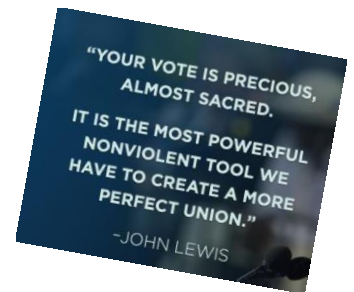


The following is a statement from the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Committee of Cleveland (JPIC-CLE), which is composed of representatives (both religious and lay) from congregations of Catholic women religious who have been serving in northeast Ohio for over 175 years and two lay women.

***An authentic faith ... always involves a deep desire
to change the world,
to transmit values,
to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.***



These challenging words of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* were echoed by Congressman John Lewis in 2012 when he said: “My dear friends: Your vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have to create a more perfect union.”

In the midst of a global pandemic, economic uncertainty, a broken immigration system, racial inequity and devastating evidence of the perils of climate change, this election calls us as never before to approach our precious right to vote knowing that we stand on holy ground. Pope Francis, our bishops, and religious and lay voices from all areas of the Church have spoken to that responsibility. Like so much of the discussion these months, their messages reflect a wide diversity of thought.

At the root of each of those messages, however, is that human life is sacred and that the dignity of each human person is foundational. St. Pope John Paul II called those of us in the United States to be “unconditionally pro-life,” to recognize that a wholehearted commitment to life includes a commitment to eradicate every form of racism, to address the devastation and life-threatening effects of human-generated climate change, to end abortion **and** the death penalty. Pope Francis has affirmed those values and challenged us to honor our responsibility to refugees and immigrants.

In his latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis “calls for a better kind of politics, one truly at the service of the common good.” (154) Perhaps more than any election in the recent past, we are called to a discernment that challenges us to listen to the Spirit of Truth around and within us, to reflect on every aspect of the Gospel message, and to make choices for the common good of ALL, choices we believe will give us the best chance to leave this nation and this earth better than we find it now.

How do we discern which candidate will get our vote? No candidate for any elected position stands for every Catholic Social Principle. When we look for the candidate who agrees with us on EVERY issue, we come up empty. The candidate who seeks to protect the life of the unborn child might deny the scientifically-established potential devastation of climate change. The candidate who advocates for the asylum seeker and

her family at the border may also seek to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Ultimately each of us must vote for a fallible human being who is also – hopefully - sincerely searching for answers.

Social media and the campaigns themselves increasingly focus on perceived character flaws and past mistakes of the opposing candidate. Integrity, honesty, openness to diverse views and the ability to bring divergent solutions together are lost amidst the clamor. The quest to win an election stifles the search for the common good for all who are in this country seeking quality of life, equal opportunity, and the freedom to pursue happiness.

Of the candidates before us, for whom do we cast our precious, sacred vote? As persons of faith, character becomes critical and challenging. Who is the candidate with the wisdom, courage and skill to engage in true bipartisan efforts to support **all** human life by addressing the dignity of life of all the unborn **and** born, COVID-19, gender equity, systemic racism, just and compassionate immigration reform, climate change? Who is the candidate willing to speak the truth – as did John Lewis – that his or her party leaders do not want to hear? Who is the candidate open to hearing the truth from a member of the other party and has the ability to bring divergent views together?



As people of the Gospel, we are called – as Jesus was – to speak the truth to our leaders. Our vote is one expression of what we see as our truth. Our hope for this election is that every citizen, regardless of age, race, gender identity, faith tradition or political party hold her or his vote as precious and sacred and recognize it as the most powerful right and obligation he or she has to contribute to truly creating a more perfect union, to make the nation better than it is today.