



Call to Justice

Newsletter of the Justice & Peace Office of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ

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"Call to Justice" is a bi-monthly newsletter from the Adorers of the Blood of Christ Justice and Peace Office. It is published to clarify, update, and focus ASC efforts for justice and peace and to encourage solidarity among us as we speak and act for the welfare of all people and our Earth. Insights and input from ASCs and associates are welcome.



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ELECTIONS 2004

Your Vote: Something Sacred!

This issue of *Call to Justice* offers non-partisan information about why voting matters. Every American has power to shape government by voting. Individual citizens, in every corner of this country, from all walks of life, build our nation's most powerful institutions. Each of us can and should do the important work of building and participating in our American democracy.

In *Faithful Citizenship, A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, the US Bishops state that, "In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation." The bishops continue: "At this time, some Catholics may feel politically homeless, sensing that no political party and too few candidates share a consistent concern for life and dignity. However, this is not a time for retreat or discouragement. We need more, not less, engagement in political life." The bishops also say that, "as Bishops we do not wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates. We hope that voters will examine candidates on the full range of issues and on their personal integrity, philosophy and performance."

Dave Robinson, National Coordinator of Pax Christi, USA in a March 2004 statement related to the Pax Christi international election monitoring project, Every Vote, Every Voter Counts said, "Exercising the right to vote is an essential component of the life of faith and the life of democracy. For many in our democracy, their vote is their voice. And every time a vote is not counted or an eligible voter is impeded from voting, another voice is silenced and our democracy is weakened. We want to make sure that the sanctity of every vote and the dignity of every voter is respected and upheld..."

Issues that Demand Attention This Election Year

To encourage responsible engagement in the 2004 election process, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (LCWR/CMSM) wrote a joint resolution reminding members of the many issues that demand attention this election year. They include:

- Preventable wars in Afghanistan and Iraq;
- US military presence being felt in nations around the world;
- The bloated US military budget's impact on the most vulnerable in the nation and the environment;
- US borders being closed to thousands of people seeking political and economic opportunities;

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*An ASC has said,
“With all the
complexity
involved we should
be grateful that we
have two people
willing to run for
the Office of
President of the
United States!”*

- The structured, globalization economic systems resulting in a greater gap between the rich and the poor;
- Millions of US citizens with no access to adequate health care, education, or social services.

In addition, the resolution pointedly asks: “How do we create structures that make this a more just, secure and peaceful world? How would those structures:

- Protect Earth and those most vulnerable on our planet?
- End hunger, poverty and homelessness?
- Work with the international community as a partner in creating peace with justice
- Promote programs that protect the dignity of human life along the life spectrum?”

Notes on Presidential Candidates’ Positions on the Pro-Life Issue

Father John Kavanaugh, SJ, professor of philosophy at St. Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri wrote an article titled “Voting Conscience” that appeared in the May 17, 2004 issue of America magazine. In reference to the two presidential candidates he states, “Kerry stonewalls on this [abortion] as effectively as Bush stonewalls about his war.... The Catholic tradition affirms the supremacy of conscience, our moral judgment. It also calls for a willingness to form that conscience. But I do not accept the dictum that the sole moral issue of November’s election is either war or abortion. For me it is an election, a choice, between two terribly deficient candidates. With the best evidence I can muster, by November, I will choose one.”

Concern about candidates’ positions on abortion makes voting decisions very difficult. Ladislav Orsy, SJ, a visiting law professor at Georgetown University, has said that on some levels “the whole debate doesn’t make much sense.” A single politician, even the president, has almost no power to change the nation’s laws about abortion. “No representative [in Congress] can bring [and pass] a bill to overturn Roe v. Wade. The only way a president can have influence for the future is to nominate justices to the Supreme Court, and still the Senate has to approve them.” (America magazine, May 17, 2004)

Another dimension on the abortion issue is brought out in an article “We Need to ask whether we are pro-birth or pro-life” by Megan McKenna in *The Catholic Peace Voice*, published by Pax Christi USA, July/Aug 2004. The article states that “President Bush has in the last few months reiterated his position that he will not introduce any legislation that would call for a change in the existing law to make abortion illegal.” The article also points out the need to see if candidates actually did anything connected to anything they campaigned on.

Leon Ward, a 60-year-old, well-educated Catholic from Chicago who is pro-life and would like to see a constitutional ban on abortion, offers an insightful observation in the June 18, 2004 *National Catholic Reporter* letters to the editor. Mr. Ward writes, “It became evident to me, after having voted for Ronald Reagan in 1980, that the Republican Party had seized upon this issue and has used it ever since to draw traditional Democrat voters into their fold. Reagan’s first Supreme Court nominee was pro-choice Sandra Day O’Connor.

“We have a Republican-controlled Congress, a Republican president and a conservative Supreme Court, and yet abortion on demand is alive and well. Wouldn’t one think given the rhetoric of the past 25 years or so, now is the time for the so-called pro-life Republicans in power to strike? Isn’t it time for a Republican senator like Rick Santorum to propose a bill that would be passed in both houses of Congress, signed by the president and affirmed by the conservative Supreme Court?”

Mr. Ward sheds more light on the issue as he writes, “It was George W. Bush, not John Kerry or Ted Kennedy or Nancy Pelosi, who said about two months ago that this country is not ready for a constitutional ban on abortion, and this is exactly what a USA Today predicted about a year ago when it stated that as long as 60-plus percent of American voters want abortion on demand to be kept legal, the Republicans will not deliver.”

Mr. Ward asks: “Why does the pro-life movement continue to turn a blind eye?” and answers, “I have witnessed political conservatism in all its forms (kingdoms, tribes, sultanates, dictatorships and democracies). Political conservatism stands for one thing and one thing only, and that is that wealth, power, knowledge and resources should be in the hands of a few while the burdens are heaped upon the shoulders of the many.”

The April 30th, 2004 editorial from the National Catholic Reporter writes: The legality of abortion will not change under either a Bush administration or a Kerry administration. Even the president’s conservative lower court nominees now regularly tell the Senate Judiciary Committee that Roe is “settled law.” The editorial presents a paradoxical comment: It is conceivable – though certainly not verifiable – that a Kerry administration... would oversee a decline in abortion rates of the kind that took place during the “pro-choice” Clinton administration.

Voter Registration

In the last four decades voter turnout has steadily declined. Only half of eligible voters voted in 2000, only 39 percent in 2002. Have you moved, changed address since the last time you registered? Confirm your registration. Contact your voter registrar at least one month prior to Election Day because in many states the deadline for registration is 30 days before the Election Day. Find out where your polling place is. Invite your family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors to register to vote and to promise to vote! Encourage young people to vote! When young people take the time to register, their turnout on Election Day is impressive and they may then begin a lifetime habit of voting. If you have questions, you can call the toll-free Voter’s Research Hotline (1-888-Vote-Smart) to speak with a researcher.

The Act of Voting

The act of voting is the cornerstone of democracy. As Justice Louis D. Brandeis once said, “The most important political office is that of the private citizen.” When you get to the polls, don’t be overwhelmed by the ballot. It is not necessary to vote on every issue. Local papers print sample ballots in advance of Election Day. Re-viewing and studying the ballot before going to the polls is a great help.

Some Election 2004 Websites

The following websites offer information on issues and the election process:

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops at: www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship

Network at www.networklobby.org

Pax Christi USA at www.paxchristiusa.org

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns at www.maryknoll.org

Friends Committee on National Legislation at www.fcnl.org

Common Cause at www.commoncause.org/VoteforAmerica

Project Vote Smart at www.vote-smart.org/



A two-part video – *In the Footsteps of Jesus, Catholic Social Teaching at Work Today* – available in both English and Spanish addresses the central question: How does God call you to make a difference in the world? Teenagers, senior citizens, college students, RCIA candidates, all Catholics will be challenged to respond. Part One provides a brief compelling overview of the seven themes of Catholic social teaching. In Part Two, each theme is highlighted through the living examples of six extraordinary individuals and a couple who offer insight and inspiration as they share their own commitment to promoting justice and peace in the world today. *Note: The video may be borrowed from the ASC Justice and Peace Office:*

Election 2004 Resources

The USCCB offers a number of resources built around their statement, *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, to help Catholics prepare for Election 2004. These include:

- Faithful Citizenship Kit – The resource kit offers
 - o The Statement
 - o Color Brochure summary of the statement
 - o Camera-Ready Brochure
 - o Letter to Pastors and Parish Leaders
 - o Planning Ideas for Parishes
 - o Bulletin Quotes and Clip Art
 - o A Family Guide
 - o Ideas for Liturgists
 - o Suggestions for Homilists
 - o Ideas for Religious Educators, Catholic School Principals and Teachers
 - o Suggestions for Youth Ministers
 - o Ideas for Social Concerns and Pro-Life Committees
 - o Tips for Conducting a Non-Partisan Voter Education Campaign and Voter Registration Drive
 - o Tips for Conducting Candidate Forums
 - o Faithful Citizenship Poster
 - o Order Form

The Kit is available from USCCB for \$5.95 at 800-235-8722.

- The full text of *Faithful Citizenship, Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* – is also available. This statement from the bishops offers help to the Catholic Community to prepare for the presidential election. The 40-page document highlights four areas of special concern – protecting human life, promoting family life, pursuing social justice, and practicing global solidarity. It also focuses on seven themes at the heart of Catholic social teaching as the foundation for the Catholic approach to faithful citizenship. (1-9 copies are \$3.95 each. To order call USCCB at 1-800-235-8722.)
- Multiple copies of the color brochure that comes in the kit are available. It offers a brief summary of Catholic teaching on civic responsibility. (50/ \$12.00 from USCCB) *NOTE: A copy of this brochure will be made available to each ASC in this mailing.*
- *Faithful Citizenship*, a nine-minute video available for \$10.95 from the USCCB, is a presentation of the challenge of faithful citizenship, which can be a resource and discussion starter for communities. *NOTE: The video may be borrowed from the ASC Justice and Peace Office: 618-282-6229 x214.*