

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

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IN YEAR OF DIVISIONS, CATHOLICS CAN MODEL CIVILITY AND LISTENING TO EACH OTHER

By John Huebscher, Executive Director

Labor Day is past and the fall election season begins in earnest. As in previous years, party leaders and political commentators see Catholics as swing voters. That means people will be paying attention to us. This attention provides an opportunity to explain and witness our values and to express them in ways that elevate not coarsen the debate.

But our witness is effective only when we practice what we preach among ourselves. The reality is that faithful Catholics are both Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, partisans and independents. And, even as we discuss our political differences, we ought not to lose sight of our shared values and common humanity that bind us together as persons created in the image of God.

Cardinal Dolan set the tone in recent days by inviting both major candidates to attend the Al Smith Dinner in New York, and by praying at both party conventions. He did so realizing that some in each party disagree with the Church on important issues. He did so knowing that both party platforms include flawed planks. He did so aware that some Catholics and non-Catholics felt he should not have attended either convention.

As he explained his openness, the Cardinal wrote: “It’s better to invite than to ignore, more effective to talk together than to yell from a distance, more productive to open a door than to shut one.”

In another corner, Julia Smucker, a theology student at St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota, reflected on an effort begun by Mennonite pastors to urge congregations to celebrate communion on Election Day. In discussing this initiative, she recalled that as Catholics, we celebrate our communion every day at the Eucharist, “where our Lord really and sacramentally meets us.”

I cannot improve on how she expressed it:

“...we ‘meet at the same table, with the same host, to remember the same things:’

- **to remember** that real power in this world — the power to save, to transform, to change — ultimately rests not in political parties or presidents or protests but in the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus;
- **to remember** that, through the Holy Spirit, this power dwells within otherwise ordinary people who as one body continue the mission of Jesus: preaching good news to the poor, freeing the captives, giving sight to the blind, releasing the oppressed, and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:16-21);

- **to remember** that freedom — true freedom — is given by God and is indeed not free; it comes with a cost and it looks like a cross;
- **to remember** our sin and need to repent;
- **to remember** that the only Christian nation in this world is the Church, the holy nation that crosses all human-made boundaries and borders;
- **to remember** that our passions are best placed within the passion of Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2);
- **to remember** that we are not to conform to the patterns of this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2);
- **to remember** that God’s strength is made perfect in weakness; and,
- **to remember** the body of Christ as the body of Christ, confessing the ways in which partisan politics has separated us from God and each other.

This year on November 6th, in order to be reminded of these things, I intend to be particularly conscientious about going to Mass alongside my brothers and sisters, some of whom will be making different choices than I will, yet all of whom have a share in the body and blood of our Lord.”

All of us should take these words to heart as we take part in the political debates of the next two months.