



DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG

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Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As our nation approaches an election, many among us feel concern or uncertainty. Public debate could tempt us to reduce our neighbors to labels, to treat political parties as if they were the Church, or to place our hope in candidates rather than in Jesus Christ. As Bishop, I am a pastor, so I write not to endorse any party or candidate, but to offer a Catholic framework for approaching this election. My hope is to encourage the formation of our consciences in the light of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church, so to weigh every issue according to its moral gravity and then participate in public life with both conviction and charity.

We often hear the saying, “All politics is local.” The decisions made by state and local officials directly affect our communities, which is why the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference’s *Voter’s Guide* is included with this letter. It presents the reflections of Pennsylvania’s Bishops on statewide issues to consider before voting on November 3. In this letter, I seek to complement that guidance by reflecting on several national issues that concern me and my brother bishops here in Pennsylvania and throughout the United States.

Participation in our electoral process is an important way Catholics can help renew public life. Pope Leo XIV recently observed that one of the central problems of contemporary politics is the decline of harmony, cooperation, and mutual engagement between citizens and their representatives. The Holy Father called for a renewed sense of “the people,” grounded in personal contact and a shared commitment to addressing concrete problems in light of an ideal vision (*Address of Pope Leo XIV to Parliamentarians from the European People’s Party, Clementine Hall, April 25, 2026*). The Pope’s words are a reminder to us that faithful citizenship extends beyond casting a ballot: it challenges us to remain engaged with our representatives and attentive to the concrete needs of our neighbors.

As shepherds in the Church, bishops do not endorse political candidates or parties. We are called, however, to help the faithful consider the moral dimensions of public decisions. Laws and policies enacted at the local, state, and federal levels affect human life, dignity, justice, peace, and the common good. In offering moral guidance, our faith encourages Catholics and all people of good will to reflect carefully on these questions.

Catholics are called neither to withdraw from public life nor to surrender our faith to partisan loyalties. Faithful citizenship invites us to seek the common good, protect the dignity of every human person, stand with those who are poor or vulnerable, and practice charity even amid

serious disagreement. Because no party platform fully expresses the breadth of Catholic moral teaching, forming our conscience requires more than adopting a political party's positions or focusing on one concern without considering the whole of that teaching. At the same time, moral issues are not all equal in gravity. A well-formed conscience gives particular weight to direct attacks on innocent human life while also taking seriously the demands of justice, peace, solidarity, and care for creation.

These principles provide a framework for considering the major issues before us as Catholic citizens. Although the following concerns differ in subject and moral gravity, each requires us to examine public policy in light of human dignity, the common good, and our responsibility toward those who are most vulnerable.

Our moral vision begins with a simple truth: every person is made in the image and likeness of God. This truth calls us to defend human life from conception to natural death and to protect human dignity at every stage and in every circumstance. The vision of our faith requires us to resist abortion and euthanasia and to oppose racism, human trafficking, and the death penalty. It also calls us to address poverty and hunger, support adequate healthcare for those in need, protect people with disabilities, care for the elderly and immigrants and refugees, and to promote the safety of every community. Even those who have committed grave crimes retain their God-given dignity. Justice must protect society and require accountability, while also leaving room for mercy, repentance, and conversion.

Nations have a right and duty to regulate their borders and protect the common good. At the same time, St. Matthew reminds us, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35). These responsibilities need not conflict. The United States Bishops have emphasized that human dignity and national security can be upheld together when nations regulate their borders while providing safe and legal pathways that reduce danger and exploitation (*The USCCB Special Pastoral Message on Immigration*, November 12, 2025). Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers must be treated as persons, never as problems or statistics. Families should be safeguarded, human trafficking and exploitation opposed, and immigration laws made orderly, just, and humane. As voters, we should therefore ask whether immigration proposals uphold the rule of law while honoring our biblical duty to welcome the stranger and protect those fleeing violence, persecution, or desperate need.

The Church begins with a strong presumption in favor of peace. Catholic teaching asks us to judge any proposed use of military force according to strict moral conditions: the threat must be grave and certain; peaceful alternatives must have been exhausted; there must be a serious prospect of success; and the response must not cause evils greater than those it seeks to prevent. Civilians may never be intentionally targeted. Pope Leo underscored this responsibility when he lamented the mounting civilian deaths and injuries in Ukraine and Russia, including those of children, and appealed for respect for humanitarian law and an end to attacks on civilian targets (*Angelus*, August 9, 2026). As voters, we should consider whether leaders pursue diplomacy, protect noncombatants, care for veterans, resist terrorism, and treat armed force as a last resort.

Economic policy is not merely about numbers; it concerns the daily lives of families, the dignity of work, and the conditions in which people can flourish. Budget decisions should not place disproportionate burdens on those who are most vulnerable. Work should uphold human dignity, workers should receive just treatment, and public choices should give particular attention to those who are poor. This same concern for our neighbors extends to the stewardship of creation, because environmental harm often falls most heavily on vulnerable communities and future generations. In both economic and environmental policy, we should ask who will bear the costs of our choices and whether those choices serve the common good.

As we prepare to vote, I urge you to take three steps. First, pray and invite the Holy Spirit to guide your conscience. Second, prepare by consulting two resources. Study *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the guidance of the United States Bishops available at <https://www.usccb.org/resources/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship-pdf>. Then review information about local and state races at www.hbgdiocese.org/voter-resources. Third, vote on November 3. Through prayer, formation, and participation, we can approach the election as faithful citizens rather than merely as partisans.

Please join me in praying for our nation, for all who seek election to public office, and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout our electoral process. Please know that I remember you and your families in my prayers, please remember me in yours. May we continue to be a Diocese where life is cherished, the dignity of every human person is respected, strangers are welcomed, justice is pursued, and mercy is practiced. As we entrust our Nation and our Diocese to Mary, the Immaculate Conception and Patroness of the United States, may we always place our hope not in any party or candidate, but in Jesus Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Timothy C. Senior". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg