

I'm Catholic. I'm pro-life. And I'm voting for Biden. Here's why.

October 13, 2020

I'm Catholic and I am pro-life.

Because I'm pro-life, I won't vote for Donald Trump. Instead, I'm voting for Joe Biden.

The Roman Catholic Bishops gave guidance to Catholic voters in their statement "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship." In it they acknowledge "Catholics often face difficult choices about how to vote."

In two carefully crafted paragraphs, they give their advice. Activists tend to quote only their favorite lines from these paragraphs, so here is the full text:

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.

35. There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position even on policies promoting an intrinsically evil act may reasonably decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil.

First, it is noteworthy that besides abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide and gay marriage, the bishops also list as "intrinsically evil," policies "deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to subhuman living conditions" as well as policies promoting "racist behavior." A liberal interpretation of this text opens the door to a wider range of Catholic social teaching than just abortion and gay marriage.

Second, the "if" clause is very important. **A Catholic is in trouble only "if the VOTER'S intent is to support that position."**

So, a Catholic can vote for Trump, even if his policies promote racism or subject the poor to subhuman living conditions, as long as the voter's intent is not to support those positions.

And a Catholic can vote for Biden, even if his policies promote abortions, as long as the voter's intent is not to support those positions.

I do not support abortion, but I do find protecting human life and dignity with a range of solutions in all stages of life meets our Catholic moral obligation more completely than merely blocking access to abortion by making it illegal.

There is another paragraph from the guide, part of which my fellow pro-lifers like to quote. For them pro-life is all about a primary issue, abortion, that they say carries more weight than the rest, and requires stopping abortion by any means possible. I understand that.

37. In making these decisions, it is essential for Catholics to be guided by a well-formed conscience that recognizes that all issues do not carry the same moral weight and that the moral obligation to oppose policies

promoting intrinsically evil acts has a special claim on our consciences and our actions. These decisions should take into account a candidate's commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue. In the end, this is a decision to be made by each Catholic guided by a conscience formed by Catholic moral teaching.

Well, I also understand and subscribe to what the rest of that paragraph states, “*These decisions should take into account a candidate's commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue. In the end, this is a decision to be made by each Catholic guided by a conscience formed by Catholic moral teaching.*” I will vote my conscience.

Another major debate involved the document's introductory note. Language declaring that “*the threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority*” was adopted, while a proposed amendment to include the following full paragraph from Pope Francis was rejected:

Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm, and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection.
(“*Gaudete et Exsultate*,” No. 101)

The amendment to include the full paragraph from Pope Francis failed by a vote of 143 to 69, perhaps because those who opposed the amendment framed it as a test of the bishops' continuing commitment to defend unborn human life.

The failure to include the full Pope Francis quote was a mistake and describing abortion as the pre-eminent priority is an incomplete and overly narrow moral criterion.

- Defenseless children, unborn and born, have a compelling claim on our consciences as a matter of justice and our duty to protect “the least of these.” We must oppose the destruction of the lives of children before birth, and we must recognize the scale and gravity of this issue.
- And just as children have a special claim on our consciences, so too do those who suffer from the legacy of slavery and continuing racial injustice have a unique claim on our consciences and action. We must be clear that Black lives matter, especially when Black Americans are being killed before our eyes.
- When Covid-19 leads to the deaths of more than 215,000 Americans, when an economic crisis, health and other disparities disproportionately threaten the poor, vulnerable and communities of color, I believe the protection of the lives and dignity of all God's children should be the moral imperative in this election year.

Getting an abortion is never a black-and-white moral, healthcare or legal issue. In January 1973, the Supreme Court issued a 7–2 decision ruling that the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides a “right to privacy” that protects a pregnant woman's right to choose whether or not to have an abortion. But it also ruled that this right is not absolute, and must be balanced against the government's interests in protecting women's health and protecting prenatal life. The Court resolved this balancing test by tying state regulation of abortion to the three trimesters of pregnancy: during the first trimester, governments could not prohibit abortions at all; during the second trimester, governments could require reasonable health regulations; during the third trimester, abortions could be prohibited entirely so long as the laws contained exceptions for cases when they were necessary to save the life or health of the mother. The Court classified the right to choose to have an abortion as “fundamental”, which required courts to evaluate challenged abortion laws under the “strict scrutiny” standard, the highest level of judicial review in the United States.

In 1992, the Supreme Court revisited and modified its legal rulings in Roe in the case of Planned Parenthood v. Casey. In Casey, the Court reaffirmed Roe's holding that a woman's right to choose to have an abortion is constitutionally protected, but abandoned Roe's trimester framework in favor of a standard based on fetal viability, and overruled Roe's requirement that government regulations on abortion be subjected to the strict scrutiny standard.

Joe Biden is a practicing Catholic and therefore doesn't believe or support abortion for himself or his family, but neither he will impose his beliefs on others who believe differently by blocking abortions. Throughout his career Joe Biden has had a very pro-life track record supporting human life and dignity on numerous fronts. And, He took oaths to support the Constitution and therefore firmly believes that the Constitution protects a pregnant woman's right to choose whether or not to have an abortion. As Biden said, "I'm prepared to accept that at the moment of conception there's human life and being, but I'm not prepared to say that to other God-fearing, [or] non-God-fearing people that have a different view."

Why not Trump/Pence you ask? Trump doesn't have a pro-life track record and he is severely lacking in character, integrity, and ability, let alone pro-life commitments. Yes, he chose Pence, which to some demonstrates his commitment to pro-life. But I think all it means is that he picked a running mate who helped him win pro-life votes. I also believe both candidates are opportunistic (who in politics isn't?) but, in Trump's case, I'm convinced this shows up in his newly minted pro-life stance. He knows it's what's necessary to win conservative (a.k.a. regressive) votes. Since becoming President, we can see by his words, policies and actions how anti-life Trump is...he lies, he is inconsistent, he is unreliable, and anything he does is highly subject to change based on what's politically convenient for him.

If you're looking for an absolutely anti-abortion candidate, then Trump isn't your guy any more than Biden.

But it's on the other pro-life issues that I find Biden the far superior candidate and Trump the most lacking. In other words, my stance isn't a choice between the lesser of two evils. I'm not simply voting against Trump. I don't consider it morally acceptable to vote against someone; in my personal convictions, I must be able to vote for the person I choose on the ballot.

I will vote for Mr. Biden for what he can do to help us recover and heal, lift up those left behind, ensure health care for all, and treat immigrants and refugees with respect. I will not vote for him to support his position on abortion, but in spite of it.

I find enough that I can affirm and identify with in the positions and record of Joe Biden, so my stance to be with him isn't based in an opposition to Trump. I see Joe Biden as the man who champions all pro-life issues more effectively and consistently.

I believe that if we call ourselves pro-life, then we must address all of the issues, not just a primary issue. Here are 10 ways in which I find the Biden more pro-life than Trump.

And, as the father of 2 sons whose families will one day benefit from all of these policies, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. I won't:

1. All life in God's Creation threatened by Climate Change

Five years ago, Pope Francis wrote Laudato Si [Praise Be to You], On Care For Our Common Home, the first papal encyclical to focus on care for creation as a central moral obligation. His groundbreaking letter brought together the call to protect the environment and to defend the "least of these" through an integral ecology that challenges all of us. The letter is a hopeful call to action, holding that climate change is a moral test as well as a scientific reality and policy challenge. We are literally burning and drowning and dying due to the effects of Climate Change.

As someone who believes the best climate policies need individual nation's commitment and cooperation internationally, I see Biden's policies and actions profoundly address Climate Change. I am voting for Biden.

I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with Trump who denies Climate Change is real, and says it is a hoax while he rolls back numerous necessary environmental regulations and refuses to engage with international solutions. I won't.

2. The lives of women who would otherwise get abortions

For me, anyone who thinks abortion will solve a problem needs their hearts changed. But, I also know it's an impossible decision to make when the reality of an unexpected pregnancy is upending your life, and those you love. And, sometimes an abortion is necessary healthcare to save the mother's life, as it is very clear as Senator Gary Peter recounted in his family's abortion story. Deciding to have an abortion is never a simple black and white choice...The mental anguish someone goes through is intense.

Women don't get abortions for fun. The procedure isn't a game. No, women who get abortions do so because they feel like they don't have other options to this pregnancy problem in their lives...they feel that they have no choice. Removing access to abortions by making it illegal won't change that reality. Just voiding Roe vs. Wade, or bankrupting Planned Parenthood, or severely restricting abortion by law won't resolve the reasons behind the 3 in 10 women who will have had an abortion by the time they turn 40.

Studies show preventing abortions through progressive social policies that make healthcare and childcare more affordable, make contraception more accessible (Catholic's use of birth control despite the Church teaching against birth control is for another discussion), alleviate poverty, and support a living wage do the most to create a pro-life culture. Countries where abortion is simply illegal see no change in the abortion rate.

Since Roe v. Wade was passed in 1972, most Republicans have talked a lot about abortion while doing little to make meaningful change in policy. Furthermore, they've opposed or stalled measures that could prevent abortions by targeting the underlying causes, like poverty, education, lack of access to healthcare, and supports for single parent and low-income families. In fact, I suspect these reasons contribute to why abortion rates rose under Reagan, rose under the first Bush, dropped under Clinton, held steady under the second Bush, and dropped under Obama. As such, I'm not sure anyone could rightfully say that voting Republican is the best thing to lower abortion rates in this country.

By focusing exclusively on the legal components to restrict abortion and placing judges who will interpret the Constitution their way, while simultaneously opposing these family-friendly social policies to prevent abortions, and that support all human life and dignity, the Republican Party has managed to hold pro-life voters hostage with the promise of outlawing abortion, (which has yet to happen under any Republican administrations since 1972's Roe v. Wade.) They have actively worked against the best humane policies that would lead to a significant reduction in the 2 million unplanned and some of them unwanted pregnancies each year in the USA....instead they have flooded states with laws severely restricting abortions that have been repeatedly struck down as unconstitutional. Therefore the Republican policies have failed to reduce abortions as much as could be possible. (could this be interpreted as pro-abortion?)

Lisa Regan, Executive Director of the Atlanta based Pregnancy Aid Clinic said in an article in 2019: "...***abortion masks social problems faced by women.*** *If abortion is restricted, the problems faced by women do not go away but will become very visible...to everyone. ...It will require more services to be "ready to walk with them, ready for parenting classes, ready armed with adoption counselors and really good strong adoption programs, good strong parenting programs, mentoring programs, counseling, advocacy..."*

As someone who believes the best pro-life policies support all human life and dignity, and the best anti-abortion policies prevent abortions rather than make them criminal, I see Biden's policies and actions profoundly address human life and dignity. I am voting for Biden.

I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with Trump. I won't.

3. The lives of all women

Biden's views are superior here because he has solid and clear stances on women's issues, the majority of which are aligned with my views. For Biden, it's a simple proposition: his daughter is entitled to the same rights and opportunities as his sons. He believes every issue is a women's issue — health care, the economy, education, national security — but women are also uniquely and disproportionately impacted by many policies. As President, Biden will pursue an aggressive and comprehensive plan to further women's economic and physical security and ensure that women can fully exercise their civil rights. Because Biden has a track record of implementing many pro-women policies, I am voting for Biden.

Meanwhile, Trump historically and as the president has demeaned women with his words and actions. I can't look my family in the eye, and say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump.. I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with Trump. I won't.

4. The lives of refugees and other immigrants

Trump's comments and actions about immigrants and the undocumented, and plans for the border are beyond absurd, they are unconscionable. Separating children from their parents at the border with no plan of reuniting them is not pro-life...its criminal. Caricatures work well in stump speeches, but they rarely reflect reality. People come for the opportunities our country provides. And, after 4 years, it's still a promise unfulfilled to build a wall that Mexico pays for. Does anyone believe that will actually happen? Immigration is not the problem. Trump's cruel nationalistic policies are the problem and not what America is about...we are a country of immigrants!

Biden's stance, however, has shown a balance of the need for security with a compassion for humanity. His policy proposals prioritize keeping immigrant families intact while making recognized and much needed immigration policy improvements.

Considering the traumatic mess Trump has made. I don't believe the pro-life solution is punishing those seeking a better life. As someone who believes life matters no matter where you were born, I am voting for Biden.

I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with Trump. I won't.

5. The lives of racial and ethnic minorities

For starters, can we acknowledge that "make America great again" is a slogan that only applies to white men?

- What they call the good old days were days in which women and our neighbors of color couldn't vote or attend integrated schools or college.
- What they call the good old days were the ones in which the larger public didn't know about police brutality against minorities because we didn't have camera phones or social media.
- What they call the good old days are times in which white men didn't have to admit any privilege or offer seats at any table to those with different lived experiences than theirs.
- What they call the good old days are an era in which my multiracial family couldn't exist.

As such, even apart from Trump's racist and misogynist comments, his slogan itself smacks of an ignorance toward the reality that in the good old days, America was only great for the lives of white men and not others. Trump has shown again and again that he doesn't value the lives of racial and ethnic minorities.

Black Lives Matter...because if black lives don't matter, then no life matters.

As someone who is striving to be an ally to and learner from those with the lived experiences unique to people of color, I am voting for Biden.

I can't look my family in the eye, and say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with Trump. I won't.

6. The lives of religious minorities

I'm a Catholic Christian. The history of this nation is one of privileged Christians...too often privileged white male Protestant Christians...for too long a vicious history of bias against Catholics, Jews and other religions. But we were founded as a place in which religious liberty for all was a foundational, a Constitutional, principle. If we place limits on the expression of faith of any group...recently Muslims...then we're eroding religious freedom for all groups – including Christians.

Furthermore, when I consider Supreme Court appointments, I don't trust Trump to appoint those who will uphold and not erode the Constitution and religious freedom in our country. We can't pick and choose which religions we want to protect. We can't insist that the worst examples of Christianity don't represent the whole while arguing that the worst examples of Islam represent all Muslims. That's not who we are as a country. And it is not pro-life when we say that the beliefs of certain faiths, or no faith, matter more or less than others.

As someone who believes the value of life isn't based in how you pray, if you pray, or to whom you pray, I am voting for Biden.

I can't look my family in the eye, and say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with Trump. I won't.

7. The lives of the LGBTQ+ community

I'm not going to get into a religious discussion here, because I doubt anything I say will influence you. That's not the point, anyway. My inclusion of the lives of the LGBTQ+ community affirms that their lives are valuable. I think we can all agree on that, right?

As one who believes the value of life isn't based in who you love or how you identify, I am voting for Biden.

As the father of sons whose worth isn't based in their sexuality or gender identity, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with Trump. I won't.

8. The lives of our armed forces

I don't see the presidency as the place for rookie mistakes, not when the lives of our men and women in uniform are on the line. Trump doesn't understand the culture of the American armed forces. He is incoherent on matters of war and peace. The U.S. military footprint abroad isn't really any smaller than when he was inaugurated, and Trump's actions...Undermining our national security, rupturing relationships and commitments with NATO, killing a top Iranian general, ending the nuclear accord with Iran, ripping up arms control agreements with Russia, moving to an increasingly confrontational stance with China, threatening North Korea with "fire and fury" and then placating Kim Jung Un with "love letters" in spite of his openly hostile development of nuclear weapons and missile systems...all have actually moved the United States closer to a major conflict. Throw in a few other scandals, old and new... Trump's deferments during Vietnam, funneling military funding of ongoing projects to finance "The Wall" that Congress refused to fund, praising Putin and other dictators, the Special Counsel investigation revealing Russian interference in the 2016 United States elections with numerous of his administration officials criminal involvement, Trump's impeachment, exposing state secrets to the Russians in

the Oval Office, his inaction in the face of reports of Russian bounties against American troops...and on and on... I can't fathom how someone so woefully ignorant in so many ways regarding foreign policy, and is so openly hostile to our Gold Star families, fallen heroes, Intelligence community and military leaders, is a better alternative.

As someone who believes the best way to honor our troops is to give them a Commander in Chief who respects both them, and the policies and laws pertaining to war and peace, I am voting for Biden.

As we share with our children about their grandfather's Army and Navy service in WWII, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with Trump. I won't.

9. The lives of those killed by gun violence

I know pro-life and pro-gun stances often go hand in hand. To me, I consider many Republican pro-gun stances to be anti-life. As someone said, "I'm not here to take away your guns. I just don't want you to be shot by someone who shouldn't have a gun in the first place."

38,000 AMERICANS DIE FROM GUN VIOLENCE EACH YEAR. IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY. The issues are Gun suicide, Kids and Guns, Domestic Violence, Mass Shooting, Community Violence, Police Shooting, Mental Healthcare...

The Republican platform not only stands in favor of the Second Amendment, but even stands against limiting the capacity of magazines. The Democrat platform calls for better enforcement of existing gun legislation, better mental healthcare and advancing other laws to decrease gun violence. To me, this shows a deep value for human life by the DNC over the GOP's value for gun industry lobbies like the NRA.

As my family asks questions about the increasing gun violence in our country, I tell them that I am voting for Biden.

I can't look my family in the eye, and say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with Trump. I won't.

10. The lives of people with disabilities

Biden's history with people with disabilities shows his esteem for their lives. I am voting for Biden.

Trump's public stance and mocking comments about people with disabilities is appalling and immoral. I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with Trump. I won't.

Finally, what about the explicitly pro-life or pro-choice elements of the Party Platforms?

Some say Republicans are pro-life and Democrats are pro-choice. (For now, I won't address the Republican party abdicating to Trump's every wish. Its conservative roots have been abandoned for Trumpism and it will take decades to recover from the Trump hijacking.)

I say both parties embrace some pro-life policies, but neither party is pro-life enough.

I won't sugarcoat it. I don't care for some of the Democratic platform on these issues. Nor do I care for the many portions of the Republican platform that I consider to be anti-life. Truly, I'm convinced that neither party is pro-life enough, not in the fullest sense in which life is demonstrably valued from conception to the grave.

The Democrat's platform affirms a women's right to abortion. I don't like that we have to make this statement, because we fail to prevent abortions. But, neither condemning abortion or shaming those involved with the

practice will make any difference in the rates of pregnancy termination. I'd even appreciate a return to a couple platforms ago, when Democrats called for abortion to be rare. Sadly, that was dropped.

The DNC platform goes even further, however, calling for the full repeal of the Hyde Amendment, while the Republican platform calls for the upholding of it. I disagree with both. I support the Hyde Amendment, which bans the use of federal funds for abortion, with exceptions for rape and incest and the life of the mother. But at one point, it also included provisions for the health of the mother, beyond merely if her life were in danger. But currently low-income women are denied the full spectrum of reproductive healthcare if, for example, a continued pregnancy would cause grave and long-lasting health consequences for the mother or a prenatal condition were diagnosed that meant a child would die before birth or shortly after. I believe we can restrict abortion funding – while non-governmental entities stand in the gap to provide those services to women who still choose them – from taxpayers like us, who stand opposed to abortion, without robbing doctors and women of their ability to make medical decisions. It's a fine line, sure, but it makes sense to me. Anything else seems as if we're supporting the abortion choices of wealthier women while restricting them for those living in or near poverty.

Furthermore, I really wish the Democratic platform didn't call for repealing all "federal and state laws and policies that impede a woman's access to abortion." But I don't see them finding success in those attempts, and, again, I find addressing the social issues of abortion to be most effective at protecting life – both the life of the mother and the life of the child – than blocking abortion access. I'd love for a major political party to work to protect life in a multi-faceted way, but that's not our reality. So, as I see it, the decision isn't between a pro-life candidate (if we can trust Trump's word, which I sincerely doubt) and a pro-choice one. It's between one pro-life approach versus another.

I didn't write this to change your mind. I wrote this because I wanted to answer what I see as a valid question: How can anyone be pro-life and vote for Biden?

You might not think I've made a solid case for Biden as a viable pro-life candidate, and that's fair. But I hope you won't be quick to dismiss the realities I've shared about why I can't consider Trump to be pro-life either. In other words, I understand how you can look at Biden's track record on abortion and not be able to say, "I'm with him." Really, I get that. I just don't understand how you can look at Trump's track record on not just abortion, but on life across the board, and say you're with him. To me, being pro-life can't just be about ensuring that babies are born without also affirming their value after birth through our words, actions, and policies.

If we disagree here, that's okay. You vote your conscience, and I'll vote mine. Have we've lost the skill of civil discourse, especially in politics? Well, I'm confident we can disagree without being disagreeable. Please prove me right in your comments. While I won't tell you not to speak your voice, I will ask you to leave my home if you can't do so with kindness and decency.

I'm voting for Biden. And I'm still pro-life. Those two realities aren't mutually exclusive.