

A REFLECTIVE VOTING GUIDE:

Creating Communion at the Intersection of Racism, Migration & Climate Crisis

In 2019, at the National Assembly of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the following statement was proposed to the members.

*Reading the signs of the times from our desire to create communion, we, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, affirm the interrelatedness of the justice concerns addressed by the LCWR Call for 2015-2022. We are heartbroken by the myriad ways our one human family and Earth, our common home, suffer from disconnection, indifference, violence, and fear in the face of racism, migration, and climate crisis. Responding to God who loves all of creation into being, we recommit ourselves to create communion and examine root causes of injustice. **We particularly focus on the intersection of racism, migration, and climate crisis.** We recognize a sense of urgency and pledge prayer, education, and advocacy. We will use our collective voice, resources, and power in collaboration with others to establish justice which reflects God's creating love.*

The Social Justice Promoters of Region 7 (Michigan and Indiana) have embraced this statement and have created three study modules on the issues of racism, migration, and climate crisis to present to our memberships for their reflection as they prepare for the November elections. Each module will have a section on **Experience** of people affected by the issue, **Values** of the issue in light of Catholic Social Teachings, and a **Call for Action**. As we studied these issues together, we realized that the three principles of CST that surfaced most frequently were **Life and Dignity of the Human Person, Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, and Solidarity**.

In light of our shared reflective study, we should also highlight the principle of **Rights and Responsibilities**. As citizens of the United States, we share the privilege and the responsibility for voting. We share with you for this study the exhortation of Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego entitled "[Conscience, Candidates and Discipleship in Voting.](#)"

On virtually every question of human life and dignity the growing culture of exclusion in our nation reinforces and propels cleavages that are highly destructive to all the goals that lie in the center of Catholic social teaching. For this reason, many faith filled Catholics believe that in this election cycle the most compelling issue that arises from Catholic social teaching for American voters is the need to repudiate radically this culture of exclusion before it spreads further and leads to new levels of moral paralysis and division... the drive to label a single issue preeminent distorts the call to authentic discipleship in voting... today a faith-filled voter is called to approach voting from a stance of bridge building and healing for our nation.

As Catholics, we are called to participate fully in the political process of our nation. One of the most effective ways we can do this is by voting. Pope Francis states that "...our political lives must be seen as an essential element of our personal call to holiness."

A NOTE TO READERS: This voting guide does not contain all the questions to be asked. Nor does it recommend any candidate for office. Assuming we will not meet candidates face to face this term, to know more about them, we need to seek out other sources of information. Most of their websites will have a section entitled issues which will identify their policy priorities. Many candidates will have virtual town hall meetings. You will need to be on their mailing list to receive their newsletter.

OTHER VOTING GUIDES AND ISSUE RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

- Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice [Network 2019 Voting Record](#)
- Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center – [Legislative Resources](#)
- Faith in Public Life & Interfaith Power and Light: “Democracy Values and the 2020 Election”
[A Reflection Guide for Faith Communities](#)
- League of Women Voters [Voting Information - Vote 411](#)

RACISM

- [Racial Justice and the Catholic Church](#) by Bryan Massingale
- [White Fragility](#) by Robin DiAngelo
- [Lies My Teacher Told Me](#) by James W. Loewen
- [Stamped from the Beginning](#) by Ibram X. Kendi
- [“White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”](#) by Peggy McIntosh
- [“What is White Privilege, Really?”](#) by Cory Collins
- [The New Jim Crow](#) by Michelle Alexander

MIGRATION

- Bishop Robert McElroy
 - [“On Voting with Faith and a Conscience”](#)
 - [“Conscience, Candidates and Discipleship in Voting”](#)
- [“The Great Climate Migration”](#) New York Times Magazine, 26 July, 2020
- [“Background on Root Causes of Migration 2020”](#) US Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Papal Messages for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees
 - [Pope Francis Message](#)
 - [Pope Benedict XVI Message](#)

CLIMATE

- *Laudato Si’* [Encyclical from Pope Francis](#) On Care for Our Common Home
- *Laudato Si’* [Study Guide USCCB](#)
- *Laudato Si’* Roundtable: [Conversation between Bishops Coakley, McElroy and Barron](#)
On the 5th Anniversary of *Laudato Si’*
- [Catholic Climate Covenant](#)
- [League of Conservation Voters](#)
- [Global Catholic Climate Movement](#)

RACISM

EXPERIENCE

Two decades into the twenty-first century, the sin of racism, the original sin of the United States of America, continues to manifest itself in ever more virulent forms. Racism is not just prejudicial and bigoted acts. It is a system of oppression that endures here in the United States.

In recent months, we have seen the violent murders of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd on camera and heard the story of Breonna Taylor violently killed in her bed. We have witnessed and sometimes taken part in Black Lives Matter marches for justice in our country. As Valerie Kaur says we hope this is “not the darkness of the tomb but the darkness of the womb.” We must educate ourselves about more than 400 years of **racial injustice in our land** and we must passionately work for systemic change in all of our systems.

Native Americans continue to suffer brutal oppression including stolen land, broken treaties, the effects of boarding schools that denigrated their culture and language, violations of their status as sovereign nations by the actions of fossil fuel companies, and high levels of poverty and a lack of basic social services.

Racism is also manifested in U.S. immigration policy where the current administration has banned Muslims, incarcerates undocumented immigrants including children, separates children from their parents, and terminates the asylum process. The Migrant Protection Protocol forces migrants to remain in dangerous Mexican border towns where they face many risks including exposure to the coronavirus.



Evelyn’s Story – In the Spirit of Understanding Racism

Evelyn Red Lodge is a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe.

During my 13 years in Rapid City, South Dakota, I’ve learned that racism and ignorance almost always go hand-in-hand. The West was “won,” many people learn in school, but what did westward expansion mean for the Native people who were already living on the land?

Just walking downtown in Rapid City, the so-called City of Presidents, I spot the stores along the way that used to sport signs saying, “No Indians or Dogs Allowed.” I go to *He Sapa* — the Black Mountains — where I look upon the faces of past U.S. presidents who helped wipe out so many Indigenous peoples. I remember that Natives were only declared to be citizens by the United States Congress less than 100 years ago.

- In 2015, I feared to go to any sporting event after a drunk beer salesman poured beer on Native students at a hockey game and shouted, “Go back to the reservation!” Within days, dumping beer on Natives had become a common occurrence at other venues.
- I feared to walk on the north side of Rapid City in 2009 and 2010, after at least two Native families with children were egged while racial slurs were hurled at them. “Go back to where you came from!” is a laughable favorite. One Native woman, who was disabled, was run off the road while driving her car. Urine in bottles was thrown on other Natives. Some Natives were shot with pellet guns.
- I am unaware of any charges brought against anyone for the attacks involving egg and urine throwing and pellet guns. Racism persists, I am sorry to report. I still feel it every day.

VALUES: In the light of Catholic Social Teaching

Life and Dignity of the Human Person: Bishop Robert McElroy (San Diego) writes, “As the 2020 election cycle begins, at least ten salient goals emerge from the Gospel and the long tradition of Catholic faith.” *One that he lists is “vigorous opposition to racism in every form, both through cultural transformation and legal structures.”*

["Conscience, Candidates and Discipleship in Voting"](#)

Bishop Mark Joseph Seitz (El Paso) writes, “Mexican farmworkers pick our pecans, pistachios...often sleep on our streets downtown. Invisible to many of us on the street and in the fields, they labor to exhaustion to produce abundance on our tables but are still paid little more than slave wages, without adequate health, disability or retirement benefits.”

[Hope Border Institute, Night Will Be No More](#)

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable: Vatican II reminds us in The Church in the Modern World that “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the [people] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”

Pope Francis speaks of people who are poor as “our principal dialogue partners, those from whom we have the most to learn, to whom we need to listen out of a duty of justice.” [Apostolic Exhortation: Querida Amazonia](#)

Racism, in both its individual and institutional forms, is a cause of poverty and at the same time an additional barrier for people of color seeking to escape poverty. We are convinced that without a conscious and proactive struggle against racism, our efforts to reduce the plague of poverty will be in vain.

[Catholic Charities USA - Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good](#)

Solidarity: “I understand racism as a soul sickness. It’s that profound warping of the human spirit that enables us to create communities that favor one racial group, white people, over darker skinned people... We become complacent or indifferent to what’s going on in our society. We don’t know, and we don’t want to know. And that’s a shriveling of the human spirit... we need to provide a remedy that can reach the inner reaches of the human spirit.” - Rev. Bryan Massingale, [Racism as Soul Sickness](#)

“There is a compelling issue our country faces... - the culture of exclusion... Racial injustice is on the rise, buttressed by a new language and symbolism that seeks to advance the evil of white nationalism and create structures of racial prejudice for a new generation. This growing culture of exclusion... seeps into all of the most salient questions of life and dignity that our society faces and corrodes each one in turn.” –Bishop Robert McElroy, ["On Voting with Faith and a Conscience"](#)

Care of Creation: “Our bias won’t let us feel within our bellies the injustice of the environmental contamination in the Chamizal (a local industrialized neighborhood and school) and its effects on their children.” –Bishop Mark Joseph Seitz, [Night Will Be No More](#)

CALL TO ACTION: Vote with these questions in mind -

- How does the candidate plan to address the systemic racism that pervades U.S. law enforcement agencies, especially the police?
- What measures will the candidate take to protect Native American lands from exploitation by the fossil fuel industry?
- How will the candidate work with community groups to reduce the pollution that disproportionately impacts communities of color?
- What is the candidate’s plan to address the inequities in our public education system that disadvantage students of color?
- What is the candidate’s position on raising the minimum wage to a living wage?
- What are the candidate’s plans to reform our criminal justice system which criminalizes people of color and incarcerates them at rates much higher than their percentage of the population?

MIGRATION

EXPERIENCE

Since the earliest times, humanity has been on the move. Some people move in search of work or economic opportunities, to join family, or to study. Others move to escape conflict, persecution, terrorism, or human rights violations. Still others move in response to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters, or other environmental factors.

For the past several decades, immigration law in the United States has been built upon the following principles: the reunification of families, admitting immigrants with skills that are valuable to the U.S. economy, protecting refugees, and promoting diversity. This is no longer honored.



Ruben's Story

Ruben is a young farmer from El Salvador. He and his wife, Maria, have one teenage daughter, Sylvia. Ruben worked hard and yet was not able to make enough to pay back the loan he had to take out to pay for seed after repeated crop failures. Since 2014, a serious drought has decimated crops in Central America's so-called dry corridor along the Pacific Coast. By impacting smallholder farmers like Ruben, weather events help drive higher levels of migration from their homes in the region.

Although it broke Ruben's heart, he saved his money to migrate out of El Salvador with his young daughter, leaving his wife in El Salvador. They could afford the \$2000 each for only two of them, the cost for a coyote to lead them on the long, treacherous journey from their home in El Salvador to the U.S. border. Some neighbors believed the U.S. support of a government coup during the Cold War had helped destabilize the region which was now afflicted by deep violence, political instability and multinational gangs. Now, both Ruben and Maria agreed that Ruben should go to the US to find a way to feed his family, and Sylvia should go with him to escape the harassment and violence young girls were experiencing from the gangs in their neighborhood.

VALUES: In the light of Catholic Social Teaching

Our Sacred Scriptures teach us to welcome the stranger and love our neighbor. Believing in the sanctity of all life, we must evaluate candidates' support for reforming an unjust immigration system and refugee policy. This includes solutions for immigrants already residing in the U.S. as well as addressing the root causes of migration that force people to flee inhuman conditions in their home countries.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person: According to [Migration and the Social Doctrine of the Church](#) which references the writings of Popes John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II, church teaching on migration flows from the right to life, the dignity of the human person, and the concept of the universal common good.

...[E]very human person has an inalienable right to life and the activities needed to sustain and develop it. Obviously when these rights are continually impeded, people have a right to go where they hope to start again to live humanly. ...While there may be justified limitations on immigration, "respect for the fundamental right of asylum can never be denied when life is seriously threatened in one's homeland."

Fundamental Option for the Poor and Vulnerable: While the common good embraces all, those who are vulnerable and most in need deserve preferential concern. Among the most vulnerable are migrants and refugees. Refugees are defined in international law as those who have crossed an international border in order to flee persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a social group.

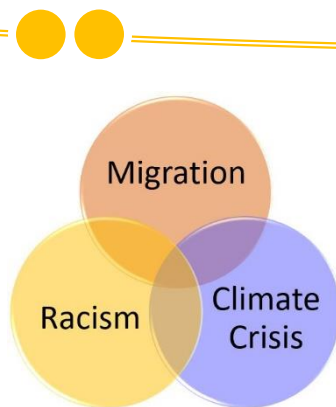
Solidarity: We are one human family, our sisters' and brothers' keeper. Love of neighbor has global dimensions. Since 1980, the U.S. has aimed to resettle an average of 95,000 refugees per year but recently that number has been limited to just 18,000 refugees.

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers: The economy must serve people, not people serve the economy. This includes decent working conditions, a just wage, and adequate health, disability or retirement benefits. Policies that give newcomers initial support help them to thrive and contribute to society in many ways. Between 2005 and 2014, refugees brought in \$63 billion more in revenue in taxes than they cost in welfare spending.

Care for God's Creation: We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. Migrants and minority groups have often been impacted disproportionately by environmental degradation and climate change. This has moral and ethical dimensions which can't be ignored.

CALL TO ACTION: Vote with these questions in mind -

- What has the candidate said about the injustice in our immigration system?
- What is the candidate's stance on additional funding for the border wall, family detention for asylum seekers or a path toward citizenship for those protected by Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)?
- Does racism or white privilege play a part in the candidate's analysis of immigration policy?
- Would the candidate's suggestions for immigration reform privilege the citizens of some countries over others?
- Does the candidate recognize the valuable contributions refugees make to our country and support a robust refugee assistance program?
- Does the candidate support diplomacy and peacebuilding efforts in war-torn countries to address the root causes of forced migration, including gang violence and drought? Does s/he support multinational efforts to help migrants and refugees?



Our defence of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development.

Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection.

GAUDETE ET EXULTATE: APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION OF POPE FRANCIS ¶101

CLIMATE CRISIS

EXPERIENCE

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing the global community. The effects of climate change are borne by the most vulnerable people.

Greenhouse gases are a major contributor to climate change. Power plants are the largest stationary source of carbon pollution in the United States. About one third of all greenhouse gas pollution in the U.S. comes from the generation of electricity by power plants. In this country, power plants have often been located near low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Air pollution from these plants contributes to health problems. Around the world, these effects are even more severe.

Extreme Weather incidents are noted by increasing floods, droughts, food and water insecurity, and conflict over declining resources. Unexpected weather patterns can make it difficult to maintain and grow crops in regions that rely on farming because expected temperature and rainfall levels can no longer be relied on. These conditions have contributed to the loss of homes, infrastructures, income, and taxes.

Warming global temperatures have caused the melting of ice sheets and glaciers. This reality has caused or has contributed to rising sea levels destroying coastal communities and island nations and damaged coastlines which in turn causes increased flooding and erosion.

The destruction of rainforests and other ecosystems has played a large part in the source and spread of the coronavirus.



The Undocumented's Story

An undocumented Latina woman in Southwest Detroit* is living with three children in substandard housing in a “redlined” area of the city. Her husband was deported after having been charged with dealing drugs. In that neighborhood is an oil refinery causing multiple medical issues for her and her children who also missed a lot of school.

Because she is laid off from her minimum wage job, she is not able to pay the water bill. She has no savings in the bank and has no way of obtaining a loan. Her children have been taken from her by protective services because of no running water in the house. *(48217 “The Most Polluted Zip Code in Michigan)

VALUES: In the light of Catholic Social Teaching

(Commentary on Themes of Catholic Social Teaching by Catholic Climate Covenant)

Our Sacred Scriptures teach us to welcome the stranger and love our neighbor. Believing in the sanctity of all life, we must evaluate candidates’ support for reforming an unjust immigration system and refugee policy. This includes solutions for immigrants already residing in the U.S. as well as addressing the root causes of migration that force people to flee inhuman conditions in their home countries.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person: “The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching.” The consequences of climate change—food and water scarcity, climate migration, and more frequent severe weather events—compromise human life and dignity. The World Health Organization estimates that climate change already causes 150,000 annual fatalities and warns that further climate change could cause an additional 250,000 deaths each year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress. To live the Catholic value of protecting human life and dignity, we must address climate change.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable: “A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring.” The effects of climate change disproportionately harm poor and vulnerable people. People who are living in poverty do not have the resources needed to recover from a devastating hurricane, nor the resources needed to build new irrigation systems as rainfall patterns change. This is particularly unjust because the poor are often least responsible for contributing to the causes of climate change. To live the Catholic value of caring for poor and vulnerable people, we must address climate change.

Solidarity: “At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace.” The Catholic vision of justice is based in the understanding that we are all children of God. As brothers and sisters, we all share the Earth as our common home. Sharing the planet well means limiting our disproportionate contribution to climate change. Sharing it with our children and grandchildren means conserving its delicately balanced systems and resources for the future. To live the Catholic value of solidarity, we must address climate change.

Care for God’s Creation: “Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.” Climate change brings real changes to God’s Creation. Melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and species extinction all compromise our calling to keep and till the Earth. We are servant leaders who are called to maintain Creation as we would a beautiful garden. To live the Catholic value of caring for God’s good gift of Creation, we must address climate change. [Catholic Climate Covenant](#), [Catholic Social Teaching and Climate Change](#)

CALL TO ACTION: Vote with these questions in mind -

- What has the candidate said about policies/programs needed for the protection of our land, water and air?
- What has the candidate said about oil and gas drilling on land and in the water? What protections has the candidate advocated for?
- What has the candidate said about the Paris Climate Agreement? Would the candidate support the US re-entering the Agreement? If so, what action would the candidate take?
- What has the candidate said about strengthening and supporting the Environmental Protection Agency to protect and promote clean air, clean water, and renewable energy?



Responding to God who loves all of creation into being, we recommit ourselves

- *to create communion and examine root causes of injustice*
- *to focus on the intersection of racism, migration, and climate crisis.*
- *to pledge prayer, education, and advocacy.*
- *to use our collective voice, resources, and power*

in collaboration with others to establish justice which reflects God’s creating love.

National Assembly of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious -2019