

## **WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE**

### **EYE ON THE CAPITOL**

**July 8, 2016**

#### **SURGE IN VOTER TURNOUT NEEDS TO CONTINUE**

By Kim Wadas, Executive Director

On Independence Day, I saw many in the Badger State wearing red, white, and blue. Like some of you, I “liked” statements on social media asserting national pride and joined in singing patriotic songs at Mass. These celebrations affirm our democracy and recognize those who have protected our founding freedoms.

However after reviewing past election results, I was reminded that everyone enjoys the celebration, but many people don’t like the planning. Elections are how we as citizens plan our government. Without them, there would be no accomplishments to celebrate. Yet even though the election process is vital to our nation’s welfare, fewer and fewer people participate as voters.

A quick look at turnout statistics, both state and national, reveals voter participation trends. The 2014 midterm elections, for example, garnered an abysmal turnout nationally, with just 36.4 percent of eligible voters going to the polls. That was the lowest voter turnout since World War II. Wisconsin beat out the national average with a 54 percent turnout, but even that was much lower than the 70 percent turnout generated in Wisconsin’s 2012 general election, a presidential election year like 2016.

This past spring, Wisconsin experienced an anomaly when over 47 percent of its eligible voters went to the polls. It was the highest turnout for our state’s presidential primary election since 1972 and higher than most states’ turnout for the 2014 general election.

As citizens, we need to keep the momentum going. The next opportunity in Wisconsin to get out the vote is the partisan primary election, which will be held Tuesday, August 9, 2016, with polls open from 7:00am to 8:00pm. It’s an important election that will determine who will be the major party candidates on the November ballot for U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, State Senator (in even-numbered districts), Assembly Representative, and District Attorney.

In past years, turnout for the August partisan primary has been poor. In 2012, the primary garnered a 19.45 percent turnout, only to be depressingly surpassed by an even lower 14.46 percent turnout in 2014. Therefore, as the new Executive Director for the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, I’d like to take this opportunity to urge Catholics to get out the vote.

As Catholics, we have a duty to participate in the political process. As Pope Francis states, “People in every nation enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 220). As faithful citizens, we are called to form our consciences, prayerfully reflect on those running for elected office, and engage in the election process.

Therefore, I urge the near 3.5 million Wisconsin registered voters, including Catholics, to learn about the candidates for the upcoming partisan primary election and to go to the polls on August 9. A voter can learn what is on his or her ballot by visiting <https://myvote.wi.gov/> and information on what to bring to vote is available at <http://bringit.wisconsin.gov/>.

Please also help those who are eligible to vote but not registered – almost one million Wisconsin residents – to get to the polls. These eligible voters may need help finding polling places, knowing what documentation to bring when registering or voting, physically getting to polling locations, or voting early or absentee.

In helping get out the vote, we celebrate our faith and our nation. Plus, you will again get to wear red, white, and blue, but this time on a small sticker that says “I VOTED TODAY.”

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