



### ELECTION SEASON

#### **U.S. Catholic readers reveal that their faith can lead them in very different directions.**

Five weeks from now we will most likely have a new President. I say “most likely” because of what occurred in the 2000 election between George Bush and Al Gore.

Back in July I shared with you excerpts from the *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* by the US Bishops. The total text is available on the U.S. Bishops web site—[www.usccbpublishing.org](http://www.usccbpublishing.org) or call 800-235-8722.

Recently, the Florida Catholic Bishops issued a *2008 Election Year Statement* which also includes their support for Three Proposed Amendments that will appear on Florida’s General Election ballot. Next week I will have in our bulletin the statement of our Florida Bishops.

This week I am sharing with you an article from the October issue of *U.S. Catholic*. The article is entitled: *Do you have faith in your vote?* The article expresses well how faith lead Catholics in very different directions when it comes to voting. It also has a sample of reasons why some Catholics will or will not vote for McCain or Obama. In the end, each person has to vote his or her well-formed conscience. In the formation of our conscience Catholics should especially look to statements issued by our bishops. These statements seek to present us with the fullness of Catholic teaching and do not tell us for whom we should vote. Now to the U.S. Catholic article. It Begins:

With approximately 38 million Catholic voters in the United States, presidential hopefuls John McCain and Barack Obama know they need to respond to the values and expectations of this group. And the group needs to be taken seriously not just of its size, but for its commitment: According to a U.S. Catholic *Reader Survey*, 84 percent say their faith greatly influences their voting decision, and 87 percent say they always vote in elections.

The challenge for the candidates is that Catholic voters don’t all think the same, vote the same, or align with the same party. Faith and values may be a starting place, but depending on what issues and positions matter

most to them, Catholics cast their ballots very differently.

“I could never vote for a president, congressman, or governor who supports abortion,” says a reader from Point Pleasant Beach, New Jersey.

Another reader from Lanham, Maryland say, “I consider how the candidate or issue impacts the poor and marginalized.” Still another, Edward Giblin of Rochester, New York says, “I look for candidates who seem to sincerely care about justice, human dignity, and sound moral values.”

And Ed McCarthy from Yorktown Heights, New York writes, “I’m voting for the candidate who will end the war.”

While these four respondents base their votes on church teaching, it’s unlikely they’ll be voting for the same candidate. And that’s to be expected, as Kathleen McCormack Lorenc from Endwell, New York points out: “There is no ‘Catholic’ candidate, just humans who come down on different issues differently. It is hard to pick the ‘perfect’ person, Jesus is unavailable for public office!”

Still Catholic voters say that their faith formation is what helps them sort out right from wrong and determine which issues are priorities and which positions are most just, even when situations are complicated or controversial. “My faith offers a lens through which I can view political issues,” says James C. Gorman of Boston. “It is the grounding of the values I wish to incarnate.”

The three most popular issues that respondents say they consider when casting their ballots are war and peace (85 percent), health care (76percent), and the economy (70 percent). It’s likely that the country’s current state of affairs influenced those results, but some readers try to use the same criteria in all elections.

“I look for a person who cares what happens to all Americans, providing availability of health care and respect for human life,” says a reader from Central Islip, New York. And Siobhan McLaughlin of Hollywood, Florida says, “Peace and justice undergird my faith and activism, hence my vote.”

Because Catholic values and teaching don’t fit neatly into one political party, most voters end up picking the party that most closely matches the priorities they want to see addressed. Among the *Reader Survey* respondents, 50 percent said they most identified with the Democratic Party, 37 percent said Republican, and

9 percent said independent. (U. S. Catholic readers are not representative of Catholic voters in general. According to the Pew Research Center, 37 percent of all Catholic voters are Democrats, 27 percent are Republicans, and 31 percent are independents.)

Having to choose a party isn't easy for some, though, and a few readers strongly expressed their exasperation. "I am a pro-life Democrat," says a reader from McLean, Virginia. "The Republicans are anti-abortion, which is good, but they are not pro-life. The Democrats are pro-choice, which is wrong, but they are pro-life otherwise."

A reader in New York explained: "I am a registered nonpartisan. I dropped out of the Democratic Party because of its pro-choice platform." But she also isn't pleased with the Republican Party's anti-abortion focus. "I believe that the Catholic Church's [anti-abortion] pro-life-and-death issues is partially responsible for the election of 'W', who claims to be pro-life but has no regard for the already born." She sees McCain as offering "more of the same."

When it comes to this election's candidates, most respondents had already made up their mind by midsummer.

"McCain is pro-life and I like his values about the U.S.A.," says Bob Barrett of Whitestone, New York, echoing many others. "I respect his Navy experience and POW time." Other readers cited McCain's long Senate experience and willingness to work with others from different political perspectives.

In this unscientific survey, 42 percent of readers said they were considering voting for McCain, 1 percent wrote in that they planned to vote for independent candidate Ralph Nader, and 57 percent said they were considering voting for Obama.

"Obama stirs up hope in me that things can be better after the eight-year disaster of Bush and company," says one respondent from Providence, Rhode Island. "He reminds me of the excitement I felt over JFK in 1960."

Readers cited Obama's anti-war stance, openness, and support for the poor and unions, but a big part of his appeal among readers is that he represents a clear break from the Bush administration. Readers from both parties had strong criticisms of the current administration; *disaster* was a frequent word choice when respondents spoke of the last eight years.

"We need a change. Enough of preemptive war, the death penalty, and harmful global non-stewardship. Enough of working for the oil barons and big business," says a reader from Brewster, New York. "It's also time for the U.S. president to reflect our diversity. A man of color would be good."

The U.S. Bishops' Document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* has been widely distributed during the past year and perhaps in part because of that,

85 percent of respondent's report that they feel well informed about what the church has to say about political issues.

"The church has the duty to point out right and wrong, good and evil, as preached by Jesus," says Cecilia Covell of Arlington, Virginia. "It is the citizen's duty to vote according to his or her conscience as to what is right and just for all citizens, not just Catholics."

Overwhelmingly readers said they'd like to see more church influence over political issues. So many political issues are moral issues, says M. Potenza of Bound Brook, New Jersey, and "we as a country have lost sight of basic principles of concern for our fellow citizens."

Some readers pointed out that while the church's anti-abortion position is often recognized as the single hot-button issue for Catholics, the church's other political positions should be better known and acted upon, including its positions on immigration, war, care for the environment, and economic justice. "Absolutely, Catholic social teaching should influence political choices," says an Orlando, Florida reader.

Still, respondents cited plenty of disappointing examples of how faith and politics have clashed during this election. Dozens of readers pointed to the controversial remarks made by Obama's former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, and the Hillary Clinton-mocking sermon delivered by Father Michael Pfleger at Trinity United Church of Christ, then Obama's church. "This was the most juvenile display I have ever witnessed from a Catholic priest, and it really injured the body of Christ," says a South Carolina reader. "Such a display is inexcusable."

Others cited the fear-mongering rumor that Obama is a Muslim, and still others pointed to the early start of the troubling "Communion wars," when the conservative, pro-life Catholic law professor (and Obama supporter) Douglas Kmiec was denied the eucharist and pro-choice Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (one of Obama's Catholic advisers) was advised by her archbishop to refrain from receiving Communion. "If these two people were attacked, who is next?" asked a New Jersey reader. "And how far will it go?"

But the ugly side of presidential campaigning hasn't seemed to dampen the enthusiasm of many readers yet. No matter one's party affiliation or ultimate vote, this election feels momentous to readers.

Diana M. Hall of Virginia Beach, Virginia sums up the feelings of many: "I am very excited to see how this election year turns out."

## **FEEDBACK from US Magazine Readers**

**I am considering voting for Barack Obama because...**

I think Obama has more potential for elevating the discussion about the role of this government in our own society and on the world stage. He brings an intelligence and openness to evaluating and solving the myriad problems facing us after the devastating past eight years.  
Peter J. Turner, New Gloucester, Maine

He appears to support issues fundamental to the Constitution and to my faith: dialogue and diplomacy rather than unjust and preemptive war, truth and integrity in our government and in our relations with other nations, abolition of extreme disparity in health care and economics, and just immigration policies.

Maria Leonard, Chicago, IL

I want the Republicans out of the White House! This administration has been a disaster for our country.

Mary Schaaf, Silver Spring, Md.

I feel he will be more inclined to address my issues of concern, even though I don't agree with all of his positions.  
Sharon Sielski, Conneaut Lake, PA

The poor and the middle class will be better served by his values. The spending on the war will taper off.

Name withheld, Norwich, VT

There has to be an end to and a complete turnaround from the catastrophic disasters wrought by the Bush administration's policies. I believe that Obama can and will bring that about.  
Barbara Mearse, Ithaca, NY

**I am not considering voting for Barack Obama because...**

His voting record is one of the most liberal.

Joseph Mullin, Whiting, NJ

His economic policies are a joke-taking money out of a struggling economy by increasing taxes doesn't make sense.

Barbara Kuehner, Port Jarvis, NY

He's pro-abortion and pro-same-sex marriage. He's too liberal and inexperienced. No name Pt. Pleasant Beach, NJ

He is too young. He promises too much for people, therefore we will have more taxes and more handouts. Also, no military service, which I feel helps to run a country.

Name withheld, Williston, VT

He is anti-life both for the young and old.

Dorothy Noel, Silver Spring, MD

**I am consider voting for John McCain because. . .**

I admire his life of service to our country both as a hero in the Vietnam War and as a member of Congress. He has shown an ability to work with members of the opposite party. Although I may not agree with all of his policies, I know where he stands on various issues.

Joseph Marchese, Wilmington, NC

His views and voting record are more aligned with my religious and moral views. While he's not a perfect candidate, I believe he is the most qualified.

Stephanie Kammerdeiner, South Riding, VA

John McCain possesses the values and has performed actions that all can admire. He has a great deal of experience, is a deep thinker, and has demonstrated leadership over his long lifetime.  
James R. Woodruff, Clemson, SC

He's pro-life-that trumps all other issues-and he has experience and good character.

Bernice K. Naame, Egg Harbor Township, NJ

He has a good balance on social and monetary policies. His position on Iraq and world politics most closely resembles mine.

Ed Donnelly East Moriches, NY

He can listen and seeks advice from others, even those of different religious and political backgrounds.

Jack Dowd, Wantagh, NY

**I am not considering voting for John McCain because...**

Senator McCain's aggressive support for war, his sexist comments, and his lack of support for persons in need all demonstrate traits unacceptable for leadership. Additionally, he has associated himself with lobbyists. It's hard to understand how a Catholic could support him.

Name withheld, Rochester, NY

He seems so clueless on technology and the domestic economy, which are both closely tied to poverty issues.  
Maureen Swift, Medford, OR

McCain would keep us in Iraq for eight more years, which I do not think this country could survive considering the enormous amount of debt it already has.

Donald Williams, Lancaster, NY

He, like most Republican Party candidates, seems more interested in helping the free market than in helping people.

Damian Hochmuth, Huntsville, AL

McCain proves to be only "pro-birth." He doesn't extend his concept of prolife to the issues of war, poverty, gun control, or immigration. I believe that he would not only keep us at war, but could extend war to other "enemies," like Iran.

Mary Ann M. Schoettly, Newton, NJ

Have a blessed week,

