

In This Time of Peril, What's a Catholic Voter to Do?

By Lauren Olson
September 2020



2020 has brought historically unprecedented challenges – a global pandemic, economic devastation, and racial upheaval. These challenges have not only affected our country as a whole but have upended our daily routines and pervaded our nightly dinner conversations. The perils of 2020 have highlighted the many social injustices that have long plagued our society – racial inequality, lack of basic health care, hunger, homelessness, and marginalization of the elderly and incarcerated. When feeling overwhelmed by the daily news and simultaneously grateful for my health, job, and family, I ask myself, “What can I do during this great time of need and change? And how should this affect the way I vote?”

As a member of MSJC’s Death Penalty Abolition, and Restorative Justice Issue Team, I turned to my Faith and Marianist Family for insight and inspiration. Without much digging, I found that inspiration in my email inbox with a link to Susan Vogt’s latest reflection published in the National Catholic Reporter entitled, “[Being Pro-Life is a Messy Affair During a Presidential Election](#).” Being a pro-life Catholic myself, and one that doesn’t often project my political affiliations or convictions, I was drawn to the simplicity and sincerity of Susan’s words.

The article challenged me to do two things.

1. First, as a conscientious person of Faith, I was reminded that all of these social justice issues can be framed within the lens of a consistent ethic of life. As Susan notes, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin’s “seamless garment” imagery teaches that all human life is sacred and we must work to prevent all premature deaths, whether that’s from abortion, the death penalty, gun violence, or lack of proper health and safety protocols in prisons and nursing homes. Instead of falling prey to the divisiveness of our current political system in choosing one pro-life issue over the other, Susan challenges us to focus on what we have in common – being *fully* pro-life.
2. In addition to framing these social injustices with a consistent pro-life lens, Susan’s article also inspired me to become a more informed voter. When voting in recent elections, both local, state, and national, I have frequently left the ballot box feeling disappointed by the number of names I didn’t recognize or my lack of awareness of the candidates’ policies. With so many people suffering, this year in particular, leadership at all levels is crucial. Thus, my vote and the knowledge I acquire in anticipation of that vote, is more important than ever. As Susan states in her article:

“No candidate or party is perfectly pro-life according to Bernardin’s consistent ethic of life, but to be a true pro-life voter we need to: 1) listen to both sides of a debate and unbiased news – not just what our “bubble” promotes; and 2) study which of the candidates has the more comprehensive understanding of protecting life.”

It’s with this edict in mind that I approach the upcoming election season and what remains of the unprecedented 2020.