect of these issues is the equivalent of building our house on sand” (n. 23).

In particular, capital punishment and the waging of war are troubling to the consciences of many voters. The Church clearly urges us to avoid both, but also teaches that at times, both activities can be morally legitimate. Take, for example, what Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) wrote in a letter in July 2004: “*Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion and euthanasia. ... While the Church exhorts civil authorities to seek peace, not war, and to exercise discretion and mercy in imposing punishment on criminals, it may still be permissible to take up arms to repel an aggressor or to have recourse to capital punishment. There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion and euthanasia*” (Letter to Cardinal McCarrick, n.3).

The bottom line, in other words, is that support for war and capital punishment do not automatically or necessarily violate fundamental moral principles; support for abortion and euthanasia always do. Therefore, supporting these latter policies is worse.

6. KEEP YOUR LOYALTY FOCUSED ON JESUS

When you vote, you show where your loyalties are. There is nothing wrong with being loyal to a candidate or to a political party. But no loyalty should be stronger than your loyalty to Jesus Christ. Ask yourself, “Is there any position that my party takes that contradicts my Christian faith?”

In *Living the Gospel of Life*, the US Bishops

reminded us, “We get the public officials we deserve. Their virtue -- or lack thereof -- is a judgment not only on them, but on us. Because of this, we urge our fellow citizens to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose their political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest” (n.34).

Sometimes people vote according to the party of the candidate, perhaps because that’s a family tradition, or because some group or friend has asked them to do so. But party platforms change, and it is important to read the latest version (see www.PoliticalResponsibility.com). If the platform of that party today contradicts the platform of the Gospel and the moral law, you need to have the inner freedom to depart from personal, family, or community tradition and vote instead for the candidate and party that best reflect God’s law. Before belonging to any party or organization or family, we first belong to Jesus Christ.

7. REMEMBER, THE PARTY MATTERS

Voting with a clear conscience also means that you consider how the outcome of the election in which you vote affects the balance of power. Elections do not only put individual candidates into power; they put political parties into power.

The same questions you ask about the candidates’ positions on issues have to be asked of the party’s positions. What is the party’s platform? If that party comes into power, what people will they assign to committees, and what kinds of legislation will they allow to come for a vote, or will they block from seeing the light of day?

8. DISTINGUISH “CHOOSING EVIL” FROM “LIMITING EVIL”

What happens if two opposing candidates both support abortion?

Rather than focusing on “pro-life, pro-abortion” labels, just ask a simple question: Which of the

two candidates will do less harm to unborn children if elected?

For example, is either of the candidates willing at least to protect some children in the womb, such as those after 20 weeks of development, because of their ability to feel pain? Is either candidate willing to enact measures that promote alternatives to abortion, or better informed consent, or clinic regulations? Can you see any benefit of one of the candidates above the other?

One of these two candidates will be elected. So you are not free right now, in this race, to choose another candidate you prefer. Forces beyond your control have already limited your choices.

In this case, it is morally acceptable to vote for the candidate who will do less harm. This is not “choosing the lesser of two evils.” We may never choose evil. But we can choose to limit evil, and that is a good. That is what we would be doing in the cases mentioned above.

9. SUPPORT THE CANDIDATE WITH MORE THAN YOUR VOTE!

Elections are not contests between two candidates; they are contests between two teams. Join the team of the best candidate by donating to the campaign, volunteering for the campaign, handing out literature for the candidate, making phone calls and visits on the candidate’s behalf, sending emails, using yard signs and bumper stickers, and praying for the candidate!

10. MOBILIZE AS MANY OTHER VOTERS AS POSSIBLE!

Each of us has one vote, but each of us can mobilize hundreds, even thousands of votes. Many who trust you will accept your guidance about the importance of voting for a particular candidate. Don’t be afraid to use that influence!

As Election Day draws near, focus on the “low-hanging fruit.” Remember, the numbers are what counts. Gathering as many votes as possible is like picking oranges from trees. You don’t expend time and energy

by climbing to the top of the trees to get the oranges there when you can get many more that are within arm’s reach with much less time and energy!

So don’t focus on the “hard to convince” voters; focus on those who agree with you but need a reminder to vote or a ride to the polls. If you can take the day off on Election Day, do so, and get others to the polls!

Having done all this, rejoice in a clear conscience, and trust the Lord to bring about the victory for a Culture of Life!

Join the movement today!

Sign up at www.PoliticalResponsibility.com!



Fr. Frank Pavone is one of the most prominent pro-life leaders in the world. He was appointed in 1993 by Cardinal John O’Connor to serve as National Director of Priests for Life, and has also served as an Official of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Family, which coordinates pro-life activities for the entire Catholic Church. He is a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life. He is a priest of the Amarillo diocese and leads Priests for Life with the permission of his bishop.

Priests for Life aims to encourage God’s people to respond to the tragedies of abortion and euthanasia, and is an association recognized under the Canon Law of the Catholic Church.

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**VOTING
WITH
A CLEAR
CONSCIENCE**

**Fr Frank Pavone
National Director
Priests For Life**

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vote and can also keep a clear
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Here’s how.**

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