



A Different Kind of Political Engagement

September 2020

Election Day is November 3. In *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (www.faithfulcitizenship.org), we and our brother U.S. bishops noted, “Unfortunately, politics in our country often can be a contest of powerful interests, partisan attacks, sound bites, and media hype. The Church calls for a different kind of political engagement: one shaped by the moral convictions of well-formed consciences and focused on the dignity of every human being, the pursuit of the common good, and the protection of the weak and the vulnerable. ... We are called to bring together our principles and our political choices, our values and our votes, to help build a civilization of truth and love” (no. 14).

To grow in holiness, a question each one of us must answer is: How will I respond to this call for a different kind of engagement? This question is key as we approach Election Day, as well as every day before and after it, as faithful citizens.

In a pre-election letter on voting decisions we issued last year, we offered three main points:

- **Many issues are important.**
- **Not all issues have equal moral weight.**
- **Protecting life is paramount.**

As bishops responsible for the pastoral care of the faithful in our two dioceses, we re-offer these points here for your continued prayerful consideration, as an essential framework not only for the critical voting decisions that must be made each year but also for the vital prayer and advocacy that must be done on a constant basis.

Whenever human dignity is at stake for any of our brothers and sisters in the human family, we must be attentive and engaged. “[R]espect for the dignity of every person ... is the core of Catholic moral and social teaching” (*Faithful Citizenship*, no. 10).

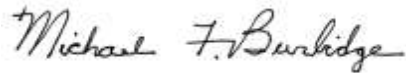
Our moral obligation to oppose intrinsically evil acts – which are “always incompatible with love of God and neighbor” (*Faithful Citizenship*, no. 22) – “has a special claim on our consciences and our actions” (no. 37). Of these, abortion is the “preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed” (*Faithful Citizenship*, Introductory Letter). Since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, there have been more than 61 million abortions in our country. Other issues of grave moral importance “undercut the dignity of the human person” (nos. 22, 23). Our priority must be to protect life to the fullest extent possible.

For more on the principles involved in voting with a well-formed conscience, we encourage you to read paragraphs 34-37 of *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*

(www.faithfulcitizenship.org). For a side-by-side comparison of what the two major-party Presidential candidates have said or done on a wide range of issues of importance to Catholics, visit www.vacatholic.org. The side-by-side comparison was compiled jointly by a number of state Catholic conferences, including the Virginia Catholic Conference.

On November 3, please vote. Every day, please seek and live out the “different kind of political engagement” that will provide a clear example to others of the civility and consistent concern for the common good we are all called to embrace.

Faithfully Yours in Christ,

Handwritten signature of Michael F. Burbidge in cursive script.

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge
Bishop of Arlington

Handwritten signature of Barry C. Knestout in cursive script, preceded by a small cross symbol.

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond