



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics



October 2020

Dear Friends for Life,

As Election Day draws near, we are dedicating the October newsletter to the topic of voting because it is so important – it is a moral act whose repercussions will affect not only our daily lives, but also our souls. In the “Bit of Bioethics” section you will find a more lengthy explanation of terms commonly used (and misunderstood) in describing our moral duty in voting. It builds on the newsletters of the past couple of months which you can find on our website. However, a condensed version follows below.

The most important advice, though, is to pray (especially the Rosary, and before the Blessed Sacrament, if possible) and be faithful. No matter the outcome of the election, we must be filled with joy, charity, civility, and patience, for we are reflections of God’s image and His glory. Indeed, the last several months have been trying on even the heartiest of characters, but forget not St. Paul’s words to the Philippians:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (The New American Bible, Phil 4:4-7).

ON VOTING

“While Americans presume that the Constitution guarantees their rights, in practice our rights survive or disappear based on how firmly we defend them.” --Archbishop Charles J. Chaput

Life Comes First. Always.

There has been significant debate about political issues this election cycle (healthcare and racism, for example) in relation to abortion and which issues may influence our vote. When it comes to comparing politician’s views on the moral principles, **all abuses of human dignity are intrinsically evil, but attacks on human life must be viewed as the most egregious violation because the right to life is the most fundamental human right and the source of all other human rights.**¹

Archbishop Naumann has written, “The U.S. bishops have reaffirmed that ‘the threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed.’² While they did warn us not to ‘dismiss or ignore other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism, the environmental



crisis, poverty, and the death penalty,’ they did give priority to upholding and defending our brothers’ and sisters’ most basic right—to live.”³

Why, though, is abortion the *pre-eminent* issue?

- 1.) **Gravity:** Abortion is the deliberate act of taking an innocent human life which is intrinsically evil. Life cannot be restored once taken. This inalienable right is a non-negotiable moral principle and it is the most fundamental because one has no other rights if he has no life. Other affronts to human dignity are grave but they may be rectified and may still allow other rights to be enjoyed. This is not possible when life is destroyed, and most especially, when it is taken from the most innocent and vulnerable—those not yet born.
- 2.) **Magnitude:** The number of abortions performed every year in the U.S. exceeds any other cause of death. According to the CDC, heart disease was the leading cause of death in 2017 with 647,457 recorded in the U.S. There were 19,107 homicides and 47,173 suicides.⁴ At the same time, **862,320 abortions** were reported in the U.S. (and this does not reflect all abortions).⁵

Well over **60 million** human lives have been lost to abortion since 1973 in the U.S. alone. In comparison, death penalty executions in the U.S. since 1976 number 1,526.⁶ American soldiers killed in all American wars through 1991 is under 1.2 million.⁷ And fewer than 3,000 deaths by physician assisted suicide have been reported in the U.S. in states where it is legal (from 1998 to 2017).⁸ By far, even among the life issues, abortion demands our attention because the numbers of human lives lost is unrivaled.

Through our post-abortion healing ministry, we know there is significant untold grief and emotional suffering experienced by mothers, fathers and others affected by abortion. *Please refer to Project Rachel resources on our website if you or someone you know is suffering from the real pain abortion causes.*

- 3.) **Current danger:** Abortion is not a hypothetical threat to human life and the common good. It is a grave reality now. We need not conjecture or debate what might happen in the same way we would speculate on the possibility of nuclear war or the impact of climate change. Rather, we have the statistics already—and they are not good.

In 2020, there are no other issues that threaten human dignity, human life, and the common good more profoundly than abortion and so, even in the context of other serious and large-loomed political issues, abortion is unquestionably the preeminent priority.

*The moral principle acknowledging the right to life
is a non-negotiable.*

Procured abortion is an intrinsic evil because it is the direct, intentional killing of innocent human life which can never be justified. **The moral principle acknowledging the right to life is a non-negotiable.**⁹

If a candidate supports abortion and I vote for him *because* he supports abortion “rights” this is never morally licit, and I am cooperating formally in the evil of abortion.



 I'm voting prolife



When the moral principle of the right to life is at stake (as in abortion), no policy position *can be considered proportionate* in gravity—health care, immigration, etc. are policy issues for which a myriad of positions may be morally licit and do not involve the direct taking of human life as their primary goal. Moreover, no grouping of negotiable policy issues can be proportionate justification to override a candidate’s position that violates a non-negotiable moral principle, particularly the most fundamental right to life.

In summary, our voting duty is to promote a government that upholds the dignity of the human person, protects our rights to life and religious liberty, promotes the family which is the building block of society, and pursues the common good.

Keep in mind the following

- You should never vote for a candidate *because* he supports abortion.
- Without *very grave* reason, you should not vote for a candidate who supports abortion if there is a candidate who opposes abortion.
- You may vote for a candidate to limit the evil of abortion when there is no candidate who opposes abortion.
- We cannot prioritize policy issues over issues of moral principle, in particular the moral principle of the fundamental right to life.

Most of the time, the issues under contentious debate are disagreements on policy, not moral principles. However, the life issues are paramount and non-negotiable, most especially, the right to life of the unborn. Nevertheless, it is important to study the candidates’ positions for ourselves and not rely on biased media sources that may misrepresent a candidate’s real position. Reviewing a candidate’s words and actions, past political record, and adherence to his or her party platform are important ways we can determine how to cast our vote.



Finally, it must be emphasized that we cannot separate our spiritual lives and our secular experience as two parallel existences; the Christian conscience and one’s political life must be morally coherent.¹⁰ Likewise, it is inconsistent and wrong to separate elements of our Catholic faith at the expense of the whole of Catholic doctrine to forward a particular agenda. However, in keeping with this idea of totality, it is also not permissible “to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals.”¹¹ **Life comes first. Always.**

“The right to health, to home, to work, to culture is false and illusory if the *right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination.”¹²

Why Is This Important?

November 3, 2020, Election Day, is fast approaching. To properly execute our civic responsibility, we must not rush into the voting booth uninformed. There is still time to do your due diligence.

- Recognize that abortion is the preeminent issue of our time.
- Know/research the views of the candidates (support for an intrinsically evil position generally should disqualify a candidate from your vote).
- Remember the consequences of our moral acts, including voting, are not limited to the next four years alone but extend to our Eternal Reward. In the end, that's all that matters.

So, pray, pray and pray. Then cast your ballot and pray some more!

God bless you,



Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.

Therefore, a candidate who upholds abortion as a so-called right should be disqualified from receiving the vote of a Catholic in good conscience, even if his other policies seem attractive, particularly when another candidate upholds the fundamental right to life, most especially those in the womb.

Endnotes

¹ John Paul II, Encyclical on The Gospel of Life *Evangelium vitae* (March 25, 1995) §72.

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html

² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” digital edition 2020. p. 6.

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship-introductory-letter> (accessed Sept. 18, 2020)

³ Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann, Letter “Priorities at the Polls” Excerpted from Respect Life Program, copyright © 2020, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/rlp-20-priorities-at-the-polls-bulletin-insert.pdf>

⁴ Melonie Heron, “Deaths: Leading Causes for 2017” *National Vital Statistics Reports* 68, no. 6 (June 24, 2019): 9, 12

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68_06-508.pdf

⁵ Rachel Jones, Elizabeth Witwer and Jenna Jerman. “Abortion Incidence and Service Availability in the United States, 2017” *Guttmacher Institute*, September 2019, 7. https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/abortion-incidence-service-availability-us-2017.pdf

⁶ “Executions by State and Region Since 1976,” Death Penalty Information Center, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/ executions/executions-overview/number-of-executions-by-state-and-region-since-1976>

⁷ “America’s Wars,” Office of Public Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs, last modified November 2019, https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs_americas_wars.pdf

⁸ “State-by-State Physician-Assisted Suicide Statistics,” ProCon.org, last modified January 28, 2019, <https://euthanasia.procon.org/state-by-state-physician-assisted-suicide-statistics/>

⁹ Pope John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988). §38. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html

¹⁰ Ratzinger, “Political Life,” 6.

⁹ Ratzinger, “Political Life,” 4.

¹² John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, §38.