

A Matter of Reception: Abortion, Holy Communion, and Catholic Politicians

○ **ISSUE:** Should Catholic politicians who publicly support abortion rights receive Holy Communion? What principles apply to this situation?

○ **RESPONSE:** All Catholics who reject the Church's moral teaching concerning the evil of abortion and/or advocate or promote abortion rights should not receive Communion until they repent of their position and are restored to full communion with the Church. This is based on the fundamental right to life and, more specifically, the Church's perennial teaching that direct abortion is always a grave offense against the right to life. It is also based on traditional teaching regarding the worthy reception of Holy Communion.

Additional factors come into play in the case of Catholic politicians. According to Church law, they may even be denied Communion if they persist in their public support of abortion rights.

○ **DISCUSSION:** Abortion is the most flagrant and widespread offense against the basic right to life of all human persons in the United States. A country that “legally” kills over a million of its children each year is fundamentally disordered and, despite any material or technological successes, cannot be considered peaceful or just, let alone the moral authority in world affairs.

With the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade* (1973), as well as subsequent cases that have affirmed and expanded the ruling, such as *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) and *Stenberg v. Carhart* (2000), abortion is considered a constitutional right. This situation is abhorrent not only to many Christians but also to many others who recognize and value the right to life of the unborn child.

Sadly, many of the legislators and judges who have championed and upheld abortion rights publicly identify themselves as Catholics. We do not presume to judge the sincerity or motives that underlie their position, nor do we fail to recognize some of the positive values these individuals seek to uphold in other areas. It is simply an empirical fact that there are prominent politicians who publicly identify themselves as practicing Catholics who nonetheless support—some more zealously and completely than others—the so-called “right” to abortion. Some even seem to use their Catholic heritage to their political advantage while advancing the goals of their pro-abortion constituents.

With the 2004 presidential candidacy of pro-abortion Catholic politician John Kerry, the issue has been pushed into the national spotlight.

Church leaders have offered different pastoral approaches to this troubling situation. On a national level, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has formed a special Task Force on Catholics in Public Life to address the issue. In the meantime, at their June 2004 meeting, the U.S. bishops issued a statement entitled *Catholics in Political Life*, which identifies the key principles upon which the Church's response must be based.

In the midst of widespread controversy and popular misunderstanding of the issues, CUF is resolved, in the words of *Catholics in Political Life*, “to teach clearly” regarding the Church's “unequivocal commitment to the legal protection of human life from the moment of conception until natural death,” and to set forth what that means for Catholics in the political arena.

Church Teaching on Abortion

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nos. 2270-75) clearly spells out the Church's perennial teaching that abortion is always and everywhere a grave offense against human life. Paragraph 2271 of the Catechism provides:

Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law.

The same paragraph of the Catechism also quotes Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*), which similarly does not mince words:

God, the Lord of life, has entrusted to men the noble mission of safeguarding life, and men must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.

In his 1995 encyclical letter *The Gospel of Life* (*Evangelium Vitae*), Pope John Paul II confirmed "by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his successors, and in communion with the bishops of the Catholic Church," that "the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral" (no. 57). It is a grave act of disobedience to God, the author of human life, and "contradicts the fundamental virtues of justice and charity" (*ibid.*). The Pope says that no authority can legitimately recommend or permit such an action.

In the specific context of legislation that favors abortion rights, the Holy Father further writes:

There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a *grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection*" (*ibid.*, no. 73, original emphasis).

The Pope recognizes that upholding the right to life of the unborn may be difficult for the Catholic legislator, perhaps even requiring "the sacrifice of prestigious professional positions or the relinquishing of reasonable hopes of career advancement" (*ibid.*, no. 74). Even so, Catholic politicians who actively promote abortion rights are cooperating in evil actions. "This cooperation can *never* be justified either by invoking respect for the freedom of others or by appealing to the fact that civil law permits it or requires it" (*ibid.*, emphasis added).

This teaching was reiterated more recently in a 2002 doctrinal note issued by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and by the U.S. bishops in *Catholics in Political Life*.

Much more can and must be said concerning the dignity and value of each human person, created in the image and likeness of God. We also affirm the absolute need to present this teaching charitably, sensitively, and in a way that promotes reconciliation and healing in the Church. However, for our purposes here, we believe it is important to highlight at the outset the Church's firm, unchanging moral teaching concerning abortion.

So when it comes to pro-abortion politics, two moral evils can come into play. First, it's a sin against faith and against the First Commandment to reject or obstinately doubt the Church's definitive teaching on the subject (cf. Catechism, nos. 2087-89; Code of Canon Law, canon 750). Second, pro-abortion advocacy typically entails some degree of cooperation with the abortion industry and, as *Catholics in Political Life* points out, this is a serious sin against justice and charity.

Who Receives Communion

Leaving aside the subject of abortion for a moment, let's turn to the Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian life (Catechism, no. 1324). Catholics believe that the Eucharist is truly the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ Himself, the Bread of Life come down from heaven (Jn. 6:51; Catechism, no. 1374).

The sincere desire of every Christian is that one day we can all be fully united with each other in perfect communion with the Holy Trinity. Yet, as Pope John Paul II most recently reminded the faithful in his 2003 encyclical letter on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the Eucharist “presupposes that communion already exists, a communion which it seeks to consolidate and bring to perfection” (no. 35).

In simpler terms, this means that only those who are both in “visible” and “invisible” communion with the Church should go up to receive Communion. The visible bonds of Communion are profession of the apostolic faith, the sacraments of the Church, and ecclesial governance (*ibid.*, no. 38; Catechism, no. 815). In other words, and without getting bogged down in theological nuance, one should be Catholic.

Yet, there’s also an invisible component. This means that a Catholic who goes up to receive Communion should be in a state of grace. In other words, if the communicant is aware of having committed a mortal sin, he ordinarily should go to Confession prior to going to Communion (cf. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, nos. 36-37).

Two guiding principles must be held in tension in this regard. First, the Church encourages all the faithful, assuming they are properly disposed, to receive Communion every time they participate at Mass (Catechism, no. 1388). Further, the Code of Canon Law provides that “any baptized person who is not prohibited by law can and must be admitted to Holy Communion” (canon 912). So ordinarily, a minister of Communion is actually forbidden to withhold Communion from a given communicant.

Balanced against this “non-judgmental” disposition of the minister is the biblical responsibility every communicant has to examine himself prior to presenting himself for Communion: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor. 11:27-29). One who is conscious of grave sin actually compounds his sin by committing the sin of sacrilege if he receives the Eucharist without first reconciling with the Church (cf. Catechism, nos. 1385, 1457).

The practice in the United States today largely does not reflect this basic teaching on the Eucharist. In many parishes, everyone in the assembly receives Communion as a matter of course—even those who are not Catholic or who are “living in sin.” Meanwhile, many Catholics never avail themselves of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The point is not to judge any particular person, but simply to note a confluence of three points:

- Many Catholics today reject key Church teachings and engage in conduct that the Church considers gravely sinful;
- Virtually all Catholics who attend Mass receive Communion; and
- A minority of Catholics ever think to avail themselves of sacramental Confession.

In this ecclesial climate, the possibility of withholding Communion from any communicant is foreign to most Catholics, and to single out certain individuals and not others for this treatment can appear arbitrary.

Loading the Canons

When it comes to the specific issue of withholding Communion from Catholic politicians who support abortion rights, there of course is the legitimate purpose of protecting the Eucharist against the profanation that occurs whenever Our Lord is received without the proper dispositions. But there are other, more specific considerations.

- (a) There is an ongoing, public advocacy of grave evil taking place that distinguishes their conduct from that of most private individuals, whose sins (and religious practices) are not a matter of public record and media scrutiny.

St. John Chrysostom, (347-407), patron of preachers and a distinguished doctor of the Church, once wrote to one of his priests:

If some public figure, or some wealthy person who is unworthy, presents himself to receive Holy Communion, forbid him. The authority that you have is greater than his. Consider if your task were to guard a clean spring of water for a flock, and you saw a sheep approach with mire on its mouth—you would not allow it to stoop down and pollute the stream. You are now entrusted with a spring, not of water, but of blood and of spirit. If you see someone having sin in their hearts (which is far more grievous than earth and mire), coming to receive the Eucharist, are you not concerned? Do you not try to prevent them? What excuse can you have, if you do not?

St. John then explains that he's not speaking "of some unknown sinner, but of a notorious one." He advocates withholding Communion only with respect to "those who sin openly. For if we amend these, God will speedily reveal to us the unknown also; but if we let these flagrant abuses continue, how can we expect Him to make manifest those that are hidden? I say these things, not to repel sinners or cut them off, but I say it in order that we may bring them to repentance, and bring them back . . ."

- (b) The pro-abortion advocacy of Catholic politicians and lawmakers is a source of scandal and confusion to Catholics and, indeed, to society as a whole. Some dissident Catholic politicians who fiercely oppose the pro-life agenda and who even support the grisly procedure known as "partial-birth abortion" make a point of receiving Communion to demonstrate that they are Catholics in "good standing" with the Church. When Church officials take no ostensible action, people are led to believe, to their spiritual detriment, that one can be both a "good Catholic" and fervently "pro-choice. It's come to the point that some secular commentators have wondered aloud whether the Church will change her "infallible" teachings on controversial moral issues, in part because she does not seem committed to them in practice.

One positive step recently taken by the U.S. bishops in this regard is the statement in *Catholics in Political Life*, which says that the Church "should not honor those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principals. They should not be given awards, honors, or platforms which would suggest support for their actions."

- (c) Catholic lawmakers, because of the secular authority they wield, are obliged, according to *Catholics in Political Life*, "to work toward correcting morally defective laws, lest they be guilty of cooperating in evil and in sinning against the common good."

Those Catholic politicians who are on the forefront of promoting, defending, and expanding abortion rights are thus complicit in an ongoing assault against our culture, an assault that has already claimed tens of millions of innocent lives. Given the gravity of this situation, it's eminently understandable that Church leaders would see this as an extraordinarily serious matter that could justify a range of pastoral, disciplinary responses.

The relevant canon of the Code of Canon Law is canon 915 (see also canon 712 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches). This canon provides: "Those who have been excommunicated or interdicted after the imposition or declaration of the penalty and others obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to Holy Communion."

In his 2003 encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II interprets this canon for us. He writes:

The judgment of one's state of grace obviously belongs only to the person involved, since it is a question of examining one's conscience. However, in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly, and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved. The *Code of Canon Law* refers to this situation of a manifest lack of proper moral disposition when it states that those who "obstinately persist in manifest, grave sin" are not to be admitted to Eucharistic communion.

Pope John Paul II envisions the application of canon 915 where there is outward conduct that is "seriously, clearly, and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm." Especially given other statements from the Holy Father on the "Gospel of Life," the case of Catholic lawmakers who obstinately persist in pro-abortion advocacy would fall well within the purview of this canon.

Similarly, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the Vatican, gave similar advice to leading American prelates, based on canon 915:

Regarding the grave sin of abortion or euthanasia, when a person's formal cooperation becomes manifest (understood, in the case of a Catholic politician, as his consistently campaigning and voting for permissive abortion and euthanasia laws), his Pastor should meet with him, instructing him about the Church's teaching, informing him that he is not to present himself for Holy Communion until he brings to an end the objective situation of sin, and warning him that he will otherwise be denied the Eucharist.

When "these precautionary measures have not had their effect or in which they were not possible," and the person in question, with obstinate persistence, still presents himself to receive the Holy Eucharist, "the minister of Holy Communion must refuse to distribute it" (cf. Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts Declaration "Holy Communion and Divorced, Civilly Remarried Catholics" [2002], nos. 3-4). This decision, properly speaking, is not a sanction or a penalty (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Worthiness to Receive Holy Communion: General Principles Contact CUF for a copy).

Indeed, some bishops, explicitly citing canon 915, have denied Communion to pro-abortion politicians within their diocese. The U.S. bishops as a body have acknowledged this possibility by leaving it to the individual bishop to make such pastoral decisions in concrete circumstances.

Responding to Objections

Catholics of good will can come to different conclusions as to the best way to address Catholics' complicity in the culture of death, and everyone would prefer a solution that does not involve withholding sacraments, which truly must be a last resort. A problem arises, however, when some Catholics ascribe political motives to bishops who courageously speak out on the subject. Often there is a misunderstanding of the underlying issues. And sadly, many Catholics for decades have supported abortion rights and pro-abortion candidates, so any proactive intervention by the bishops in this area will predictably meet opposition. Let's examine a few of the more common objections.

(a) **The Eucharist shouldn't be used as a "weapon" or "sanction."**

Those who make such statements do not want to withhold Communion from pro-abortion politicians. Some who are more partisan on the subject accuse bishops who withhold Communion—and sometimes even those who merely exhort pro-abortion politicians not to receive—of politicizing the issue. Sometimes critics, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, make *ad hominem* attacks of such bishops and accuse them of being "extreme," even though they are simply manifesting the "pastoral concern for the good order of the Communion" and "respect for the Sacrament" that Pope John Paul II asks of all bishops.

Archbishop Raymond L. Burke of St. Louis is one of the most accomplished canonists in the United States. He notes that withholding Communion from pro-abortion lawmakers in keeping with canon 915 is not technically a "sanction" under Church law, but rather flows from the inherent

nature of the Eucharist, which requires visible communion with the Church (see Most Rev. Raymond L. Burke, “Prophecy for Justice,” *America*, June 21-28, 2004, 13-14).

Pastors must be vigilant when it comes to the souls that have been entrusted to them. That at times may involve prophetic teaching and firm action that won’t make them popular. Even if some might interpret the actions as being harsh (when they’re eminently pastoral) and politically motivated (when as likely as not in today’s climate the candidates will actually benefit politically from the confrontation), they cannot grow weary of doing the right thing (2 Thess. 3:13). The prudence that comes into play here is not political pragmatism, but what is needed for the salvation of souls.

While a bishop may decide not to apply canon 915 in this situation, it would be wrong, not to mention pastorally imprudent, to say that a bishop “can’t or “won’t ever” take such steps. Church law, as recently affirmed by the Holy Father and Cardinal Ratzinger, says he can. Such a denial of the bishop’s prerogative reflects the “intolerant secularism” of our society, and only serves to undermine the ecclesial and moral authority of the bishop.

(b) The Catholic Church isn’t “single issue.”

That’s for sure! Anybody who has read the periodic documents of the U.S. bishops on the subject, such as *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (September, 2003), knows that Catholics are rightly concerned about the broadest possible range of issues. No organization has presented a more comprehensive and coherent approach to the complex issues our society faces than the Catholic Church. And it should further be noted that the Church as a matter of principle does not align herself with particular candidates or political parties (cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 76).

Yet, not all issues are created equal. As Fr. Frank Pavone of Priests for Life has noted, *Catholics in Political Life* “dispels the confusion that leads some to conclude that all moral issues are equal.” After noting that the U.S. bishops’ document affirms that abortion can never be justified, Fr. Pavone added, “this cannot be said about war, capital punishment, or particular policy decisions that do not contradict fundamental moral principles.”

Abortion is distinctive because it touches upon the fundamental right to life, a right without which other rights are rendered meaningless. Further, because it’s an intrinsic evil that can never be justified, and given the Church’s definitive, unequivocal witness to this truth, it does not admit of a plurality of legitimate positions. Catholics are not “pro-choice,” that is to say, “pro-abortion,” under any circumstances.

This is one of the exceptional issues (same-sex “marriage,” cloning, and euthanasia being other exceptions) where Catholic moral teaching—and the natural law—requires uniformity. On most issues, Catholic social teaching informs the issue without compelling a particular approach or position. For example, the Church has a “preferential option for the poor,” but Catholics may take vastly different approaches to addressing this important societal concern.

The vast majority of the time, the “single issue” rhetoric is used by those who want to justify voting patterns that support “pro-choice” politicians—sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. An example of the latter might be someone whose views on education, housing, gun control, or countless other issues, aligns him with candidates who support abortion.

It should be noted that the “single issue” issue cuts both ways. Pro-abortion politicians—including, sadly, some prominent Catholics—routinely apply a pro-abortion litmus test of their own when it comes to scrutinizing judicial nominees. The fact of the matter is that everyone has particular issues that are most significant to him. The Church is far from “single issue,” but her principled views on abortion are clear and are given the priority they deserve without ignoring other issues. Abortion is not the only issue, but it’s a decisive issue.

(c) The Church must not “impose” her teaching upon the American public.

Some accuse the Church of violating the “separation of Church and state” in its pro-life advocacy. A closer look reveals that this is another example of an “intolerant secularism” that is meddling with intra-ecclesial affairs. The situation of a pastor (i.e., bishop) addressing voluntary members of his flock (i.e., certain pro-abortion lawmakers) does not bring into play constitutional issues. The Church has the right to function and to determine the conditions for receiving Communion. Those who assert otherwise are the ones who are running afoul of the U.S. Constitution.

Further, bishops have not only the right but the sacred duty—as Vatican II emphasized—to teach and to inform the consciences of the faithful. In challenging Catholic politicians to “think with the Church,” the bishops are fulfilling their solemn duty. In fact, the Catechism notes that “assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience” and “rejection of the Church’s authority and her teaching” can in fact be “at the source of errors of judgment in moral conduct” (no. 1792). Catholic politicians who attack the bishops for speaking out are in essence saying, “I’m happy with my ill-formed conscience. Leave me alone.” (See generally CUF’s FAITH FACT on “Moral Conscience,” accessible at www.cuf.org.)

While the Church recognizes the rightful autonomy of temporal authority and does not exercise “jurisdiction” over non-Catholics, she has the right and obligation to proclaim the truth about human life and dignity in the public square. Abortion is not merely a “Catholic” issue but a human rights issue, rooted in the natural law, that brings together people of diverse cultural and religious perspectives.

Lastly, every law to some extent reflects the morality and values of somebody, so the idea that a Catholic politician must check his or her “personal” morality at the door is simply an abdication of responsibility for the moral fabric of society. Laws don’t make people good, but good people should be counted upon to make good laws.

(d) The Church doesn’t judge the worthiness of a person who presents himself for Communion.

This objection entails a confusion of the internal and external forums (see generally, Fr. Thomas Williams, L.C., “Bishops and the Communion Conundrum,” *National Catholic Register*, June 13-19, 2004, p. 9).

“Internal forum” concerns one’s subjective state before God, as might be confided to a confessor or spiritual advisor. The “external forum” refers to Church governance and matters of public record. These forums roughly correspond to the private and public sectors of Church life.

Some suggest that the denial of Communion necessarily entails a judgment of a person’s subjective moral status and thus wrongly crosses the line from external forum to internal forum. It is true that the Church refrains from making public judgments about the state of the souls of those who present themselves for Communion. The Catechism (no. 1861) reiterates the basic Catholic principle that no one can know with certainty the state of another’s soul, and thus we are obliged not to judge others (cf. Mt. 7:1).

However, knowledge of the state of the prospective communicant’s soul is not required. If it were, then it would *never* be possible to do so. Yet, as noted earlier in this FAITH FACT, canon law does explicitly provide for refusing Communion under certain conditions.

Sin has both an objective and subjective element. The Church is obliged to judge the former. So, without making a judgment about a person’s soul, the Church may refuse Communion to persons who persist in objectively grave sinful action (i.e., “grave matter”) of a public nature with no external signs of repentance. That’s what canon 915 of the Code of Canon Law is all about.

(e) What is needed is more sound teaching, not harsh discipline.

Nobody denies the importance of sound teaching on this issue, as clearly we have a whole generation of Catholic lawmakers—and citizens—who have not been formed well in the faith.

Yet, to the extent withholding Communion is seen as “discipline,” it’s a restorative and educative measure, not a punitive one. The goal is to purify and renew the Church, not shrink it. Authentic zeal impels Catholics to seek the full restoration of those who wander from the truth. Indeed, it’s a spiritual work of mercy.

Interestingly, “discipline” and “disciple” have the same Latin root. To become a learner, one must become a *discipulus*, who would submit to the pedagogy of discipline. Where do we most frequently hear the term “discipline” applied? The answer is by parents, teachers, coaches, and military personnel. All of these examples involve people who are trying to teach. Teaching without discipline usually doesn’t entail a change in conduct, and this “change” in a spiritual context is conversion.

Concerns of Catholics United for the Faith (CUF)

CUF members have several concerns with regard to Catholic politicians who support abortion. Before listing such concerns, we want to emphasize that they are completely divorced from partisan considerations. It is not our place as a lay Catholic apostolate to advocate affiliation with a particular political party or to take a collective stand on matters in which Catholics rightfully reflect a diversity of opinion. However, we see abortion as the most pressing human rights issue and not as a liberal-conservative or Democrat-Republican issue. The Holy Father emphasizes our “moral duty” to oppose laws that legitimize the direct killing of unborn children and thus deny the equality of everyone under the law (*Evangelium Vitae*, nos. 72, 74). Given this context, we have the following concerns:

(1) The salvation of the Catholic politician. Our faith tells us that Catholic politicians who support abortion on a massive scale are participating in a grave offense against God and against human life. Again, we do not judge any particular Catholic politician, but prudence and charity dictate that we be concerned about the state of his or her soul.

(2) The scandal to the faithful. Catholics who publicly champion the cause of abortion give grave scandal to the faithful. Obviously it is confusing to the laity to see a politician maintain such views while purporting to be a Catholic in good standing. Catholic students are taught one thing in their religion class and then hear another message from their Catholic heroes or leaders. Eventually the faithful become inoculated to the discussion, and believe—along with their elected politicians—that it’s okay for a Catholic to favor abortion rights and still receive Communion. Further, many faithful Catholics are dismayed when their pastors seem to provide little or no direction in the face of such widespread scandal.

(3) Ecumenical and evangelistic concerns. When it comes to abortion, many Catholic politicians stand with the secularists over and against devout Christians who strive to instill a sense of morality in our culture. This, we believe, is exactly the type of counter-witness discussed in *Gaudium et Spes*. After identifying atheism as one of the most serious problems of our day, this Vatican II document says that “[b]elievers can . . . have more than a little to do with the rise of atheism. To the extent that they are careless about their instruction in the faith, or present its teaching falsely, or even fail in their religious, moral, or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than to reveal the true nature of God and of religion” (no. 19).

(4) Violence in society. A society that countenances the killing of one class of vulnerable citizens will surely set its sites on other classes as well, such as the elderly and handicapped, among others. At some point we must reverse the cycle of violence that manifests itself in so many ways today.

(5) Future generations. The ongoing support and expansion of *Roe v. Wade* on the part of some Catholic legislators places at grave risk future generations of Americans who will be unjustly deprived of the fundamental right to life if these Catholic legislators do not have a change of heart.

Recommendations to Our Members

While we acknowledge the gravity of this situation, and the need for action, even more we recognize the plenitude of God's grace and the need for prayer. This outlook, shaped by the writings of CUF founder H. Lyman Stebbins and the rich spiritual tradition of our Catholic faith, enables us to encourage all those who share our fundamental goals and concerns to take the following practical steps:

(1) Our founder rightly emphasized that our zeal must first of all be directed to the renewal of our own hearts. We all need to be more deeply converted; we all need to strive for holiness. As helpful as pro-life judges, journalists, and legislators can be, even more we need more pro-life saints and heroes, such as St. Maximilian Kolbe and Pope John Paul II, St. Gianna Beretta Molla and Bl. Teresa of Calcutta. We exhort all our members to strive for holiness as their first and foremost duty as Christians.

(2) We need to pray fervently and daily for all those in public office (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-4), especially for our fellow Catholics. We must resist the real temptation to harbor uncharitable thoughts about Catholic politicians who fail to uphold the right to life, and instead we should offer extra prayers and mortifications for their conversion on this issue.

(3) As the U.S. bishops urge in *Catholics in Political Life*, the present teachable moment must not be squandered. Rather than pit bishops against each other or criticize our own bishop's response, we must relentlessly proclaim the Church's non-negotiable teaching regarding the evil of abortion, the grave responsibility of Catholic politicians to defend life, and the need to be properly disposed to receive the Eucharist.

(4) We must do all we can to support the renewal of families. The next generation of Catholic lawmakers is now receiving its formation within the family, or domestic Church. Vatican II calls the laity to be a leaven in the world. However, today's pro-abortion Catholic politicians reflect the fact that for too long the world has been a leaven in the Church, as Catholic families have largely bought into the secular mindset. This must change if there is to be a strong foundation on which to build in the future.

(5) Further, both the Holy Father and the U.S. bishops have emphasized the role of the laity—and particularly the family—in the political arena. For example, in his 1981 apostolic exhortation on the role of the Christian family in the modern world (*Familiaris Consortio*), Pope John Paul II writes: "The social role of families is called upon to find expression also in the form of *political intervention*: families should be the first to take steps to see that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family" (no. 44).

This role can be manifested in many different ways, depending on one's state in life, occupation, talents, etc. Certainly as Catholic laity we should be involved—both formally and informally—in the education of society on life issues and foster an informed, responsible use of the right to vote. Even more in this context, we encourage the faithful to call and/or write Catholics in public office, charitably but firmly expressing our disapproval of their support of abortion rights, and calling upon them to support specific measures and judicial nominees that will protect the lives of unborn children. And clearly it is never morally licit to vote for a political candidate on the basis of his or her support of abortion or other intrinsic moral evils.

(6) We encourage pastors of souls who have pro-abortion Catholic legislators within their jurisdiction to exercise their moral and, if need be, canonical authority to bear prophetic witness to the truth in a way ordered to the salvation of the Catholic legislator and indeed the good of all the faithful entrusted to their pastoral care and protection. In addition to canon 915, canon 1371 of the

Code of Canon Law, particularly as amended by Pope John Paul II in *Ad Tuendam Fidem* (1998), provides that one who publicly repudiates Church teaching, and who does not retract after being legitimately warned, is to be punished with a remedial penalty. In this regard, the lay faithful play an important role by praying for their bishop and encouraging him with respectful communications to take appropriate, decisive action to protect the flock entrusted to him. We invite concerned Catholics to contact CUF at 1-800-MY-FAITH or questions@cuf.org for additional assistance.

It is our prayer that, united in Christ and ever faithful to His bride, we will help the “Gospel of Life” flourish in our beloved homeland, so that all people, without exception, may enjoy the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” which our Founding Fathers sought to guarantee for future generations.

○ **RECOMMENDED READING:**

Holy Bible (Catholic Edition)

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Documents of Vatican II

Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics, Statement of the U.S. Catholic bishops (1995)

George Weigel, *Courage to be Catholic*

Benjamin Wiker and Donald Demarco, *Architects of the Culture of Death*

David Carlin, *The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Church in America*

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- Choose Life, That You and Your Children May Live: The Truth About Birth Control
- Persevering to the End: The Biblical Reality of Mortal Sin

Call CUF’s Information Services department toll-free helpline (1-800-MY-FAITH) for these and other Faith Facts, and with your questions about the Catholic faith.

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