**From the Office of Peace, Justice and Ecological Integrity**

**Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth**

**Reflection for Election 2020**

From **Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship**

As Catholics, we are led to raise questions for political life other than those that concentrate on individual, material well-being. Our focus is not on party affiliation, ideology, economics, or even competence and capacity to perform duties, as important as such issues are. Rather, we focus on what protects or threatens the dignity of every human life. (*Faithful Citizenship*, #91)

**Reflection:**

Bishop Robert McElroy, Bishop of San Diego, CA, has degrees in American history from Harvard, doctorate in moral theology from the Gregorian University in Rome and a doctorate in political science from Stanford. is the author of Bishop McElroy has written two books:[The Search for an American Public Theology](https://www.amazon.com/Search-American-Public-Theology-Contribution/dp/0809130513/) and [Morality and American Foreign Policy](https://www.amazon.com/Morality-American-Foreign-Policy-McElroy/dp/0691000786). As such he is a uniquely qualified commentator on American public life.

On February 6, 2020 he gave a major address at the Harpst Center for Catholic Thought and Culture of the University of San Diego, “Conscience, Candidates, and Discipleship in Voting.” Reflecting on this talk would be very helpful in forming our consciences as we look to Election 2020. He states: “It is primarily through the votes of Catholic women and men, rooted in conscience and in faith that the Church enters into the just ordering of society and the state .And it is primarily in voting for specific candidates for office that believers as citizens have the greatest opportunity to leave the earth better than we found it.”

He points to ten “salient goals” that should be in our minds at we look to the 2020 election:

* + The promotion of a culture and legal structures that protect the life of unborn children.
  + The reversal of the climate change that threatens the future of humanity and particularly devastates the poor and the marginalized.
  + Policies that safeguard the rights of immigrants and refugees in a moment of great intolerance.
  + Laws that protect the aged, the ill, and the disabled from the lure and the scourge of euthanasia and assisted suicide.
  + Vigorous opposition to racism in every form, both through cultural transformation and legal structures.
  + The provision of work and the protection of workers’ rights across America.
  + Systematic efforts to fight poverty and egregious inequalities of wealth.
  + Policies that promote marriage and family, which are so essential for society.
  + Substantial movement toward universal nuclear disarmament.
  + The protection of religious liberty.

Bishop McElroy also points out that as important as these issues are, we generally do not vote for issues but for candidates: “But voting for candidates ultimately involves choosing a candidate for public office, not a stance, nor a specific teaching of the Church. And for this reason, faithful voting involves careful consideration of the specific ability of a particular candidate to actually advance the common good. In making this assessment, opportunity, competence and character all come into play.”

In evaluating candidates, he invites us to consider the following criteria:

Opportunity – will a candidate be likely to advance a particular issue. How likely will she of he be to make changes in key areas to promote the common good?

Competence-is the candidate competent to carry out her or his duties effectively to advance the common good?

Character-especially in a climate of political divisions and degradation in public life, character is more important than ever.

1. Research the stands of candidates for elective office on each of Bishop McElroy’s salient issues and evaluate them in the light of the gospel and Catholic Social Teaching.

2. Hold in prayer the candidates for public office in the light of Bishop McElroy’s categories of opportunity, competence, and character.

3. Invite your friends and family to reflect on the moral dimensions of voting by sharing with them the short YouTube video on Bishop McElroy’s talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=15&v=30AZO5kGCNk&feature=emb_title>.

Include a short quote from the talk in the signature line of your emails.

4. Participate in the *Vote Forward* project <https://votefwd.org/> in which volunteers send heartfelt handwritten letters to unregistered and low-propensity voters encouraging them to participate in our democracy.

**Deeper Dive:** Read and reflect on Bishop McElroy’s entire presentation and watch the accompanying video <https://www.sdcatholic.org/bishops/bishop-mcelroy/conscience-candidates-and-discipleship-in-voting/>

**Prayer:** Prayer Before an Election from the USCCB

Lord God, as the election approaches, we seek to better understand the issues and concerns that confront our city/state/country, and how the Gospel compels us to respond as faithful citizens in our community. We ask for eyes that are free from blindness so that we might see each other as brothers and sisters, one and equal in dignity, especially those who are victims of abuse and violence, deceit, and poverty. We ask for ears that will hear the cries of children unborn and those abandoned, men and women oppressed because of race or creed, religion or gender.  
We ask for minds and hearts that are open to hearing the voice of leaders who will bring us closer to your Kingdom. We pray for discernment so that we may choose leaders who hear your Word, live your love, and keep in the ways of your truth as they follow in the steps of Jesus and his Apostles and guide us to your Kingdom of justice and peace. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.