

The Dorothea Project Action Small Group Discussion Discernment for Faithful Participation (Personal Examen) and Voter Guide

Decisions Prior to Your Small Group Discussion:

1) Which Version to Use First?

- The Discernment for Faithful Participation with a Personal Examen using the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching?
- OR
- The Voter Guide using Catholic Social Teaching for Candidate Assessment?

2) Meet Multiple Times or Once?

- Meet multiple times to review Intro, Conscience, Moral Character and to review two or three of the CST Principles at each session?
- OR
- Meet Once to Review Intro, Conscience, Moral Character and A Sample of One CST Principle?

3) Who to include? Whole Parish, Social Justice Committee, Parish Council, Family groups, Faith Groups, etc.?

Start Your Small Group Discussion

1. **Opening Prayer:** Encourage groups to begin with prayer.
 - a. Suggested prayer: [Prayer for Unity-to Overcome Division by the USCCB](#)
 - b. Last 3 paragraphs of the USCCB Pastoral Statement on Immigration November 12, 2025 [USCCB Special Message on Immigration.pdf](#)
2. **Questions based on the Introduction:**
 - a. Share how you understand our call and responsibility as Catholics to bring our faith into public life.
 - b. Pope Francis' "equally-sacred" statement is the foundation for this work emphasizing the:
 - sanctity of unborn life equally with the
 - dignity of the poor, immigrants, the elderly, and other vulnerable people.
 - Why is it important to consider all of these issues together instead of focusing on only one?
 - c. Questions in the Discernment and Voter Guides prompt us to ask, "What does it mean to respect and uphold the human dignity of all people? What kinds of policies do you think best promote **human flourishing and the common good** as defined by the USCCB?"

3. **Questions based on Criteria for first assessing our own Moral Character, then the Moral Character of a Candidate:**
 - a. In your life who has best exemplified the qualities of a moral and virtuous person?
 - b. Which of their characteristics and virtues (as seen in actions) - do you personally strive to build up and use in your life?
 - c. Which of my characteristics, virtues, or actions may need improvement?
 - d. Which characteristics, virtues or actions tell me that a candidate genuinely listens to the concerns of all their constituents; is willing to work across the aisle, collaborate, seek unity rather than division?
 - e. Examine the full list of criteria of Moral Character in the Discernment or "CST Voter Guide" (p.4).
 - f. **Which of these qualities** (in a, b, c, d, e) **do I need to see in a candidate for them to earn my vote?**
4. **Questions based on Forming Conscience:**
 - a. Catholic teaching on Conscience is well-established and vital for our lives in faith. Begin with a commitment to **"embrace goodness and truth"** and a commitment to **study scripture and church teaching**.
 - b. **A basic task for forming conscience is to examine facts - to seek "to discover concretely what is good or evil about any given issue."**
 - i. How have you done this in your life?
 - ii. Who do you think is a good example of someone who examines the facts and the consequences of actions?
 - c. Our two guides (Discernment for Faithful Participation and CST Voter Guide) are structured to help seek the good and examine facts.
 - i. How do you want to use them?
 - ii. How does your assessment of Moral Character help you form your Conscience?
 - d. We must **act "according to what one believes to be good.** ... even if it is in conflict with Church teaching." (See Forming Conscience)
 - i. Have you had to act according to your conscience in a way that some could say is in conflict with Church teaching?
 - ii. How did you develop your conscience in that area?
 - e. **Because no candidate will meet all of our moral criteria, we need to form and follow our Conscience as we make decisions.**
5. **Pause for the group to read the guide and take notes:**
 - a. Review titles of the seven principles of CST - each is integral to Church teaching. Each is defined with supporting quotes from Scripture and Doctrinal Tradition.
 - b. Review the Saints or holy people whose lives exemplify each CST principle.
 - c. Participants can review in small groups, in pairs, or individually.

6. **Questions based on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching:**

- a. Which themes of Catholic Social Teaching do you find most challenging or thought-provoking when forming your conscience? How might they influence how you evaluate candidates to decide your vote?
- b. Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis both argue that caring for the environment is intimately connected with caring for human beings. How are concerns about human dignity intertwined with concerns about caring for “our common home”?
- c. Pope Francis encouraged us to have “genuine dialogue and openness to others”. St. Paul told us to “put on the mind of Christ”. Keeping this in mind, while also considering CST, share how you are planning to reflect on the candidates and issues prior to voting.
- d. Popes from Leo XIII to Leo XIV call attention to the dignity of work and the rights of workers. How does the Church’s commitment to upholding the dignity of work and workers intersect with its commitments to justice and peace, to the poor and the vulnerable, to the environment, and to solidarity with all members of the human family?
- e. The USCCB and many popes call us **to work for the common good so that individuals and all people can flourish.** (Pope Francis, [Fratelli Tutti](#), summary no. 66-67) See also USCCB [common good](#).
- f. The Personal Examen questions and the Candidate Assessment questions were **developed by > 20 Dorothea Project volunteers. They reflect the concerns of those people.** You may want **to add assessment questions based on local issues or national and international issues of prime concern to you.**

7. **Conclusion**

- a. Allow time for participants to ask questions and/or share additional thoughts.
- b. **Ask everyone to make a plan to reflect on the candidates and issues prior to voting.**
- c. Ask **would people like to return for more group discussion?**

