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Pax Christi USA strives to create a world that reflects the Peace of Christ by exploring, articulating and witnessing to the call of Christian nonviolence. This work begins in personal life and extends to communities of reflection and action to transform structures of society. Pax Christi USA rejects war, preparations for war, and every form of violence and domination. It advocates primacy of conscience, economic and social justice, and respect for creation.

Pax Christi USA commits itself to peace education and, with the help of its bishop members, promotes the gospel imperative of peacemaking as a priority in the Catholic Church in the United States. Through the efforts of all its members and in cooperation with other groups, Pax Christi USA works toward a more peaceful, just and sustainable world.

I support Pax Christi USA Statement of Purpose and wish to become a member.

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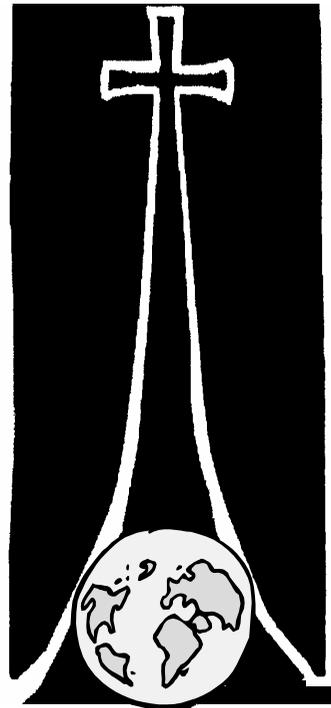
- Information about joining a local group
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Summer 2004

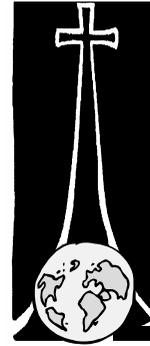
Peaceweavings

Choosing a Presidential Candidate

*At the heart of political decision-
making stands the common good.
What kind of nation do we want to be?
What kind of world do we want to shape?*



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Choosing a Presidential Candidate

When George Ryan ran for governor of Illinois in 1998, he brought to the gubernatorial race impeccable credentials as a Midwestern conservative. A Republican pharmacist from Kankakee, he joined the Illinois legislature in 1970 as a law and order candidate. Later, he could boast, "I supported the death penalty, I believed in the death penalty, I voted for the death penalty."

During his tenure as governor, Ryan oversaw one execution, but the experience triggered a flood of moral anguish. A study released after the execution revealed that one-third of the 285 capital convictions in Illinois since reinstating the death penalty were reversed because of fundamental error. No fewer than 13 men were completely exonerated. In January 2003, shortly before he left office, Governor Ryan issued a blanket commutation that saved 156 inmates from execution, because he was convinced that capital punishment could not be justly administered. Confronted by the facts, Ryan stretched his thinking to embrace a greater, and more consistent, life ethic.

In this election year 2004, many Catholics feel no one candidate reflects fully the social teachings of the church. No candidate appears to have stretched his thinking to adequately include the life issues that range

from abortion to cloning, from fair trade to a living wage, from poverty to war.

The US Catholic bishops in their document, "Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility," highlight our moral priorities. The church must protect human life, promote family life, pursue social justice and practice global solidarity. Unfortunately, politics pivots around ideology rather than principle. Presidential candidates bow to special interests, big contributors and assorted political realities. So, how can a Catholic choose a presidential candidate?

Some voters emphasize abortion to the exclusion of other political considerations. While the right to life stands as a primary human right, getting the child born does not finish our moral, economic and political responsibilities to defend life. Indeed, the bishops proclaim a consistent life ethic. Human life is also assailed by hunger, poverty, violence, the death penalty and modern warfare. The bishops write, "A political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the Church's social doctrine does not exhaust one's responsibility towards the common good." A single-issue voter trivializes the complexity of the life process.

At the heart of political decision-making stands the common good. That common good, constrained by political realities, consists of the moral values necessary to achieve a just society. The bishops ask, "What kind of nation do we want to be? What kind of world do we want to shape?"

Presidential candidates project that vision. Sometimes voters get half a loaf; sometimes only a slice must suffice.

The example of George Ryan could prove instructive. People of faith might vote for the candidate most open to life issues. Which candidate might stretch his thinking to embrace a greater, and more consistent, life ethic? Who possesses enough integrity to admit mistakes, apologize, change and show genuine compassion?

Since a president appoints key administrators, who will select people respectful of the immigrant, the working poor, the most vulnerable in society? Who will hold corporations responsible for the care of creation and the rights of workers? Who has the vision to alleviate global poverty by fair trade and challenge terrorism through international law and collaboration among nations?

Political greatness is defined as someone who puts the common good ahead of party and career. Given the political climate today, how can people of faith set the expectation for a candidate to meet that challenge?

This article was written by Fr. John S. Rausch and originally appeared on the Web site of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, www.ncrlc.com.

Prayer for Leadership

Give us, O God, leaders whose hearts are large enough to match the breadth of our own souls and give us souls strong enough to follow leaders of vision and wisdom.

*In seeking a leader, let us seek more than development for ourselves—
though development we hope for—
more than security for our own land—
though security we need—
more than satisfaction for our wants—
though many things we desire.*

Give us the hearts to choose the leader who will work with other leaders to bring safety to the whole world.

Give us leaders who lead this nation to virtue without seeking to impose our kind of virtue on the virtue of others.

Give us a government that provides for the advancement of this country without taking resources from others to achieve it.

Give us insight enough ourselves to choose as leaders those who can tell strength from power, growth from greed, leadership from dominance, and real greatness from the trappings of grandiosity.

We trust you, Great God, to open our hearts to learn from those to whom you speak in different tongues and to respect the life and words of those to whom you have entrusted the good of other parts of this globe.

We beg you, Great God, give us the vision as a people to know where global leadership truly lies, to pursue it diligently, to require it to protect human rights for everyone everywhere.

We ask these things, Great God, with minds open to your word, and hearts that trust in your eternal care.

Amen.

By Joan Chittister, OSB

Prayer Reflections

Sunday: Politics in this election year and beyond should be about an old idea with new power—the common good. The central question should not be, “Are you better off than you were four years ago?” It should be, “How can ‘we’—all of us, especially the weak and vulnerable—be better off in the years ahead? How can we protect and promote human life and dignity? How can we pursue greater justice and peace?” —U.S. Catholic Bishops, “Faithful Citizenship,” 2004

Monday: Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. —Matthew 5:6-7

Tuesday: The lack of accessible and affordable health care presents a multifaceted problem for many low and moderate-income families. Over 40 million Americans lack health insurance, and many more are underinsured. Families that cannot afford health insurance, or lack easy access to health care facilities, lose the health and cost benefits of preventive medicine and regular care, and they are more likely to miss work, which makes it more difficult for them to maintain steady employment. —Catholic Charities USA

Wednesday: Any nation that chooses to spend more on armaments than on social reform is a nation in trouble. —Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thursday: O Lord, open my eyes that I may see the needs of others, open my ears that I may hear their cries, open my heart so that they need not be without comfort. —Alan Paton

Friday: We readily recognize that we live in a world that is increasingly estranged from Christian values. In order to remain a Christian, one must take a resolute stand against many commonly accepted axioms of the world. —U.S. Catholic Bishops, “The Challenge of Peace,” 1983

Saturday: As we approach the elections of 2004, we renew our call for a new kind of politics—focused on moral principles and not the latest polls, on the

needs of the poor and vulnerable not the contributions of the rich and powerful, and on the pursuit of the common good not the demands of special interests. —U.S. Catholic Bishops, “Faithful Citizenship,” 2004

Action Suggestions

1. Stay updated on the political issues of the day through alternative media. Subscribe to a magazine, newspaper, or e-list which will offer another perspective on key issues in the upcoming election. For ideas, contact Johnny Zokovitch, communications director at Pax Christi USA, at johnnycusa@yahoo.com or 352-271-6941.
2. Make copies of this brochure and place them in the information area of your local parish.
3. Participate in Pax Christi USA’s international election monitoring project in FL. Volunteers and funds are needed to help us monitor counties which experienced a high degree of voter disenfranchisement in the 2000 presidential election. Contact info@paxchristiusa.org for more info.

Resources

- “2004 U.S. Elections: Impact on Peace, Social Justice, and the Integrity of Creation, a 16-page booklet produced by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. Contact 202-832-1780 or ogc@maryknoll.org to order or download a copy at www.maryknollogc.org/election.htm.
- *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret* by Edward P. DeBerri and James E. Hug with Peter J. Henriot and Michael J. Schultheis. Contact Center of Concern to order, www.coc.org or 202-635-2757, ext. 110.