

## Voting is Merely the First Step to Ordering a Just Society

The elections are over. Some candidates won. Some lost. We, the electorate, have chosen our leaders.

Hopefully you voted, however our obligation as Catholics isn't over when we vote. It is merely the first step.

The US Catholic Conference of Bishops in their call to political responsibility state, "In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation." As Catholics we are called to be a part of shaping a society with increased respect for the life and dignity of all persons, and a greater commitment to justice and peace.

We started by becoming informed voters and voting for candidates who support Catholic values. Now further action is needed as we work with our elected officials to assist them in promoting those values. We use our Catholic social teachings as our guide and speak to support the preferential option for the poor.

As I write this, the words of Dorothy Day keep coming back to me. "We can to a certain extent change the world... We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world."

It is from that one voice raising up to speak for those the least among us that another is encouraged to stand with us. From the two we gain others, and from the many voices, our politicians will notice and respond.

But first we need good information. This is where the Montana Catholic Conference Email Alert Network and new website fit in. Our network will enable the Conference to send information directly to you. We will provide a weekly briefing of legislative issues, and will send out alerts when your voice is needed to assist legislators with their decisions. There are times they need to hear from you. It may be your voice that makes the difference. Sign up for this service by contacting MCC at [alertnetwork@bresnan.net](mailto:alertnetwork@bresnan.net).

We are also upgrading our website. [www.montanacatholic.org](http://www.montanacatholic.org). It will have links to the Montana Legislature to find bill status, contact information for legislators, daily hearing schedules, and floor agendas. We will also link to US Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) for views from our Bishops, and alerts for legislation on the national level. There will be an incredible array of information to assist you in your legislative efforts. Please take a look, and let us know what you think, what we should keep, and what we should change.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his first encyclical letter "Deus Caritas Est", (God is Love), speaks of the Church's role in establishing a just society. He cautions us in that the formation of just societies is the role of politics, but it is the Church's role to "contribute to the purification of reason and to the re-awakening of those moral forces *without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run.*"(emphasis added) His next statement is directed at us. "The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity."

The responsibility for ordering a just society is clearly ours. The church will strengthen us through its teachings, and through our commitment to Eucharist. It is us, the lay faithful, who are called to participate directly in the political process in order to shape a just society.

Let us call to mind again the words of Dorothy Day, “We can to a certain extent change the world...We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world.”

Your voice is the pebble. The legislative debate is the pond. The MCC will help you find the pond; at that point it is your job to throw the pebble