

## Conversation Guidelines on Election Issues

The Church's social teaching is neither "liberal" nor "conservative." It seeks to be faithful to God's call. As specific issues are explored, people of good will might see complex social issues differently than others. Encourage all involved to show respect for each person in the group by listening and not interrupting. The goal should not be to have a debate, but rather to have an informed conversation and dialogue based on respect. This is the hallmark of civic discourse.

**We have provided a handout on page 2** that may be helpful to share with your participants; it includes ground rules, conversation helpers, and principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN, WE RECOMMEND:

- Avoiding focusing on candidates which can lead to a polarized debate.
- Reminding the group that formation of one's conscience is a sacred duty and conversation can assist in that process;
- Ensuring that the group understands the ground rules and agrees to adhere to them before beginning a conversation;
- Reviewing the principles of Catholic social teaching to focus the conversation on analyzing how these values are, or are not, reflected in a particular policy or position on an issue. Explore the values of dignity of the human person; solidarity; option for the poor; rights and responsibilities; the call to family, community, and participation; and care for creation.

### NOTES FOR THE DISCUSSION FACILITATOR

1. Remember: the Church's social teaching is the standard we want to apply to how we conduct a discussion as well as to issues and policies we discuss.
2. Acknowledge the human dignity of others by listening carefully and waiting a moment after each person speaks to acknowledge and absorb what they have said.
3. Encourage group members to be open to honestly consider another's point of view and not dismiss it quickly. Encourage group members to try to understand another's position or point of view was formulated and why it is compelling to the speaker.
4. Engage everyone in the group and ensure that all participate. Invite those who have not spoken in the group to do so.
5. Make sure no one person dominates the discussion.
6. Reserve the right to get the group back on topic if the conversation strays.

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## CONVERSATION GROUND RULES AND AGREEMENTS FOR THE GROUP

- Review these ground rules with the group before starting a discussion:
- Listen to and respect everyone and all points of view.
- Stay focused on issues and their implications for the common good. Stay on the topic.
- Be accepting, try to suspend judgment.
- Seek to understand rather than persuade.
- Use “I” statements rather than “you” statements.
- Challenge ideas, not persons. (Avoid questioning the integrity or motives of others.)
- Remain curious, not critical. Question old assumptions and look for new insights.
- Be brief, be honest, not long winded; as a sign of respect, give others an opportunity to talk.
- Be respectful at all times, in your tone of voice and your body language as well as your verbal language.

## CONVERSATION HELPS

- “I heard you say this ... is that what you meant?”
- “I’m wondering what you are thinking or what your thoughts on this are?”
- “Would you be willing to tell me what you heard me say?”
- “Can you rephrase that in a nonjudgmental or threatening way?”
- “I’m not sure what you mean by that ... please explain.”

## KEY CONCEPTS IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

- **Life and Dignity of the Human Person** All human persons have inherent dignity, and human life is sacred. We are called to protect human life in all stages and seek peaceful means for resolving conflicts.
- **Call to Family, Community, and Participation** In order to live out our shared humanity, we are called to actively seek policies and practices that support families and the common good, with special concern for the poor and marginalized.
- **Rights and Responsibilities** Humans have a fundamental right to life and basic human needs, and it is our duty to protect those rights.
- **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable** As the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) tells us, we must prioritize the needs of the poor and vulnerable.
- **The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers** Work is a way of participating in God’s creation, and consequently, human dignity must be upheld through their work. These rights include a right to working and earning a fair wage; a right to joining and organizing with labor unions; a right to private property; and a right to economic initiative.
- **Solidarity** As human beings with shared dignity, we are called to care for our brothers and sisters worldwide and consistently pursue justice and peace for all.
- **Care for God's Creation** The earth is a gift from God, and therefore we are called to protect it and consequently protect the people who inhabit it.