

A Revolution of Tenderness: A 2016 Election Pope Francis Voter Guide

Introduction

“The Gospel tells us constantly to risk a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.”—Pope Francis (Evangelii Gaudium 72)

As we live out this Jubilee Year of Mercy and the United States enters into the 2016 election season, Americans face a myriad of choices between competing visions for our nation’s future. As Catholics, we are called by our faith to engage in this election. Pope Francis says that “a good Catholic meddles in politics, offering the best of one’s self so that those who govern can govern well.” Politics, Francis says, “is one of the highest forms of love, because it is in the service of the common good.” He called on us to orient our politics based on the Christian models of Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, and Martin Luther King Jr.

We engage in this political process not because we’re partisan, but because we’re Christian. Our faith offers a specific vision for the common good. It isn’t theoretical or abstract. It’s rooted in the story and person of Jesus Christ. In short, the entire social vision of the Catholic Church is this: in Jesus, God became poor to save humanity from every form of oppression. We must do likewise. The Catholic vision for the common good, then, is a radical invitation to what Pope Francis calls a “revolution of tenderness.”

The central claim of Christianity has always been that the rejected, crucified, and then resurrected Jesus is somehow Lord of the entire earth. The birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus had political and social consequences for the community he lived in and, by implication has political and social consequences for all communities everywhere, including the ones we live in. The resurrection of Jesus marked the end of Caesar’s way of doing things. In fact, with God’s love in Jesus, Rome is no more, and a new community with new rules is established. In this community, hierarchies are subverted, concentrated power is decentralized, and prodigal children are welcomed home. In this new place of mercy the last are first, the poor are blessed, and enemies are loved. Black lives matter here. LGBTQ lives matter here; and so too do the lives of refugees, the imprisoned, the unborn, and anyone else who suffers dehumanization, exclusion, and injustice.

Of course no candidate, and no party, completely adheres to this vision of the common good. Ours is a pluralistic society in which many do not share our faith or its social vision. It is our hope, however, that the essential truth of the Gospel, the beauty of Pope Francis’s vision, and the social mission of Catholic Church will appeal to the American people. We bring that vision and those values into the public square because they animate us in all we do, privately and publicly.

We invite our fellow Christians and all people to consider carefully how candidates do, and do not, embrace that vision and those values, and to make prudential judgments about which candidates best reflect Christian love.

We offer this guide to help inform our brothers and sisters about their specifically political vocation as Catholic Christians in the United States. Let us say at the outset: We do not in any way wish to claim for ourselves the right to speak for the Catholic Church, nor for all Catholics. Instead we offer this guide to show how we apply the teachings of our Church to the problems of our day with a heart of mercy. We here seek to take up the call issued by the U.S. bishops in their document *Faithful Citizenship* to form our consciences, guided by the Gospel, examining the issues we face and reaching informed, conscientious decisions about the issues we hold dear as Catholics and as Americans.

Our Political Foundation: The Sacred Gift of Life and Creation

“The great gift of life is the first gift we have received. Sometimes we risk forgetting about this, as if we were the masters of our existence while instead we are radically dependent. In fact, it is a source of great joy to hear that at every age in life, in every situation, in every social condition, we are and remain sons and daughters.”—Pope Francis (General Audience, June 18, 2015)

The inviolable dignity of each and every human person, especially those who are vulnerable, is the foundational political concern for Catholics. That dignity becomes meaningless unless human life is valued both in our laws and in our culture. Indeed, as Americans, we believe, as our Declaration of Independence states, that the very purpose of government is to promote “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Catholics stand four-square in opposition to any and all dishonor to human dignity and to life.

Today, human dignity and life is degraded by racism, violence, abortion, war, the death penalty, euthanasia, human trafficking, torture, environmental damage, and poverty. We believe that these issues are all related. In many situations, there are often nuances and root causes that need to be addressed. A person whom we persuade to respect the rights of immigrants is a person more likely to understand our concern for pregnant mothers and children. Those who share our commitment to supporting family life must be challenged to embrace programs that provide affordable healthcare to everyone. A government that ignores the cries of the poor is a government that’s more likely not to account for the horrific human cost of war.

We believe that only by defending against *all* threats to life and creation will Catholics be able to credibly make the case for the culture of life and inclusion.

Questions to Consider When Reading About or Listening to Candidates:

- How does each candidate talk about preventing mass shootings and gun violence in our streets?
- What alternatives to abortion and euthanasia does each candidate discuss, such as assistance and support to expectant mothers, in particular those who are low-income?

The Economy

“Just as the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. Money must serve, not rule!”—Pope Francis (Evangeliu Gaudium 53)

The key economic issue facing the country today is income inequality and the resultant increase in poverty. This is exacerbated by unjust minimum wages, unequal pay for women, lack of federal paid family leave laws, systematic attacks on labor rights, and high rates of unemployment and incarceration among youth and in communities of color.

Unemployment and underemployment harm the long-term fiscal health of our economy. Unemployment also exacts an enormous human toll on our society. When people lose their jobs, they often lose their family’s health insurance as well. Parents who cannot provide for their children are beset not only by bills but too often by emotional struggles as well. College age students who are unable to afford tuition either postpone college, deferring their dreams and facing uncertain job prospects, or work two jobs, thereby making their education less effective. Elderly persons who live on fixed incomes must often choose between heating their homes, taking their medications, or buying their groceries.

This economic picture, however, does not extend to all Americans. Large corporations continue to rack up record profits. Hedge fund managers, able to manipulate the tax code, pay a lower tax rate than their secretaries or the people who mow their lawns. In 1980, the wealthiest one percent of Americans garnered ten percent of the national income. Today that same top one percent receives twenty-one percent of national income. This increasing gap has significantly distorted our political system due to the role of money in politics, funding candidates, lawmakers, and robust lobbying firms. We need to curtail this trend if we are to have any hope of developing just policies and a genuine democracy.

In this rich country of ours, it is a scandal that, instead of focusing on jobs and a living wage, too many in the political class seem focused on budget cuts that will only further constrict economic growth and result in layoffs of those who provide vital services such as firefighters, emergency medical personnel, teachers, and childcare workers.

It is appalling that social programs which help the poor are being cut while the super-rich are not asked to contribute their fair share of tax revenue. It is absurd that Congress entertains the idea of cutting Medicare or raising the Social Security retirement age, but refuses to close tax loopholes that benefit the wealthiest Americans and the largest, most profitable corporations.

Funding to States for federal/state partnership programs must be enhanced. However, mandatory programs supportive of the most vulnerable among us must remain federally mandatory programs, both to protect individuals and households from being considered ineligible and to ensure that funding cuts do not reduce funding levels below what is needed to meet needs of those who qualify. If we don't ensure these basic needs are met, then we often get stuck in an idolatrous worship of the unregulated market, contrary to the lessons of history and the instructions from our bishops. Such a failure would be impossible to reconcile with the social mission of the Catholic Church.

Both corruption and a global economy that considers transnational profits more vital than human lives and human flourishing keep the poor of the world mired in their poverty. In our own country, too many regularly denounce the pittance our nation spends on international development. Inadequate funding allows new diseases, and old, to continue to kill millions of innocents. We fully support the efforts of organized labor to promote better working conditions for those who labor in sweatshops for substandard wages. We hope the U.S. will pay closer attention to the socio-economic needs of our neighbors in Latin America, where America's thirst for drugs and abundance of weaponry for export wreak havoc on still fragile democracies.

We believe the moral measure of any economic policy must be the measure supplied by Jesus himself: "Whatever you do for these the least of my brethren, you do for me." (cf. Matthew 25:40)

Questions to Consider When Reading About or Listening to Candidates:

- How does each candidate respond to questions about the wealth gap in this country? What ideas does she or he have for addressing this?
- What is each candidate's position on health care reform? What is being proposed to ensure that all Americans have access to healthcare?

Global Peacemaking

"I appeal forcefully to all those who sow violence and death by force of arms: in the person you today see simply as an enemy to be beaten, discover rather your brother or sister, and hold back your hand! Give up the way of arms and go out to meet the other in dialogue, pardon and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust, and hope around you!"—Pope Francis (World Day of Peace, 2014)

Our faith tradition offers invaluable witness and Spirit to embody and risk peacemaking even in the most violent situations. Jesus called us to love not only our friends but also those who seriously sin and who might be called enemies. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Pope Francis said "peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare."

Our world continues to struggle with large-scale violent conflict in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Libya, Palestine and Israel, among other nations. Yet there have been notable, effective, and sustainable peacemaking practices developed which offer us a great deal of hope. Research has shown that nonviolent resistance movements are twice as effective as violent resistance and at least ten times more likely to lead to durable democracy. Other effective practices include restorative justice approaches, trauma-healing programs, unarmed civilian protection, inter-religious dialogue, and multi-level diplomacy. We have seen women play a vital and effective role in peacemaking in many instances including in Liberia and South Sudan.

In contrast, war and preparations for war continue to fuel further violence, acts of terrorism, and a "whack-a-mole" game of "terrorist groups" that never ends. With war, people living in poverty suffer the most

in terms of death, displacement, and disease. Pope Francis said “war is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment;” and “justice can never be wrought by killing a human being.”

As Catholics who follow the way of Jesus, we are called to humanize even our enemies; not to excuse injustice or violence, but to see them as children of God with dignity, with value, with good in them and with genuine human needs. Hence Pope Francis boldly proclaims “the true force of the Christian is the force of truth and of love, which means rejecting all violence. Faith and violence are incompatible!”

Thus we support a robust commitment and strategy of creative, multi-level, and sustained diplomacy at all stages of conflict. We support increasing investment not only in poverty-focused development aid, but also in innovative, effective peacemaking programs, both domestically and abroad. We call for the U.S. to take steps to end our nuclear weapons program, invest much less in military programs, and instead become a global leader in training people in the skills and strategies of nonviolent ways of resisting injustice and transforming conflicts.

Questions to Consider When Reading About or Listening to Candidates:

- What is each candidate’s approach to conflicts in other parts of the world? Does she or he talk about lessons learned from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?
- How does each candidate talk about the role of diplomacy and peacebuilding in preventing conflicts? Do she or he promote investing in peacemaking programs?

Immigration and Refugees

“We, the people of this continent, are not fearful of foreigners, because most of us were once foreigners. I say this to you as the son of immigrants, knowing that so many of you are also descended from immigrants. When the stranger in our midst appeals to us, we must not repeat the sins and the errors of the past. We must resolve now to live as nobly and as justly as possible, as we educate new generations not to turn their back on our ‘neighbors’ and everything around us.”—Pope Francis (Speech to U.S. Congress, June 24, 2015)

Pope Francis’s first pastoral trip outside of Rome was to the Italian island of Lampedusa in July 2013, where hundreds had died while trying to immigrate into the country. There Pope Francis called out the globalization of indifference, which characterizes a society that lacks compassion for immigrants and refugees. Today we face the worst refugee crisis since World War II with millions of people fleeing violence and war. His words that day should ring in our ears: “We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion — suffering with — others ... Let us ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty of our world, of our own hearts, and of all those who in anonymity make social and economic decisions which open the door to tragic situations like this. Has anyone wept? Today, has anyone wept in our world?”

The American bishops have also put this at the top of their agenda. In 2014 and 2015 they celebrated the Eucharist at the U.S.-Mexico border and visited lawmakers on Capitol Hill to lift up the need for comprehensive immigration reform. In 2016 the Pope also visited the border during his trip to Mexico.

The April 2014 trip to the border was particularly poignant. During Mass, Boston’s Cardinal Sean O’Malley and his brother bishops and priests reached across the border fence to distribute the Eucharist to Mexicans on the other side. The theological message that the bishops communicated was unmistakable. Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the Christian life. In the Eucharist, God’s love through Jesus Christ is made fully present to us. Distributing the Eucharist through the fence shows that there are no borders in Jesus Christ. In Jesus, no one is excluded and no one is left behind.

In June 2013 the United States Senate passed a sweeping immigration reform bill that was supported by the Catholic Church. While the bill increased attention to the border issues, it also provided a pathway to citizenship for aspiring Americans who are undocumented. Sadly, the leadership in the House of Representatives refused to take up the bill.

This current situation is immoral and shameful, especially as for-profit prisons continue to make money from detaining immigrants, families, and children. Furthermore, we continue to fail to address the “push

factors” that drive forced migration, such as horrendous violence and poverty in Central America. The 10-20 year wait time for legal immigration in the U.S. is another major injustice.

God hungers for justice and commands us to welcome the stranger and to bind the wounds of those left by the side of the road. As Catholics who believe in the sanctity of life, we must not be complicit in the suffering of migrants dying in the shadows. We need to go beyond letters and symbols by doing more community organizing and direct resisting of the structures that implement this unjust immigration and refugee system.

Questions to Consider When Reading About or Listening to Candidates:

- Where does each candidate stand on a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants? On deportations? On detention of women and children in for-profit prisons?
- How does each candidate challenge anti-immigrant rhetoric?

The Environment

“It is my profound conviction that the future of the human family depends also on how we safeguard – both prudently and compassionately, with justice and fairness – the gift of creation that our Creator has entrusted to us.”—Pope Francis (Common Declaration of Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, May 25, 2014)

The first words of the Bible tell us that God is the creator of heaven and earth. God’s first home for us was a garden, and God’s first vocation for us was to be gardeners who protect, care for, sustain and develop creation. Pope Francis spoke earlier this year about our global failure to live up to this mission. “Humanity has slapped God in the face,” the Pope said. “We have taken possession of nature and Mother Earth. God always forgives; we humans sometimes forgive; but nature never forgives. I believe that humanity has gone a bit too far. Thank God that today many, many people are talking about it.”

But this isn’t Francis’s issue alone. In fact, it was Pope Benedict—not Francis—whom the media first dubbed the “green pope” for his environmental activism. “If you want to cultivate peace,” Benedict famously said, “protect creation.”

The Catholic Church speaks on issues of faith and science not as some academic exercise, but because these issues affect human flourishing, and we are called by God to defend the dignity of every woman, man, and child. Just as the Church is unafraid to defend the dignity of the child in the womb, we cannot be afraid to defend the dignity of those who are the victims of a global economy that kills through environmental exploitation, rampant consumerism, and structural inequalities. What many seem to misunderstand, but which Francis, Benedict and the Church get, is that protecting creation is first and foremost a religious and moral issue.

Living simply, protecting creation, and addressing climate change is a response to God’s ancient request that we be good stewards of all that God has given and entrusted to us: clean air, fresh water and fruits of the harvest. Water is a particularly vital issue to address, as many violent conflicts have been linked to water issues, and many future violent conflicts are likely to be linked to water as well.

One tangible way we can protect creation is to reduce air pollution. As Pope Francis writes, “technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay.”

Questions to Consider When Reading About or Listening to Candidates:

- How does each candidate talk about climate change? Does he or she have any policies for addressing this issue?
- What does each candidate say about alternatives to fossil fuels, and jobs associated with them?

Racial Justice

“The problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms: wherever any minority is persecuted and marginalized because of its religious convictions or ethnic identity, the wellbeing of society as a whole is

endangered and each one of us must feel affected.”—Pope Francis (Address to delegation of the Simon Wiesenthal Center 10/24/13)

The August 11, 2014 community response to the killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager in Ferguson, Missouri, shed a clear focus on personal and structural racism that continues to plague our nation’s history, its laws, and its criminal justice system. Our legal processes and political solutions can give some answers and provide some solace for these continued events of violence and racism, but we too need to confront our individual failings.

Faith teaches us how important it is to encounter the suffering of others. In the Bible, some of the early questions that God addresses to humanity are: “Where are you?” and “Where is your brother?” Today God asks the same of us. We must seek out and find our brothers and sisters in Ferguson, New York City, Charleston, and throughout the nation who suffer from the violence of racism. Though those with privilege can never completely grasp it, they must encounter their suffering, listen to their stories, and try to share in their pain. Pope Francis says this “culture of encounter” will give us the ability to weep with those who suffer.

Though some want to move immediately into political, policy, or even moral solutions, this approach is limited. No law, no government program, and no sermon alone will end the violence and bring complete healing to Ferguson and to the nation. So we must resist the temptation to thrust ourselves into these situations and declare ourselves the messiah with the answers. Rather we must be co-companions for the long journey towards healing, examining both racial privilege and racial oppression. We must strive to be allied for and with each other. The era of the “voice for the voiceless” is over. Everyone has a voice to be heard.

During his ministry, Jesus of Nazareth encountered many people begging for healing. While in Jericho, two blind men called out to him asking for mercy and for the gift of sight. Though the crowd tried to silence them, the men did not waver, but rather cried out “Lord, open our eyes!” Scripture tells us that Jesus was then moved with compassion for them and gave them their sight.

What truth do we discover in Ferguson when we encounter the suffering there, and our own blind spots are removed? We first see that the outward violence that has plagued Ferguson since Brown’s killing didn’t begin on the streets that afternoon. Rather, it is the fruit of the invisible violence that plagues our communities every day. It is the violence of institutions, too often including the police, that fail to serve their people. It is the violence of the disproportionate mass incarceration of people of color and minorities. It is the violence that afflicts the poor and makes us indifferent to others’ suffering. It is the violence of inaction in the face of failing schools, decaying cities, racial discrimination in hiring, and economic disparities. It is the violence that sows distrust between people and communities because of the color of their skin. This violence isn’t always as attended to as the gunshot that killed Michael Brown, but it’s just as deadly.

Nearly eight years after the election of President Barack Obama, we must acknowledge that racism is still very much alive in our nation, and even in our churches. In fact, when we end the carnival of naiveté around this issue and remove the masks, we will see the truth: individual and structural racism is tearing at the very fabric of our nation. It’s cloaked in seemingly different and even benign issues such as tax codes, school districts, the criminal justice system, and the allocation of federal resources. We experience this racism in our own lives and in our own hearts—even in perhaps the smallest of ways. No one is truly beyond it. It’s a broken part of us that is twisted up in our own lives, our own histories, and our own failings. But when we acknowledge its presence in our lives and in our communities, we can join with the Psalmist and cry out: “Forgive us, Lord, for we have sinned!”

This first step of encounter and acknowledgment can begin the journey of reconciliation for our communities and our nation. Archbishop Desmond Tutu said it well: “true reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth. ... It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing.”

Today, we must be those people of Jericho. We must cry out and ask God to remove the masks that blind us. The road of encountering human suffering and the invisible and institutional violence that precedes it is uncomfortable, but it isn’t sterile. It will allow us to see the grittiness of the truth and to experience the gift of reconciliation and healing that will bind the wounds that divide us and allow us to move forward as a community and as a nation.

Questions to Consider When Reading About or Listening to Candidates:

- What is each candidate’s stance on mass incarceration and reform of a criminal justice system that disproportionately puts people of color in prison for long periods of time?
- What is each candidate’s position on voter identification laws and other restrictions that suppress voting among people of color?

Freedom of Religion and Conscience

“American Catholics are committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities, and to rejecting every form of unjust discrimination. With countless other people of goodwill, they are likewise concerned that efforts to build a just and wisely ordered society respect their deepest concerns and the right to religious liberty. That freedom reminds one of America’s most precious possessions.”—Pope Francis (Speech at White House, September 23, 2015)

In a time when hate and fear of religious difference has dominated much of the rhetoric of some presidential candidates, we remain committed to preserving that freedom of religion which is an anchor of the first amendment to the Constitution. As Americans, we are called to respect people of all faiths, including Muslims in our midst. As Saint Francis did with the Islamic Sultan, we must reach out as Catholics to form friendships and partnerships with Muslims.

There is no room in our society for anti-immigrant laws that seek to exclude any people based on their religious beliefs. Our democracy is strongest when we support diversity of thought and belief. We are also strong when everyone can live in communities, contributing to the common good.

Jesus tells us our faith must manifest itself in works, so we insist that no distinction be drawn between our houses of worship and our public ministries to the poor and sick. This ensures that our work to serve the excluded can be practiced within our faith tradition. That being said, no Catholic institution—or any institution—should use a false notion of religious liberty to discriminate against anyone they employ or serve, particularly the LGBTQ community.

Sadly, the issue of religious liberty has often morphed into a partisan wedge. The United States’ foundational commitment to religious liberty has, for more than two hundred years, helped unite Americans, not divide them. We oppose efforts to restrict religious liberty for all people of any religion, but we also oppose efforts to demean it by turning it into a partisan issue.

At times there can be honest disagreements about just what is the common good, but we must work together to ensure that the religious consciences of all of our people are honored. This, at times, can lead to different perspectives on the freedom of practice of religious beliefs; but our faith challenges us to work together to find the way forward where we maximize the freedom of expression and denigrate no one.

Questions to Consider When Reading About or Listening to Candidates:

- How is each candidate talking about our Muslim neighbors and refugees from the Middle East?
- What is each candidate saying about the freedom of conscience of individual, religious institutions, and even private businesses?

This voter guide was put together for your prayerful reflection by a coalition of national Catholic organizations, listed below.

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good , Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach, Conference of Major Superiors of Men, Faith in Public Life: Catholic Program, Franciscan Action Network, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Pax Christi USA, Pax Christi International, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Extended Justice Team