

# Learn, Pray, Vote: The 2010 elections

*Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien has asked four individuals to serve as guest columnists in August. The fourth is Mary Ellen Russell, executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference, the legislative lobbying arm of Maryland's Catholic bishops.*

Much is at stake in the choices we make for the 2010 elections. During their upcoming terms, the men and women we choose to represent us will decide on many issues affecting the values the church promotes in the public square, including the sanctity of life, the dignity of the human person, and the integral role of marriage and the family in our society. How does your faith play a part in your voting habits?

The Sept. 14 primary and Nov. 2 general elections will provide Marylanders the opportunity to choose our next governor, all 188 members of the General Assembly, a U.S. Senator and members of Congress.

The elected officials we choose will likely make laws on our behalf regarding the legal definition of marriage, and how the implementation of federal health care reform will affect the unborn, the medically vulnerable and the poor. Their decisions will determine how we address comprehensive immigration reform, how we maintain a safety net for the poor in an economic downturn, and whether students and teachers in Catholic schools will receive fair and equitable support from our state and federal governments.

For both voters and elected officials, making the right choice is no easy task, especially if the values that guide our decisions about the common good aren't clear in our own minds and hearts. The influence of partisan politics, an overwhelming barrage of messages from media outlets, and an understandable worry about our personal and collective economic welfare no doubt all factor heavily in determining our political opinions and choices. But what role does our faith play in determining how we view public policy issues?

This question is not merely an invitation to weigh the values of our faith against

other influences on our political viewpoints. It is a plea to give serious thought to whether we are even *conscious* of how our opinions are formed. We live in an age where some of our country's greatest talent and deepest pockets are pouring resources into ever more sophisticated – and instantaneous – means of influencing public opinion. In that context, it is alarmingly easy to adopt opinions on any given issue without thinking through *why* we hold that viewpoint, much less whether the premises on which that viewpoint is based reflect values consistent with those we profess to believe in as Catholics.

The public policy positions of the church may seem nearly incoherent from a conservative-liberal, Democratic-Republican perspective, but from the lens of our faith, they reflect a compelling and consistent understanding of human life and the common good. Our faith's consistent moral framework provides a perspective that, for Catholics, should precede other factors in forming our "political" opinions. As the U.S. Bishops remind us in "Faithful Citizenship," "As Catholics, we should be guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a political party or interest group. ... We are called to bring together our principles and our political choices, our values and our votes, to help build a better world."

It takes vigilance, honest and prayerful reflection, and yes, time, to exercise our responsibility to become educated faithful citizens. Ample resources are available to assist in that effort by consulting the websites of the Maryland Catholic Conference ([www.mdcathcon.org](http://www.mdcathcon.org)), the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops ([www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)) and the Archdiocese of Baltimore (<https://www.archbalt.org>).

Take the opportunity this election season to become educated about the church's public policy positions, and about the positions of the candidates who are seeking your vote. Pray for a mind and heart open to the truth our faith and reason reveal to us. And literally, for heaven's sake, get out there and vote!

*The Catholic Review will publish responses to the Maryland Catholic Conference's survey of candidates for Maryland governor, General Assembly, U.S. Senate and Congress in the Sept. 9 issue. Survey responses will also be posted at [www.mdcathcon.org](http://www.mdcathcon.org).*