

VOTER GUIDE FOR 2020 ELECTION
REFLECTIONS BASED ON STATEMENTS FROM
DOCUMENTS BY POPE FRANCIS AND
THE U.S. CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS REGARDING
CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND HOW IT PERTAINS
TO THE ISSUES OF THE 2020 ELECTION

As the United States enters into the 2020 election season, Catholic Americans face choices between candidates and parties with divergent views for our nation's future. We are called by our faith to engage in this election. *Pope Francis says that "a good Catholic meddles in politics, offering the best of one's self so that those who govern can govern well." Politics, he says, "is one of the highest forms of love, because it is in the service of the common good."*

He called on us to orient our politics based on the Christian models of Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, and Martin Luther King Jr. *We engage in this political process not because we're partisan, but because we're Christian.*

This guide contains material from the Franciscan Action Network and agencies with which it collaborates to show how we apply the teachings of our Church to the problems of our day with a heart of mercy, with which Pope Francis encourages us to approach the issues pertaining to this election. This material relates to what is contained in the document by the U.S. bishops, *Faithful Citizenship*.

The Church teaches that we should take our civic responsibilities seriously, forming our consciences guided by the Gospel, in order to contribute to the common good. The information contained here is offered for your prayerful reflection and consideration in preparation for the upcoming election.

Our Political Foundation: The Sacred Gift of Life and Creation

"The great gift of life is the first gift we have received. Sometimes we risk forgetting about this, as if we were the masters of our existence while instead we are radically dependent. In fact, it is a source of great joy to hear that at every age in life, in every situation, in every social condition, we are and remain sons and daughters." – Pope Francis (General Audience, June 18, 2015)

The inviolable dignity of each and every human person, especially those who are vulnerable, is the foundational political concern for Catholics. That dignity becomes meaningless unless human life is valued both in our laws and in our culture. Indeed, as Americans, we believe, as our

Declaration of Independence states, that the very purpose of government is to promote “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Catholics stand four-square in opposition to any and all dishonor to human dignity and to life.

Today, human dignity and life is degraded by racism, violence, abortion, war, the death penalty, euthanasia, human trafficking, torture, environmental damage, and poverty. We believe that these issues are all related. In many situations, there are often nuances and root causes that need to be addressed. A person whom we persuade to respect the rights of immigrants is a person more likely to understand our concern for pregnant mothers and children. Those who share our commitment to supporting family life must be challenged to embrace programs that provide affordable healthcare to everyone. A government that ignores the cries of the poor is a government that’s more likely not to account for the horrific human cost of war.

We believe that only by defending against *all* threats to life and creation will Catholics be able to credibly make the case for the culture of life and inclusion.

⇒ How does each candidate talk about preventing mass shootings and gun violence in our streets?

⇒ What alternatives to abortion and euthanasia does each candidate discuss, such as assistance and support to expectant mothers, in particular those who are low-income?

The Economy

“Just as the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. Money must serve, not rule!” – Pope Francis (Evangelii Gaudium 53)

The key economic issue facing the country today is income inequality and the resultant increase in poverty. This is exacerbated by unjust minimum wages, unequal pay for women, lack of federal paid family leave laws, systematic attacks on labor rights, and high rates of unemployment and incarceration among youth and in communities of color.

Unemployment and underemployment harm the long-term fiscal health of our economy. Unemployment also exacts an enormous human toll on our society. When people lose their jobs, they often lose their family’s health insurance as well. Parents who cannot provide for their children are beset not only by bills but too often by emotional struggles as well. Elderly persons who live on fixed incomes must often choose between heating their homes, taking their medications, or buying their groceries.

This economic picture, however, does not extend to all Americans. Today the top one percent receives twenty-one percent of national income. This increasing gap has significantly distorted our political system due to the role of money in politics, funding candidates, lawmakers, and

robust lobbying firms. We need to curtail this trend if we are to have any hope of developing just policies and a genuine democracy.

⇒ How does each candidate respond to questions about the wealth gap in this country? What ideas does she or he have for addressing this?

⇒ What is each candidate's position on health care reform? What is being proposed to ensure that all Americans have access to healthcare?

Global Peacemaking

"I appeal forcefully to all those who sow violence and death by force of arms: in the person you today see simply as an enemy to be beaten, discover rather your brother or sister, and hold back your hand! Give up the way of arms and go out to meet the other in dialogue, pardon and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust, and hope around you!" – Pope Francis (World Day of Peace, 2014)

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Pope Francis said "peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare."

Our world continues to struggle with large-scale violent conflict in many areas. Yet there have been notable, effective, and sustainable peacemaking practices developed which offer us a great deal of hope. Research has shown that nonviolent resistance movements are twice as effective as violent resistance and at least ten times more likely to lead to durable democracy.

In contrast, war and preparations for war continue to fuel further violence, acts of terrorism. With war, people living in poverty suffer the most in terms of death, displacement, and disease. Pope Francis said "war is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment;" and "justice can never be wrought by killing a human being."

As Catholics who follow the way of Jesus, we are called to humanize even our enemies; not to excuse injustice or violence, but to see them as children of God with dignity, with value, with good in them and with genuine human needs. Hence Pope Francis boldly proclaims "the true force of the Christian is the force of truth and of love, which means rejecting all violence. Faith and violence are incompatible!"

⇒ What is each candidate's approach to conflicts in other parts of the world? Does she or he talk about lessons learned from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?

⇒ How does each candidate talk about the role of diplomacy and peacebuilding in preventing conflicts? Does she or he promote investing in peacemaking programs?

Immigration and Refugees

"We, the people of this continent, are not fearful of foreigners, because most of us were once foreigners. I say this to you as the son of immigrants, knowing that so many of you are also descended from immigrants. When the stranger in our midst appeals to us, we must not repeat the sins and the errors of the past. We

must resolve now to live as nobly and as justly as possible, as we educate new generations not to turn their back on our 'neighbors' and everything around us.” – Pope Francis (Speech to U.S. Congress, June, 2015)

In his first pastoral trip outside of Rome after his election to the exiled refugees in Italy, Pope Francis called out the globalization of indifference, which characterizes a society that lacks compassion for immigrants and refugees. His words should ring in our ears: “We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion – suffering with – others ... Let us ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty of our world, of our own hearts, and of all those who in anonymity make social and economic decisions which open the door to tragic situations like this. Has anyone wept? Today, has anyone wept in our world?”

The current situation is immoral and shameful, especially in regard to the separation of children from their families, detaining immigrants, the threat do “dreamers” and the like. Furthermore, we continue to fail to address the “push factors” that drive forced migration, such as horrendous violence and poverty in Central America.

God hungers for justice and commands us to welcome the stranger and to bind the wounds of those left by the side of the road. As Catholics who believe in the sanctity of life, we must not be complicit in the suffering of migrants dying in the shadows. We need to go beyond letters and symbols by doing more community organizing and direct resisting of the structures that implement this unjust immigration and refugee system.

⇒ Where does each candidate stand on a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants?

On deportations? On detention of women and children in for-profit prisons?

⇒ How does each candidate challenge anti-immigrant rhetoric?

The Environment

“It is my profound conviction that the future of the human family depends also on how we safeguard – both prudently and compassionately, with justice and fairness – the gift of creation that our Creator has entrusted to us.” – Pope Francis (Common Declaration of Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, May 25, 2014)

The first words of the Bible tell us that God is the creator of heaven and earth. God’s first home for us was a garden, and God’s first vocation for us was to be gardeners who protect, care for, sustain and develop creation.

Pope Francis said, “Humanity has slapped God in the face,” the Pope said. “We have taken possession of nature and Mother Earth. God always forgives; we humans sometimes forgive; but nature never forgives. I believe that humanity has gone a bit too far. Thank God that today many, many people are talking about it.” And this isn’t Francis’s issue alone. In fact, it was Pope Benedict whom the media first dubbed the “green pope” for his environmental activism. “If you want to cultivate peace,” Benedict famously said, “protect creation.”

The Catholic Church speaks on issues of faith and science not as some academic exercise, but because these issues affect human flourishing, and we are called by God to defend the dignity of every woman, man, and child.

Just as the Church is unafraid to defend the dignity of the child in the womb, we cannot be afraid to defend the dignity of those who are the victims of a global economy that kills through environmental exploitation, rampant consumerism, and structural inequalities. What many seem to misunderstand, but which Francis, Benedict and the Church get, is that protecting creation is first and foremost a religious and moral issue.

Living simply, protecting creation, and addressing climate change is a response to God's ancient request that we be good stewards of all that God has given and entrusted to us: clean air, fresh water and fruits of the harvest. Water is a particularly vital issue to address, as many violent conflicts have been linked to water issues, and many future violent conflicts are likely to be linked to water as well.

⇒ How does each candidate talk about climate change? Does he or she have any policies for addressing this issue?

⇒ What does each candidate say about alternatives to fossil fuels, and jobs associated with them?

Freedom of Religion and Conscience

"American Catholics are committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities, and to rejecting every form of unjust discrimination. With countless other people of goodwill, they are likewise concerned that efforts to build a just and wisely ordered society respect their deepest concerns and the right to religious liberty. That freedom reminds one of America's most precious possessions." – Pope Francis (Speech at White House, September 23, 2015)

As Catholics, we should remain committed to preserving that freedom of religion which is an anchor of the first amendment to the Constitution. It is a foundational belief as Americans that we respect people of all faiths. As Saint Francis did with the Islamic Sultan, we must reach out as Catholics to form friendships and partnerships with all other religions. There is no room in our society for anti-immigrant laws that seek to exclude any people based on their religious beliefs. Our democracy is strongest when we support diversity of thought and belief. We are also strong when everyone can live in communities, contributing to the common good.

Jesus tells us our faith must manifest itself in works, so we insist that no distinction be drawn between our houses of worship and our public ministries to the poor and sick. This ensures that our work to serve the excluded can be practiced within our faith tradition. That being said, no Catholic institution—or any institution—should use a false notion of religious liberty to discriminate against anyone they employ or serve.

At times there can be honest disagreements about just what is the common good, but we must work together to ensure that the religious consciences of all of our people are honored. This, at times, can lead to different perspectives on the freedom of practice of religious beliefs; but our faith challenges us to work together to find the way forward where we maximize the freedom of expression and denigrate no one.

⇒ How is each candidate talking about our Muslim neighbors and refugees from the Middle East?

⇒ What is each candidate saying about the freedom of conscience of individual, religious institutions, and even private businesses?

Racial Justice

“The problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms: wherever any minority is persecuted and marginalized because of its religious convictions or ethnic identity, the wellbeing of society as a whole is endangered and each one of us must feel affected.” – Pope Francis (Address to delegation of the Simon Wiesenthal Center 10/24/13)

Today God asks us to seek out and find our brothers and sisters in throughout the nation who suffer from the violence of racism. Though those with privilege can never completely grasp it, they must encounter their suffering, listen to their stories, and try to share in their pain. Pope Francis says this “culture of encounter” will give us the ability to weep with those who suffer.

No law, no government program, and no sermon alone will end the violence and bring complete healing to the nation. We must be co-companions for the long journey towards healing, examining both racial privilege and racial oppression. We must strive to be allied for and with each other. Everyone has a voice to be heard.

Invisible violence plagues our communities every day, the violence of institutions, too often including the police, that fail to serve their people, the violence of the disproportionate mass incarceration of people of color and minorities. It is the violence that afflicts the poor and makes us indifferent to others’ suffering, and the violence of inaction in the face of failing schools, decaying cities, racial discrimination in hiring, and economic disparities. It is the violence that sows distrust between people and communities because of the color of their skin.

We must acknowledge that racism is still very much alive in our nation, and even in our churches. In fact, when we end the carnival of naiveté around this issue and remove the masks, we will see the truth: individual and structural racism is tearing at the very fabric of our nation. It’s cloaked in seemingly different and even benign issues such as tax codes, school districts, the criminal justice system, and the allocation of federal resources. We experience this racism in our own lives and in our own hearts—even in perhaps the smallest of ways. No one is truly beyond it. It’s a broken part of us that is twisted up in our own lives, our own histories, and our own failings. But when we acknowledge its presence in our lives and in our communities, we can join with the Psalmist and cry out: “Forgive us, Lord, for we have sinned!”

This first step of encounter and acknowledgment can begin the journey of reconciliation for our communities and our nation. Archbishop Desmond Tutu said it well: “true reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth. ...It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing.”

⇒ What is each candidate’s stance on mass incarceration and reform of a criminal justice system that disproportionately puts people of color in prison for long periods of time?

⇒ What is each candidate’s position on voter identification laws and other restrictions that suppress voting among people of color?