

October 12, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

You may recall that in October 2012 and again in October 2016, I wrote you about the right and privilege we have as citizens to vote. In this election year of 2020, I repeat that 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 again to exercise this cherished right.

As Catholics I remind you that along with the right to vote comes the equally grave responsibility to make certain that your vote will best serve and defend the common good of us all. What is the common good? The Second Vatican Council teaches that it is "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 26a). That "sum total of social conditions" takes in many concerns and the "fulfillment" which the common good helps us to attain is not our personal, private self-fulfillment. It is rather the fulfillment of God's plan and destiny for us and for His world.

In considering the "sum total of social conditions" which make up our common good, there is a real and objective order of priority which we must know, accept and vote to uphold and follow. Conditions upon which other social conditions depend must come first in our consideration. In all things the first consideration for us is the protection of human life from its first moment of conception to natural death. This consideration must govern every law and action so that the person's life and dignity are always and everywhere protected and defended. Without this it makes no sense to consider any other social conditions. The common good as the Church teaches is founded on the inviolable good of the individual person's unique and unrepeatable dignity as created by God Himself.

For this reason, there are some actions that are never acceptable and should not be made so by any civil law, they include: abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, the attempt to redefine the unique human relationship of marriage as the union of one man and one woman and racism. Each of these grave sins is an immediate attack upon Almighty God and on the person created by Him and there is never any reason that would justify any of these mortal sins. These intrinsic evils are such because they are directly opposed to the love of God and our neighbor, they are always opposed to the authentic good of every person and therefore they are the enemies of our common good.

In this election year the positions of the political parties and their candidates are very well known. What I ask each of you to do before you vote is to consider what our Catholic Church teaches about the issues and then consider how your vote for a particular candidate will contribute to the defense and strengthening of our common good. I ask you, please, vote as a Catholic citizen with your conscience informed by the Church's clear teaching. Those for whom we vote are supposed to represent us as Catholic citizens.

In closing I recall the powerful words of Pope Saint John Paul II: “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 the Holy Spirit inspire each of you to do your duty as Catholic citizens who cherish and respect every human life as a gift from God, the Father of us all, so precious to Him that He gave us His Only Son to be our Lord and Savior.

May Our Blessed Mother continue to pray and intercede for us!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend David D. Kagan
Bishop of Bismarck