

September 6, 2024



2024 Lutheran Citizenship Guide

As is obvious from the change in title – no longer the “2024 Lutheran Voter Guide” but rather the “2024 Citizenship Guide” – this election year we have chosen to broaden the focus of our comments. No longer restricting our discussion to specific political issues or specific pieces of legislation, we will instead be offering thoughts regarding the attitudes and approaches that Lutheran Christians might consider as they seek to be faithful in serving their neighbor through the exercise of their citizenship.

Of course, the Bible, as well as centuries of well-developed Christian thought, continue to have much to say about the specific issues of the day. The sanctity of every human life as an image bearer of God continues to lead us to oppose the intentional taking of innocent life through abortion and assisted suicide. The clear God-designed social ordering of males and females; of husbands and wives; and of parents and children continues to move us to object to the many recent distortions of God’s good design for our lives together. The Biblical mandate that each person must be genuinely free to worship God as he or she chooses without the coercion of the State continues to motivate us to stand in support of religious liberty for all people, including the right of parents to freely choose the kind of educational environment for their children. Unchanged in substance, these have been, and remain, the key issues that the Church speaks to in our modern culture and to which past versions of the Lutheran Voter Guide has given voice to in recent years.

What does seem to have changed is the increasing degree of confusion people are experiencing as they endeavor to apply these basic Christian principles to the current political circumstance. Indeed, given the high degree of dissatisfaction with both of the majority parties and their candidates, many Christians are, for perhaps the first time, questioning not only for whom they will vote, but whether they will vote at all. Having come to feel that this is a country they no longer recognize, that they are exiles in their own state and/or nation, many are entertaining thoughts of just “washing their hands” of it all and withdrawing from active participation in the political process as a whole.

Such an attitude, however, cannot be the attitude of us who have been joined to Christ through faith and Holy Baptism. As both the Scriptures (Jeremiah 29:7) and the early Church Fathers (i.e. Augustine) make clear, *“it is our duty as citizens of the Kingdom of God to be the best citizens of the society in which we actually live.”* In America, that means, at a very minimum, voting.

But who to vote for? In the past, the alignment or non-alignment between the major party platforms and our LCMS positions on major political issues seemed to offer pretty clear guidance as to how to cast our vote. Not

quite so much anymore. Recently, this has become particularly true with regard to the life issues. So, in the face of this confusion, what principles should be guiding us in our political decision-making?

A recent commentary on “Breakpoint Daily” by the Colson Center offers what we think is a helpful viewpoint. In it, the author, John Stonestreet, observes that while it is common to describe our current situation as one that calls on us to “choose between the lesser of two evils,” it is perhaps more accurate and more helpful to think of our situation as one requiring the “lessening of evil.” In that article, Stonestreet says: “to speak of the lessening of evil not only better fits the political realities of our particular context, it also recognizes the inherent limits of politics, even while maintaining our [Christian] principles.” Also, voting to “lessen evil acknowledges the moral inadequacies of candidates while still seeking to accomplish good through voting.”

So, should Christians vote? Yes, absolutely. Should Christians vote even in circumstances where there are no “pure parties” or “pure candidates”? Yes, absolutely. Must Christians love their neighbors enough to do the hard work required to discern which candidate and which party will do more than the other to reduce evil in our world? Yes, absolutely! And what will that “hard work” consist of? Well, among other things, it will consist of:

- making the effort to honestly consider whose policies will better (though not perfectly) restrain the evil surrounding us and which will more (though not perfectly) effectively advance the good;
- making a good faith effort to break free from the narrow range of news sources that have become “our favorites” and actively seek out more diverse sources that will help us examine whatever our current assumptions may be;
- committing ourselves to a serious study of God’s Word so that we might be reminded of what a God-pleasing life looks like;
- seeking out conversation with mature Christian friends, soliciting their viewpoint on who will better serve the needs of God’s people and of the nation as a whole;
- committing ourselves to being in regular and earnest prayer, asking God to guide our thoughts and direct our judgments regarding the difficult decisions we’re called on to make as Christian citizens;
- repeatedly reminding ourselves and each other that elections are not of ultimate importance; that in the end, it is God who is in charge, directing the affairs of men and of nations and that we can, and should, place our complete trust and confidence in Him and in His promise to watch over and bless us.

In the end, He is the source and grounding of our hope, and it is in that hope – that sure hope - that we do our best, in messy and confusing circumstances, to be alert to and avoid the evils threatening us and to understand and promote the good, as God allows us under the Holy Spirit, to discern that good.

In Christ,

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