

**APP VOTING WITH AN INFORMED MORAL CONSCIENCE:
A GUIDE FOR CATHOLIC VOTERS (Ap'd 6/8/2020)**

In light of the plethora of complex moral challenges facing American voters, both at home and in our global community, the Association of Pittsburgh Priests issues the following guidelines to assist Catholics determined to vote with faith and conscience in the November 2020 elections. In so doing, we are not endorsing particular candidates. Our purpose is to provide guidance based on Catholic social teaching.

ISSUES OF HIGHEST PRIORITY:

Although many issues merit attention and thoughtful consideration from Catholic voters, a few are of such gravity that they warrant the highest priority. Listed and elaborated on below are five of these. **We do not prioritize them in importance, since we believe all are of the highest significance.**

- **ABORTION:** Each year in the United States over 750,000 unborn babies are killed by abortion. Hundreds of thousands more are aborted globally. New York has even gone so far as to legalize the abortion of babies virtually up to the time of birth. Such egregious behavior must end and therefore abortion must be considered an issue of high priority for Catholic voters in the upcoming elections.

That said, Catholic voters must also address the root causes of abortion. Lack of adequate financial sources is the reason given by over 70 percent of women who choose to terminate their pregnancy. Consequently, we believe that Catholic voters cannot separate the reality of abortion from socio-economic disparities that play a large role in perpetuating poverty. Such issues include the right of workers to a just living wage; affordable health care—including pre- and post-natal care—for the poor; educational programs, including affordable higher education; government-sponsored job training and child care programs for the needy; a tax system aimed at benefiting the poor and working classes, rather than the very rich. There is no question that these economic disparities contribute to the high rate of national and global abortions. Is it moral for a Catholic to vote for a political candidate who claims to be pro-life, but systematically opposes programs aimed at ameliorating the dismal condition of the poor?

- **CLIMATE CHANGE:** Scientists are in almost universal agreement that the overuse of fossil fuels, coupled with other man made abuses of nature, have put the very existence of humankind and all of creation in peril. Such “unprecedented destruction of ecosystems” resulting from these abuses, says Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, is a global problem with not only environmental, but also social, economic, and political ramifications. If massive global-wide efforts are not undertaken immediately to address climate change, adds the Holy Father, there will be consequences of the highest gravity. Yet, despite the warnings of the scientific community, there are candidates, who, even in the face of an ever-increasing number of destructive forest fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and droughts—all of which experts believe are connected to changes in our climate—insist that this issue is a “hoax” and have even gone so far as to roll back the constructive reforms that have already been put in place. In light of the serious consequences that will result if this urgent issue is not properly addressed, Catholic voters have a moral obligation to consider climate change of high priority when voting.

- **RACISM AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC INJUSTICE ACCOMPANYING IT :** As San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy stated in a recent lecture at the University of San Diego: *“A third compelling issue our country faces [along with abortion and climate change] in this election cycle [is] the culture of exclusion that has grown so dramatically in our nation during the last three years.”* As the recent callous murders of African Americans in Minnesota, Georgia, Kentucky, and elsewhere have graphically illustrated, racial injustice is not only on the rise, but is *“buttressed by a new language and symbolism that seeks to advance the evil of white nationalism and create structures of racial prejudice for a new generation.”*

Racial and ethnic inequalities in housing, health care, education, and employment, the Bishop of San Diego continues, *“are rooted in our nation’s historic culture of exclusion,”* and they contribute dramatically to *“the breakdown of marriage and family life.”* Moreover, disparities of wealth and income, resulting in large part from the absence of a just minimum wage and tax laws that overwhelmingly benefit the rich, make it extremely difficult for racial and ethnic minorities to better their economic situation. Our criminal justice system is replete with inferior legal representation for the poor, coupled with an ever-growing number of private prisons where profits resulting from high rates of incarceration are the primary goal. With such a reality, is it any wonder that our jails are filled with a disproportionate percentage of poor African American and Hispanic inmates? Since the equality and dignity of all people is a cornerstone of Catholic social justice teaching, issues of racism and its ancillary evils should be given high priority for Catholic voters.

- **QUESTIONS OF CHARACTER:** It is of the utmost importance that those holding political office have the knowledge, psychological stability, and moral character to govern wisely. Thus, before voting we must ask ourselves if a candidate has the following prerequisites needed for good governance: intelligence, leadership skills, human relations skills, honesty, moral rectitude, self-control, prudential judgement, and concern for others—especially the poor.
- **NUCLEAR AND OTHER FORMS OF MODERN WARFARE:** On his visit to Japan in 2019, Pope Francis emphatically stated that not only is the use of nuclear weapons immoral, but so is the mere possession of them, *“because an accident or the madness of some government leader, [just] one person’s madness, can destroy humanity.”* But Francis went further by also condemning the global arms race: *“In a world where millions of children and families live in inhumane conditions, the money that is squandered and the fortunes made through the manufacture, upgrading, maintenance and sale of even more destructive weapons are an affront crying out to heaven.”* Following a recent U.S.-directed drone strike in Iran, the Holy Father broadened his condemnation of nuclear war to include all forms of modern warfare. *“War,”* he warned, *“brings only death and destruction.”* In light of the pope’s words, it is important when voting that Catholics reflect on the disturbing fact that the United States has for decades had the world’s largest military budget. In 2019 alone our government spent \$732 billion on its military; this represented 38 percent of all military spending worldwide. Indeed, our defense budget was larger than that of the next ten countries combined. The United States is also the largest global exporter of weapons to other countries.

OTHER ISSUES OF HIGH PRIORITY: While perhaps not of the highest priority as the five above issues, the following are still important issues to consider when deciding for whom to vote.

- Is the candidate's position on capital punishment in harmony with that of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Paragraph 2267), which states that “*the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on inviolability and dignity of the person?*”
- Does the candidate support an immigration policy that is just and benevolent?
- Are the candidate's views and conduct towards Muslims, Jews, Hindi, Buddhists, other Christians, and people of other faiths rooted in respect and charity?