

# JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS



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## Catholics and Voting The Call to Faithful Citizenship

By Fred Kammer, S.J., J.D.

**Voting is one of the most important duties of an engaged citizen.**

Learn more about early voting in Louisiana (happening now through October 27th) and vote by mail requests (until October 30th) by clicking [here](#).

### JSRI Future Activities

#### October 22

This evening, Fr. Fred Kammer, SJ will be part of an on-line panel on *The Challenge of Environmental Justice Today*, sponsored by the Ignatius Ropolo Memorial Endowment, together with Alison McCrary, JD, social justice movement lawyer and graduate of the Loyola College of Law, and David Robinson-Morris, Ph.D., director of the Center for Equity, Justice, and the Human Spirit at Xavier University of Louisiana.

#### October 23

The JSRI Advisory Board will conduct its semi-annual meeting by zoom and receive its first report from the JSRI Executive Director Search Committee.

#### October 25

Fr. Kammer will participate in a breakout session on "The Triadic Insight: Spirituality for the Faithjustice Journey" as part of the on-line Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice.

JSRI staff and associates—working from home—will continue monitoring local, state, and federal administrative, legislative, and judicial actions regarding our priority issues and the impact of Covid-19; participating in advocacy communications with authorities; recommending resources on our website and by social media; research and writing for our publications; and activating our advocacy network as appropriate.

### JSRI Recent Activities

#### September 17 & 18

JSRI Associate Mary Baudouin and Dr. Sue Weishar participated in dialogues via Zoom with members of the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility about Human Rights at privately owned or operated prisons, jails, and immigrant detention centers.

#### September 23

Dr. Weishar and other members of the Louisiana Stop Solitary Coalition's Faith Outreach Sub-committee organized a Zoom webinar entitled *The Moral Imperative to End Solitary Confinement: A Discussion with Survivors and Faith Leaders*, which can be viewed [here](#).

#### October 2

Fr. Kammer keynoted an on-line webinar on "Voting: What's a Catholic to Do?" sponsored by the Seeds of Justice organization.

#### October 8

Dr. Weishar participated in the first planning meeting of the 13th Annual Loyola Student Peace Conference with student leaders and Dr. Behrooz Moazami, faculty advisor to the Peace Conference.

#### October 11

Fr. Kammer provided a presentation on parish social ministry for parishioners of Holy Name of Jesus Parish here.

I am not going to tell anyone how to vote this year—because I believe it is morally wrong to do so. However, I also believe that considerations about voting should begin with human dignity and the common good—the twin foundations of Catholic social doctrine. Fifty-five years ago, the Second Vatican Council taught, "Hence let all citizens be mindful of their simultaneous right and duty to vote freely in the interest of advancing the common good."



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Every four years, since at least 1975, the U.S. Catholic bishops have issued a pastoral letter on political responsibility one year before the election. In *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the bishops describe our responsibilities for political life, forming conscience, and Catholic Social Teaching. This letter points out that no existing party or platform in the U.S. comports with Catholic teaching—which effectively cuts across partisan divides.

The body of the Pastoral Letter has remained unchanged from 2015 and has been substantially the same since 2007. There, the bishops describe the moral principles underlying public issues and their policy applications. Only the covering letter was updated at the November, 2019, bishops' meeting. In that letter, the bishops wrote:

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. At the same time, we cannot dismiss or ignore other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism, the environmental crisis, poverty and the death penalty. [1]

In his encyclical *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis wrote about the necessity of a "firm and passionate" defense of "the innocent unborn." He went on to say:

Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection. [2]

The bishops wrote in the Pastoral Letter itself, "As Catholics we are not single-issue voters. A candidate's position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter's support." [3]

For decades, it has been the explicit policy of the bishops' conference, for which I worked thirty years ago, not to endorse or oppose candidates in elections or in judicial appointments and that Catholic parishes and dioceses are forbidden to do so— although this message has not reached every Catholic pulpit. The bishops focus on the moral quality of issues and positions, leaving to voters the exercise of well-informed conscience and prudential judgment in choosing candidates.

Issues, however, are not the sole criteria for voting. The bishops acknowledge that, "These decisions should take into account a candidate's commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue." [4] It is not enough for a candidate or party to give "lip service" even to important moral issues. There also must be commitment to action to produce change, a candidate's intellectual capacity and relational skills to make a difference in political debate, compromise, and decision-making, and the contemporary opportunity to move an issue or value.

The role of the lay voter is, first, to apply principles to policy applications and, then, to consider policy applications in a complex calculation that scrutinizes candidates, their qualities, and capacities. This is probably a combination of head, heart, and spirit. Making that complex decision—and it is complex—is the sole responsibility of the voter, exercising his or her conscience after prayerful reflection.

[1] U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2019). *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, Cover Letter.

[2] Pope Francis. (2013). *Gaudete et Exsultate: The Joy of the Gospel*, 101.

[3] *Forming Consciences*, 42.

[4] *Ibid*.

[This article is an abbreviated version of an opinion piece entitled "[Catholics should vote their conscience](#)" in the October 23rd *Maroon*, Loyola's award winning campus newspaper.]

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans.

Please send feedback to [jsri@loyno.edu](mailto:jsri@loyno.edu)

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