

Applying Faith in the Ballot Booth: A Message from Minnesota's Bishops

In just over a week, Minnesotans will be heading to the ballot box making choices for statewide offices.

To help us think about how we should think as we head to vote, the Catholic bishops of Minnesota, in conjunction with the Minnesota Catholic Conference (the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota) have issued an election statement. You can read the entire statement over at mncatholic.org; but I wanted to share the thoughts of our bishops and share a few comments too.

In particular, in light of the Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*, our bishops ask us to carefully consider the issue of prenatal justice as we vote.

From our bishops:

Paraphrasing Pope St. Paul VI, if we want peace, we must work for justice.

This year, in a special way, we call on Catholics to consider how a candidate will work for prenatal justice as a pre-eminent consideration in his or her voting calculus. As life begins in the womb, so must justice. As we discuss below, there are responsibilities entailed by each set of relationships and good public policies that follow.

Fostering prenatal justice

The recent Dobbs decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, declaring that there is no right to an abortion protected by the U.S. Constitution, has returned the matter of abortion to the political process for deliberation.

It would be a dereliction of duty for us as bishops to pretend as though the abortion question was not a focus of Minnesota's election discourse this year, especially as Dobbs has changed the abortion landscape in this nation. And as Pope Francis teaches, we cannot stay silent when nearly a million unborn lives are being cast aside in our country year after year through abortion.

Right now in Minnesota, the situation is troubling: in spite of the fact that scientific inquiry has definitively determined that human life begins at conception, a woman can procure an abortion for almost any reason at any stage of pregnancy up till birth. To put this in perspective, in 2021 there were 222 abortions involving babies older than 20 weeks. Almost half of all abortions are paid for with taxpayer funds. Our laws allow an 11-year-old girl to get an abortion without even one parent knowing. There is no requirement in force that a licensed physician perform an abortion. And abortion proponents, including elected officials, are working proactively to shut down pregnancy resource centers.

Fostering right relationships requires that we determine what we, as a society, owe the unborn child in the womb. At minimum, that is the right an innocent human being has to life, as well as the protection of the law from being killed. It also requires welcoming the child into the world.

Part of that welcome is establishing right relationships between mother, father, and child. We must encourage marriage and family stability, and clarify that abortion is not about bodily autonomy and freedom, but about the life of another human being for whom the father and mother are responsible.

We encourage Catholics and other advocates for human life to step proactively into the political debate both winsomely and charitably, and to use creatively all peaceable levers of political power to prudently, and incrementally, transform our cities and our state into places that respect the human rights of the unborn by welcoming them in life and protecting them by law.

Part of that work is voting. A representative democracy such as ours requires that the citizenry elect good people into office and continue to inform their elected representatives of their views on important issues.

Unfortunately, many candidates are openly advocating for Minnesota to become an abortion sanctuary state with taxpayer-funded abortion on demand, as well as pledging to deregulate the abortion industry by removing safeguards put in place to protect women from medical malpractice or to protect teenage girls from ill-considered abortions. Far too many others, moreover, although professing to be pro-life on paper, are going out of their way to avoid talking about Minnesota's future as a potential abortion sanctuary or what should be done to limit abortion, preferring to avoid the subject altogether.

In this situation, it is incumbent on the Catholic laity to be especially proactive in speaking to candidates about prenatal justice and supporting legislative and judicial efforts to limit abortion. Catholics cannot expect just laws will be enacted without their faithful citizenship and building relationships with legislators. That is what faithful citizenship is all about.

What we seek to emphasize here is that, just as the bishops of the United States have identified the ending of abortion as a pre-eminent policy priority, so too should Catholic voters make protecting innocent human life and stopping abortion extremism a pre-eminent consideration in our voting calculus.

While the letter is slightly abridged due to space, I wanted to publish it here too as I'm sure many aren't familiar with the Minnesota Catholic Conference or the letter's existence.

I applaud our bishops for taking a courageous stand to speak out.

On our part, it's important to remember why we take this issue so seriously, because it is an attack on innocent human life. We are in no way single issue voters, but some issues matter more than others, and in "Faithful Citizenship," the document from the US Bishop's Conference, the word "preeminent" is used to describe it, just as in our state bishop's letter. Now more than ever we as Catholics cannot say "well it's a settled matter by the courts" or "well I can't do anything about it." Part of the reason for our large display for the Memorial of the Innocents is to help all pause and think about how many lives have been lost; something our Respect Life group has been doing for years here at Saint Joe's.

Let us as Catholics not fear from speaking about our political views. My hope is that we can rediscover healthy arguing - vs. attacking and shouting. Odds are you know someone or maybe you yourself struggle with this issue or other areas of Catholic Social Teaching. Don't ignore the Church which is there to shepherd us; prayerfully read what the Bishops or Catechism says. Engage with others and keep your temper in check. Try to have civil conversations and construct an argument to get people to think. And above all else, remember what we do at Mass or in prayer is meant to inform us, not just in the voting booth but everywhere we go in our world.

Again please do check out mncatholic.org; there you'll find various resources on voting and issues, along with interviews with people running for office.

And make sure to vote next Thursday, November 8th!

God bless,

Fr. Paul