

October 19, 2012  
Feast of the North American Martyrs

My Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

In this “Year of Faith” each Catholic citizen has the privilege and duty to participate in our Nation’s governing by the exercise of our constitutional right to vote in national, state and local elections. As your Bishop I urge you to exercise this cherished right.

I will not tell you how to vote. However, I ask you to vote as a Catholic citizen with a properly formed Catholic conscience. A properly formed Catholic conscience will never contradict the Church’s teachings in matters of faith and morals. In this letter I wish to explain what this means in direct relation to the issues on which each person’s vote will have a lasting impact.

What is “a properly formed Catholic conscience?” The *Catechism* says: “A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. Everyone must avail himself of the means to form his conscience.” (1798) The Catholic Church’s teachings are the means for us to properly form our consciences so that we seek always what is true and good.

At the heart of all Catholic moral and social teaching is a single fact: the respect given to an individual human person must always be first and must govern every law and action so that the person’s life and dignity is always and everywhere protected and defended. In other words, from the first moment of human conception to the last moment of life on earth, the person must be respected without exception.

For this reason, there are some actions that are never acceptable and should not be made so by law, they include: abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, and not recognizing the unique and special role of marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

All of the other social, economic and political issues gain importance only from the fundamental issue of the respect for the individual person and the inviolability of each person’s life and God-given dignity.

Thus, if there is no respect for the life and dignity of each person from conception to natural death, then every other moral evil can be justified. There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called “intrinsically evil” actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life as in abortion and euthanasia.

In this election year, the positions of the two political parties and the positions of their candidates are well known. What I ask each of you to do before you vote is to consider carefully what our Catholic Church teaches about these issues, then consider how your vote for a particular candidate will contribute to the common good of us all as persons with that human dignity which must be respected and protected always.

We know that we have a representative form of government and that those we elect are to represent us. When you vote, I ask you to vote for the candidates who represent you as Catholic citizens. Please do not vote for the candidate who is most likeable. We can find something likeable in each candidate but that person may not represent us as faithful Catholics. Our vote as Catholic citizens has to focus on who and what protects human life and dignity and therefore, the common good.

I close with a quote from Blessed John Paul II. He wrote: “The common outcry which is justly made on behalf of human rights – for example the right to health, to home, to work, to family, 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.” (*Christifideles Laici*, 38)

May God bless and guide us at this important moment and may Our Blessed Mother remain with us!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend David D. Kagan  
Bishop of Bismarck  
Apostolic Administrator of Fargo