



On Praying, Voting, and Advocating for the Common Good

October 2011

On Tuesday, November 8, Virginia voters will decide who will occupy all 140 seats of the Virginia General Assembly.

Participating in the political process is an integral part of who we are as Catholics called to be faithful citizens – that is, Americans who practice civic virtue guided by their Catholic faith. When we open our minds and hearts to the Lord in the Eucharist and in our daily prayer lives, we enable Him to mold and fashion us into the faithful citizens He calls us to be. When, on the other hand, we decline to participate in public decisions that impact our brothers and sisters in the human family, we fail to love God and neighbor to the best of our ability.

Voting with a Well-Formed Conscience

As bishops, we do not tell Catholics for whom to vote. It is the duty of each voter to receive the Church's teachings (see, *e.g.*, www.faithfulcitizenship.org) with an open mind and heart and to apply those teachings. But before exercising our civic responsibility, we must first form our consciences thoughtfully, prayerfully, and correctly.

Not all issues have equal moral weight. While most issues debated in the public square are matters of prudential judgment about which people of goodwill can legitimately disagree (*e.g.*, deciding on the best way to ensure access to health care), some practices permitted by government (and sometimes even funded with taxpayers' money) are intrinsically evil – that is, always incompatible with love of God and neighbor.

Among acts that are intrinsically evil, those that directly attack life itself are the foremost threats to human dignity. The right to life is the foundation upon which all other human rights are based and without which no other right could possibly exist. Therefore, violations of this right are by far the most serious. Sometimes these violations occur with almost unimaginable frequency. Such is the case with abortion, which extinguishes nearly 4,000 lives per day (and well over one million per year) in the United States alone.

Therefore, protecting life to the maximum degree possible should be our highest consideration when we vote. Many issues deserve our careful attention. When the issue is whether to protect or deny the fundamental right to life, however, it outweighs other matters.

The Virginia Catholic Conference: A Resource Before and After Elections

We urge you to consider the Virginia Catholic Conference, the office that represents us and our two dioceses in matters of public policy, as a vital resource in your efforts to be faithful citizens.

For your use before the elections, the Conference has conducted a survey of candidates in all contested General Assembly races, and candidates' responses are posted at www.vacatholic.org.

For your involvement throughout the year, the Conference offers an Email Advocacy Network. This network provides enrollees regular updates and alerts on issues being debated – alerts that provide a very easy way for Virginia residents to communicate directly with their federal and state elected officials. With challenges escalating on so many matters, we issued a letter to all 226 of our parishes on August 3rd, asking them to consider conducting sign-up drives during the weekend of November 12 and 13 to boost enrollment in the Conference's network. For more information about ways to conduct parish sign-up drives, and to sign up for the network if you are not yet enrolled, please visit www.vacatholic.org.

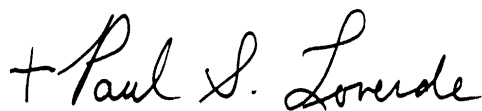
Communications from constituents to the legislators who represent them have saved lives and assisted the poorest and most vulnerable. But so much more could be accomplished if many more of our dioceses' nearly 700,000 registered parishioners joined the Conference's network.

We Decide

Why is faithful citizenship so essential every day of every year? The more questions we ask, the clearer the answer becomes: Will taxpayers be forced to fund abortions? Will human embryos be sacrificed at the altars of economic development and science without ethical limits? Will the death penalty be curtailed or expanded? Will the bedrock institution of marriage be safeguarded or redefined? Will the safety net that helps sustain the poorest in our communities be preserved or eroded? Will parents, as first teachers, be given more options and opportunities to send their children to the schools best suited for them? Will immigrants be welcomed in our communities?

We decide. That is why we must pray, vote, and advocate.

Faithfully Yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde
Bishop of Arlington



Most Reverend Francis X. DiLorenzo
Bishop of Richmond